DAGG-3

Dynamic AAC Goals Grid Instructions Third Edition



Developed by Tobii Dynavox in conjunction with Vicki Clarke, MS, CCC-SLP (2023) based on the original DAGG created by Clarke and Schneider, 2009. Informed by the works of Patricia Dowden, PhD (1999), and Janice Light, PhD (1989, 2014).

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How to Use the Dynamic AAC Goals Grid

The Dynamic AAC Goals Grid (DAGG-3) is a tool to help speech-language pathologists collaborate with the support team (e.g., educators, family, related services, etc.) as they design an intervention plan for individuals using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). The DAGG-3 identifies an individual's current communication abilities. This information guides professionals in choosing appropriate goals and a way to track their progress. It includes all ability levels – from early learners to more advanced communicators. Activities for each goal are included as well as a clear path for advancing skills.

To access the Dynamic AAC Goals Grid-3

Scan QR code or qrco.de/tddagg

What are the benefits of using the DAGG-3:

- Provide a systematic way to assess (and reassess) an individual's communication skills
- Provide the tools to develop a long-reaching plan for communicative independence
- Encourage successful AAC use across all communication competency areas
- Support IEP goal writing
- Provide specific strategies and lessons to teach skills

Getting Started with the DAGG-3

All of us, including individuals with complex communication needs, must learn the skills required to communicate effectively. Communication ability levels give you a way to use observable behaviors to identify how an individual is currently communicating. Because it may be difficult to formally assess the communication skills of someone who is non-vocal, we must rely on observation and interviews to gather the information needed. Once an ability level has been noted, you can then choose appropriate goals to move them towards higher levels of communicative competency.

Step 1
Identify the Communication Ability Level

Read the description of each communication ability level and mark the one that best describes the individual's current skill level. If the individual demonstrates skills in more than one level, decide as a team what is the best starting point.

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Step:1 Identify the Communication Ability Level continued

Emergent Communicator ☐	
Definition	An emergent communicator may have limited or no understanding that symbols (e.g., photos, line drawings) represent things, places, ideas, etc. and may not yet have a consistent method of communication.
Communication characteristics may include	▪ Difficult for others to determine how much the individual understands ▪ May communicate most successfully using facial expressions, body language, gestures, and/or behavior (either socially appropriate or challenging) ▪ Requires help from communication partner to communicate successfully ▪ May indicate acceptance (e.g., smile) or rejection (e.g., turn away) but does not reliably answer other yes/no questions ▪ Reacts to familiar people and/or motivating activities ▪ Inconsistent in all communication
Note: Although these behaviors can occur involuntarily, they can be shaped into intentional communication messages through use of AAC intervention.	
Case Example	At mealtimes, Sam's mother notices that he often turns his head when he is done eating or cries if he is still hungry. Sam reaches for the foods he likes and pushes away the foods he does not want. Sam's mother has started showing picture symbols for his food choices and Sam smiles when she shows a picture symbol for a preferred food. Sam will inconsistently reach for a symbol but may not always pay attention to the selection he is making. Sam's mother notes he has a picture book about cars at home that he is beginning to show interest in.

Emergent Transitional Communicator ☐	
Definition	Emergent Transitional Communicators are beginning to demonstrate purposeful communication within motivating activities or interacting with preferred people.
Communication characteristics may include	▪ Following simple directions within familiar routines and activities ▪ Understanding concrete symbols for motivating or common items ▪ Beginning to use clear and simple symbols (including objects, photographs, and picture symbols) one at a time in familiar and motivating situations ▪ Developing emergent literacy skills (e.g., interest in books) ▪ Showing some interest in social interactions, especially in specific situations ▪ Responding positively to help from their communication partner
Case Example	Lorena used to cry and kick her feet when she did not get a toy she wanted. Recently, when her parents play with her, Lorena is pointing to what she wants to play with in the room. Lorena is getting more consistent in pointing during familiar playtime routines. Lorena also uses the symbols for 'more' and 'all done' (with support from a communication partner) when playing with motivating toys.

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Step:1 Identify the Communication Ability Level continued

Context Dependent Communicator ☐	
Definition	Context Dependent Communicators can get basic needs and wants met through simple communication exchanges in specific contexts with familiar people.
Communication characteristics may include	▪ Using a low- or high-tech device effectively, but only in specific situations ▪ Using concrete symbols (e.g., cookie, dog, sock) and starting to understand and use abstract symbols (e.g., like, help, different) ▪ Developing literacy skills through shared reading and supported writing activities, keyboard exploration, etc. ▪ Initiating conversations and social interactions with familiar partners ▪ Answering routine questions with familiar communication partners ▪ Using simple strategies (e.g., repeat) to repair communication when not understood with support from the communication partner ▪ Beginning to combine two or more symbols to create messages
Case Example	Calvin uses a communication device when in speech therapy, at home with his mom, and in the classroom. Calvin is learning new symbols on his preferred communication pages. He is working on literacy skills with shared reading activities, recognizing letter names and sounds in his name and favorite things. Calvin uses pre-stored messages and is starting to combine symbols to make novel messages. Calvin has difficulty using his device with less familiar listeners or in new situations. Calvin enjoys going to football games, but really struggles to interact with his peers.

