

CLARIFICATION

STRATEGIES

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Children are often unaware of when they are not understood while speaking. This means, children sometimes need to be taught to become more aware of their communication partners' level of understanding (or lack of understanding), and that they have a responsibility to try and help the partner understand.

Communication partners need to provide clear, constructive feedback so that children know when they are being understood, when they are not being understood, and when and how clarification strategies can help them communicate their messages.

When you don't understand a child, say that you don't understand. Don't pretend that you do. This will help the child become more aware of the communication partner's level of understanding and encourage them to use clarification strategies to assist them when needed. When a child uses a clarification strategy (e.g., gestures, points) and it assists in clarifying their message, tell them! For example, "I really liked that you showed me the picture. It helped me understand you better.").

See the next page for things to try when you don't understand a child.

WHEN YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

1. As previously mentioned, **if you don't understand a child, say that you don't understand.**
2. **If you think you understood, but you're not positive, check in with the child** by asking for confirmation. For example: "I heard you say 'ball? Is that right?" or "You went to the zoo?"
3. **Repeat back parts of the message** you understood **and ask for more information.** For example: "You're talking about your cat. Tell me more."
4. **Give suggestions** to aid your understanding:
 - i. Ask the child to say their message again, but slower.
 - ii. Ask the child to repeat their message one word at a time.

- iii. Ask the child for a key word if the child is linguistically capable of doing so.
 - iv. Ask the child to act it out, use gestures, facial expressions, or use props (e.g., pointing to a special event on a calendar or a picture in a book).
 - v. Ask the child to draw what they are talking about.
 - vi. Ask the child to spell it or tell you the first letter (e.g., first letter cueing explained below).
5. **Ask guiding questions.** Ask yes/no questions to narrow down topic and provide context. Start with general questions and categories (i.e. “Are you talking about a person? Are you talking about a place? Are you talking about a thing?”). Once a general category has been established, reiterate the topic and encourage repetition (e.g. “You’re talking about a person. Ok, tell me again about the person.”). You can also move to more specific questions. For example: “Is it something about school?, Is it something in your classroom?”). If you have a clarification board, you can use this to identify topic and provide context. See the clarification board steps at the end of this document.
6. **Encourage student to use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)** to clarify their verbal message. The key is to model, model, model! Once a child’s communication partner becomes good at using and modelling AAC, we can expect the child to use it on their own. The child needs to see how it is meant to be used and that it is O.K. to use it because their communication partners (teachers, parents, friends) have all used it too!

The School-Based Rehabilitation Services Program provides generic visual supports to clarify communication:

- i. Core board (i.e., pictures of common things a student may talk about)
- ii. Clarification board (i.e., topics, letters, colors, numbers)

For more information regarding these supports and how to use them, see the next page.

**Note: Students who require support additional to the communication strategies listed on this page may be appropriate for referral to the Augmentative Communication Services at the CTC-CK. For more information, visit <https://ctc-ck.com/augmentative-and-alternative-communication/>*

CLARIFICATION SUPPORTS

CLARIFICATION BOARDS

Ask **yes/no questions** while using the clarification board, **to narrow down a topic and provide context**. Start with general questions and categories (i.e. “Are you talking about a person? Are you talking about a place? Are you talking about a thing?”).

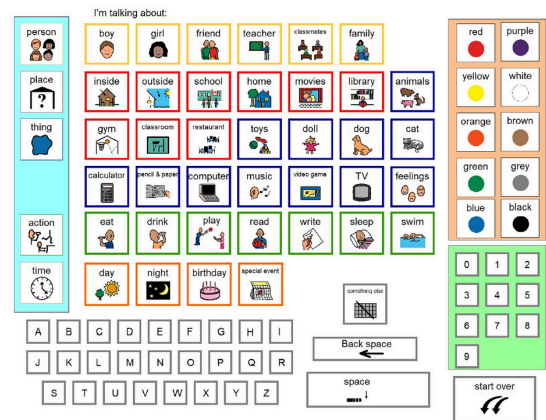
Make sure you are pointing to these picture symbols while asking the questions. For example, if you asked, “Are you talking about a person?”, you should be pointing to the person symbol on the board while you ask. Modelling (pointing to the pictures) shows how your child can use the board in the future to help them communicate.

