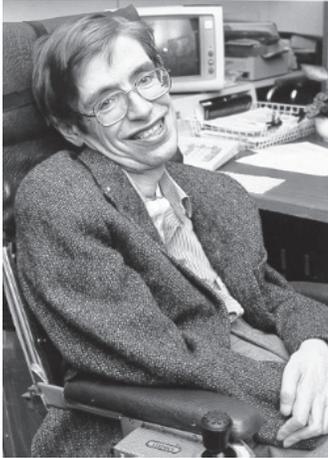


# Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Everyone deserves a voice. Yet not everyone can produce audible speech. Fortunately, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems, such as sign language or pointing to a picture, are available to help (ASHA, n.d.). AAC systems are designed to supplement communication or provide an alternative method (Justice & Redle, 2014, p. 118).



(Above: Stephen Hawking, 1980s)

## Who needs AAC?

A well known AAC user was Stephen Hawking. He used a speech generating device (SGD).

AAC devices and strategies support communication like a wheelchair supports mobility. Users of AAC systems may be non-verbal, or require support with “listening, speaking, reading, writing [or] gesturing” (Justice & Redle, 2014, p. 127). For example, individuals who produce unintelligible speech (dysarthria), or have trouble understanding language (aphasia) after suffering a stroke (Justice & Redle, 2014, p.116).

The goal of AAC intervention is to improve the user’s communication skills and independence (Justice & Redle, 2014, p. 126). An individual’s use of an AAC system may be temporary or ongoing.

## What is an AAC system?

**Unaided systems** only involve a person’s body.



This includes gestures, body language, facial expressions and sign language



There are no additional “tools” or “devices” being used.

There are two types of AAC systems, aided and unaided. Typically, a variety of aided and unaided techniques are used depending on the context and who the person is talking to (Fossett & Mirenda, 2009, p. 331).

Source: Justice & Redle, 2014, p. 120-3; ASHA, n.d.

**Aided systems** involve the use of a tool or device.

### High-tech:

- electronic speech generating devices (SGD)



### Low-tech:

- typing or writing
- photographs
- communication boards or books



## How are AAC systems and complex communication needs identified?

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) work as part of a multidisciplinary team to create customized treatment plans for clients. Choosing an AAC system is based on the individual’s communication needs, patterns and capabilities (Justice & Redle, 2014, p.128-9).



(Above: Photo of communication board)



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## Tips for communicating with someone using an AAC

(source: ACCPC, 2010)

- ◇ Give them time to respond.
- ◇ Choose a quiet room, if possible.
- ◇ Speak directly to them. Do not attempt to communicate through others.
- ◇ Speak at your typical volume and pace, unless instructed otherwise.
- ◇ Be respectful. Do not talk down to them or use 'baby talk'.

### Here to support in Alberta

- I CAN Centre for Assistive Technology (Adult and Pediatric)
- Alberta Children's Hospital - Augmentative Communication and Educational Technology Service (ACETS)

### Additional Resources:

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- Communication Disabilities Access Canada
- Speech-Language & Audiology Canada

### Information Gathered from:

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Bunnell H., Pennington A. (2010). Advances in computer speech synthesis and implications for assistive technology. In: Mullennix J., Stern S., Computer synthesized speech technologies: Tools for aiding impairment. (pp. 71-91). New York, NY: IGI Global.

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Justice, L., & Redle, E. (2014). Communication sciences and disorders: an evidence-based approach. (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

July 2018

### Getting Help

If you suspect a problem, consult a Registered Speech-Language Pathologist (R.SLP). To find a practitioner:

- Contact HEALTH LINK - Health Advice 24/7 at 8-1-1 or visit: [www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca](http://www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca)
- Enquire at a Public Health Centre or your child's school.
- Find a private practice SLP:
  - Search the Yellow Pages
  - Contact the Alberta Speech-Language Association of Private Practitioners (ASAPP) website at [www.asapp.ca](http://www.asapp.ca).