Transitional Independent Communicator ☐	
Definition	Transitional Independent Communicators demonstrate the ability to consistently communicate by generating novel messages using a combination of single words, pre-programmed phrases, and basic keyboard skills.

Communication characteristics may include	▪ Communicating about a broad range of topics with familiar and unfamiliar communication partners
	▪ Consistently combining two or more symbols to create complex messages
	▪ Using various strategies to repair communication when misunderstood
	▪ Demonstrating the following literacy skills:
	  • Increased letter-sound awareness
	  • Additional sight words
	  • Conventional spelling of simple words
	  • Adding word endings as appropriate (e.g., past tense “-ed”, plural “-s” or “-ing)
	  • Solid understanding of the connection between spoken words and print
	▪ Beginning to utilize word prediction with symbol support

Case Example	Dedra has used a communication device for a few years. She is going to a birthday party and does not know all the people who will be there. Dedra’s sister helps her explore and practice messages that could be used at the party. Dedra uses these messages and combinations of her core words to communicate. Dedra uses repair strategies as needed with some assistance from the communication partners. She meets and communicates with several new people while at the party. She is able to introduce herself, share information, ask partner-focused questions, and participate in some conversations.

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Step:1 Identify the Communication Ability Level continued

Independent Communicator ☐	
Definition	Independent Communicators can communicate anything on any topic with anyone based on expectations for their age but may be slower than their peers.
Communication characteristics may include	▪ Using a combination of novel and pre-stored messages. ▪ Using core vocabulary to compose complex messages. ▪ Successfully communicating with unfamiliar partners in unfamiliar events. ▪ Social interaction skills, environments, and activities are similar to their peers. ▪ Understands communication and directions the same as same-age peers. ▪ Able to program desired content (e.g., personal stories, etc.) into device if age appropriate. ▪ Literacy skills are consistent with same-age peers.
Note: Individuals at this level may still use symbols to help them quickly find vocabulary and will use the keyboard more often when developing unique messages.	
Case Example	Rodrigo uses a communication device with a mixture of core words, pre-stored messages, and a keyboard with word prediction. He attends class and communicates successfully with his peers and teachers. Rodrigo participates in age-appropriate conversations, troubleshoots technical issues, and uses efficiency features as needed. Rodrigo creates novel messages with ease and loves to program new jokes in his device to share with his classmates.

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Step 2
Review goals in each competency area and mark the goals that have already been met (GM) to identify potential competency areas of focus

Create your starting point for each communication competency. Locate the goals that match the communication ability level identified in Step 1. You may need to move up or down an ability level in specific competencies, as some individuals will show different ability levels for each competency area. Mark the goals observed and achieved already (GM) to help determine what goals to target.

Considerations for selecting goals:

- Select at least one goal in each competency area.
- Involve the individual and their family when deciding on priorities.
- Stay focused on your long-term goals. Determine the functional outcome you are striving to achieve and ensure each short-term goal stays true to this long-term target.

It is imperative that we address goals across all four competencies to achieve the highest level of communication independence possible. The four communicative competencies include (Light, 1989):

Linguistic: Expressing and understanding language. Learning and using vocabulary. Reading, writing, and spelling.

Operational: Ability to maintain, navigate, and operate the AAC system using the chosen access method (e.g., touch, scanning, eye gaze, etc.).

Social: Communicating effectively and in socially appropriate ways.

Strategic: Utilizing strategies to overcome or minimize the functional limitations of AAC (e.g., prevent or repair communication breakdowns and rate enhancement techniques).

Case Example:

Competencies	Ability Level				
	Emergent	Emergent Transitional	Context Dependent	Transitional Independent	Independent
Linguistic			✓		
Operational				✓	
Social				✓	
Strategic			✓		

Melvin is an extremely social 45-year-old man with quadriplegic cerebral palsy. He is an eye gaze and scanning user. His ability levels for each competency are as follows:

More emphasis will be placed on linguistic and strategic goals because they are at a lower level than the other competency areas.

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Step 3
Determine the level of support needed for each target goal

Use the Chain of Cues to ensure that you are offering the correct amount of support and promoting independence as much as possible. It can also help you measure progress and teach communication partners to better support independence. The goal is to teach the individual to participate in communication opportunities with the least amount of support for success.

CHAIN OF CUES

Use this tool to encourage independence in all environments.

MODEL

Show (model) an appropriate message using the device and your speech.



NATURAL CUE | **Expect communication. Lean forward and use facial expression to show interest.**

PAUSE → Response → KEEP INTERACTING!

PAUSE → No Response



INDIRECT CUE | **Motion toward the communication device with your hand.**

PAUSE → Response → KEEP INTERACTING!

PAUSE → No Response



DIRECT CUE | **Ask opinion questions like *What do you think?* and *What do you know about?*.**

PAUSE → Response → KEEP INTERACTING!

PAUSE → No Response

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Step 4
Identify your implementation and teaching techniques

Using AAC means providing opportunities for individuals to engage and participate in everyday activities in meaningful ways. The first step toward successful implementation is to be a great communication partner. Communication partner skills are techniques that you can use to help the communicator be more effective.

Recognize opportunities:
Identify times during the day when an individual can learn and practice communication skills. For example, help them use their communication board or device to indicate their choice of snack to eat, what game to play, or what job they want to do (e.g. calendar helper, line leader, etc.). Don't forget to look for unexpected opportunities throughout the day.

Make meaning out of any communication attempts:
There are no mistakes when learning to communicate. It is important to respond to all attempts to communicate, especially when an individual is exploring the AAC system. For example, if you are reading a book with the focus on the word "want" but the individual touches "more" – you could say "Oh, do you WANT MORE?"

Even if the individual doesn't interact at all or shows no interest, continue to provide models by touching key words and messages on the device as you talk. Don't forget that communication and interaction can also include facial expressions and body language.

Create a positive communication environment:
A positive communication environment is a place or situation where all types of communication are encouraged and help is provided when needed. The focus is on positive outcomes in a natural and supportive relationship.

- Assume competence "I know you can do this."
- Focus on use, not testing. Instead of saying "Find book." Say "It's reading time. What book should we read?"
- Respond to all modes of communication. Learner: Smiles at you. Partner: "Well, hello to you too!"
- Wait longer. The partner counts to five before providing help with locating vocabulary.

Model:
Research shows that using AAC yourself is the best way to teach use. We call this modeling. It is touching and using AAC yourself as you talk with the person.

- Modeling is about showing the individual how to communicate.
- It does not require imitation.
- Model key words instead of every word you say.
- Model as you look for vocabulary to above sentence.
- Mistakes are OK. They give you the chance to model how to correct them.
- Modeling is not quizzing or testing.
- Even if there's no response – continue to model; it doesn't mean it isn't successful.

Look for Success
Looking for success is more than the individual communicating what you expect, when you expect it, and how you expect it. Success may include:

- Increased attention to interactions
- Initiation of communication
- Use of more vocabulary – intentional or not intentional. Exploring and making random selections is an early sign of success.
- Longer interactions
- Greater enjoyment of interactions
- More independence in communication

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Step 5
Use activities and lessons to practice competencies

Every goal in the DAGG-3 has a suggested lesson to help you teach skills. Lessons can be used in group or individual settings. Modify these lessons as needed.

The lessons include:

- Materials and preparation suggestions
- Tips for success
- Activity with detailed steps
- Supplemental activities
- How to measure success
- Parent letter for connecting home to school

Step 6
Fill out the Implementation Planning and Goals Progress Report

Decide as a team when you will complete the progress reports.

- Select your time period (e.g., September 1st to October 31st).
- Copy the targeted goals to the list for the identified time period.
- Date the progress report.
- Summarize your progress for each goal. Mark their current ability level, percentile, and prompting level.

Sample Implementation Planning and Goals Progress Report

Name: Sam

Date: November 5

Time Period: September 1 to October 31

Goal (From AAC Goals Grid)	Activity and Materials Needed	Competency Area	Level of Prompting				Criteria % or # of occurrences	Familiar or Unfamiliar task or partner
			N	I	D	M		
Completes a sentence given an initial starter phrase to write about a preselected topic or theme	**Predictable chart writing**	**Linguistic**		X			**70%**	Familiar in group activity
During daily activities and with intent, selects names of common and motivating objects and people.	**Monster truck rally video-naming things**	**Social**	X				**75%**	Familiar
Keeps AAC nearby and in a usable position by moving it from place-to-place or directing others to do so with gestures, gaze, or vocabulary in AAC throughout the day.	**Sam was responsible for device in various classrooms throughout his school day**	**Operational**		X			**70%**	Unfamiliar
Takes part in a short back and forth interaction using Topic specific messages on a given page in a communication system during social interactions and daily activities. (forming social connections and friendships)	**Given a page, Sam selected appropriate messages regarding a puzzle activity.**	**Social**		X			**65%**	Familiar
Repeats message when intended message is misunderstood, ignored or system didn't activate/speak.	**Role play with favorite classmate**	**Strategic**			X		**60%**	Familiar

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Step 7
Fill out the Progress Summary on the first page

Fill out the Progress Summary on the first page whenever it's time to review the individual's progress (e.g., monthly, biweekly).

To fill in the percentage of a competency level, take the number of goals in that one ability level and the specific competency level that they have met (e.g., Emergent Linguistic goals) over the total number of goals in that specific area.

For example, if someone has met two out of the four goals being addressed in Emergent Transitional under Operational you would write 50% in the Summary Chart for that competency. Do not count goals that are not appropriate (e.g., eye gaze access goal for a touch user), those you can mark as n/a within the goals grid. If you used the blank areas to add personalized goals, you can use those in your calculations as well.

DAGG-3 References

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Frequently Asked Questions

How do I find motivating activities?

- The Tobii Dynavox Interest Inventory is a checklist for individuals and their caregivers to aid in finding motivating topics and interests to focus on when supporting communication. qrco.de/bdrEtH

How do I address a challenging goal?

- Increase the level of cues you provide to help support the individual.
- Try changing topics or activities to find the most motivating option.
- Encourage caregivers to target the goal outside of therapy sessions.
- If an individual is becoming frustrated, move on and come back to the goal later.
- Stay focused on your long-term goal; modify short-term goals in ways that still address your long-term target.

How do you know when a goal has been met? When is it ok to move on?

- The individual does not have to master each goal at 80% accuracy before you can move on to the next one. Even if they don't meet the goal consistently, or without cuing, the individual may still be ready to move forward to the next goal. Use clinical judgment to decide when to move on.

What do you do if the individual doesn't select the correct target or does nothing at all?

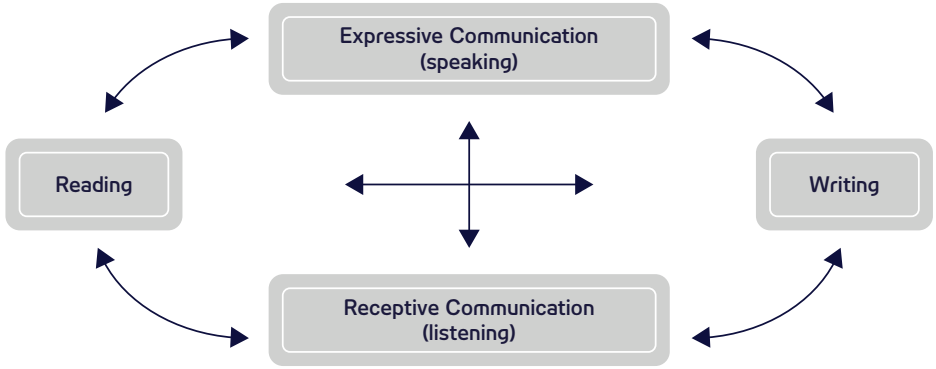
- Continue modeling and allow more time for the individual to respond.
- Change the activity to something more motivating to the individual.
- Use the chain of cues to provide more support.
- Take a step back and try one of the previous goals.

Is the DAGG-3 standardized?

- No. The purpose of the DAGG-3 is to evaluate an individual's performance, not to compare that performance to another person. This allows us to obtain specific information about the individual and create a customized treatment plan. The DAGG-3 provides a measurement of an individuals' current level of communication ability (Patricia Dowden, 2002) across the communicative competencies (Janice Light, 1992). In addition, it assists with planning future communication goals to achieve successful communication as independently as possible.

What is the relationship between language and literacy?

Language and literacy experts agree that it is important to mutually reinforce language and literacy. When literacy skills improve, language abilities will also increase and vice versa. Throughout the DAGG-3, literacy and language goals are tied together within the linguistic competency. Literacy skills are important for all learners, but especially important for individuals who use AAC. Literacy allows for more novel message creation, greater independence in communicating, and more personalized conversations. One difference between language and literacy is that our brains are not wired for literacy like they are for language. As the facilitator, caregiver, or teacher it is our job to strive toward literacy goals, especially emergent pre-literacy exposure. No one is too young or too involved to work toward literacy. Addressing goals that focus on literacy will benefit individuals of all ability levels and improve language skills overall. This diagram shows how all four modes of communication develop together and help one another to develop.



Oral and Written Language Development

(Koppenhaver, Coleman, Kalman &Yoder, 1991
Adapted from Teale & Sulaby, 1989)

If you are interested in learning more about literacy and language, try our Core First Learning program at https://us.tobiidynavox.com/products/core-first-learning. Core First Learning is a program targeting core words for language and literacy. The four main components of teaching the core words are Find, Use, Read, and Begin to Spell.

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