Once a general category has been established, move to more specific questions. For example:

“Is it something about school?”

“Is it something in your classroom?”

Remember to model by pointing to the items as you ask questions about them. The child will need LOTS of modelling before he will attempt to use his clarification board or flipbook on his own.



You can even model use of the board/flip book when you do understand what the child is saying by repeating what you heard and rephrasing it to give context while pointing to the appropriate symbols on the display. For example:

Child: play ball

Partner: Oh, at school today you played basketball [while pointing to SCHOOL and BASKETBALL pictures]

Try to practice modelling with vocabulary and scenarios that typically occur, and you already know about. If the child is reluctant to use the board/book, take ownership over the items. Use phrases like “I’m having difficulty understanding you. I think I’ll get out my board to help me understand you better”.

FIRST LETTER CUEING

First letter cueing appears to be the one most powerful clarification strategies. By pointing to the **first letter of every word** as you say the word, **it tends to slow down speech, isolate each word, and provide a contextual cue**. In a research study by M. Fried-Oken at Oregon Health Sciences University, this technique increased speech understanding by 95%. Model how to use first letter spelling to give a clue about a misunderstood word. Play games to practice e.g., find the first letter of specific content words.

First Letter Pointing With An Alphabet Board

1. **Have alphabet boards readily available.** If the student can attach it to himself, it is usually easier – does it fit in a pocket? Can you hang it from a necklace/shoelace around the student’s neck? Can you attach it to a belt that is always worn? Individuals have also found it helpful to have many alphabet boards placed throughout their classroom, home, car, coat pockets, etc. The board can be any size, as long as it’s easy for the student to touch each letter and the communication partners can easily and accurately recognize the letter.

2. The student will **point to the first letter of each word** as the partner speaks it aloud. For example, if the student wanted to say, “would you like to walk with me?” he would point to letters as the partner said each word like this:

W - WOULD
Y - YOU
L - LIKE
T - TO
W - WALK
W - WITH
M - ME

Letter Board

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r
s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z	
			sh	ch	th			

3. If it is only a single word that is misunderstood by the communication partner, the partner can repeat back what they understood and **ask the student to clarify only the misunderstood word/words**. The student would then point to the first letter of the misunderstood word. If the student is able, they could continue to attempt to spell the word. For example, if the misunderstood word was “ring” the student would point to R, then continue by pointing to the letters I-N-G.

4. If the communication partner is not familiar with the technique, it is the student’s responsibility to tell the partner that he will be pointing to first letters while speaking. Sometimes people expect the student to spell entire words and are waiting for more letters. If they don’t understand this first letter strategy, the student could spell out whole words. (adapted from M. Fried-Oken, Oregon Health Sciences University). A “First Letter Cueing

Instruction Sheet” (example below) may help the child inform their communication partners of this strategy.

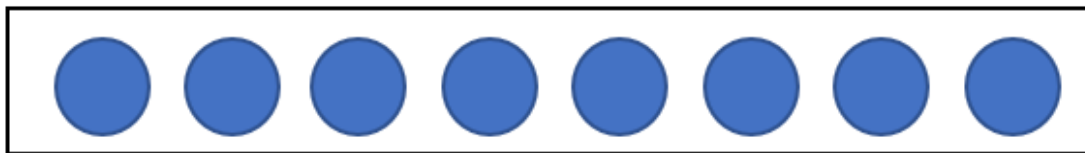
First Letter Cueing Instruction Sheet

- My name is _____.
- Sometimes it is difficult to understand my speech.
- If you don’t understand what I am trying to say – tell me.
- Repeat what you do understand.
- If you don’t understand, I will use my alphabet board.
- I will point to the first letter of each word I am saying.
- You can guess what I am saying after I point to a letter and say a word.
- Repeat every word after me so I am sure that you understand.
- When I am finished a word, I will touch the end word square.
- If I am going to spell the whole word, I will touch the spelling square.
- Please be patient.

PACING BOARD

A pacing board is a simple yet effective tool to help **slow down their speech rate** and **mark all the sounds in a within a word or sentence** while speaking. This, in many cases, will also help increase a person’s intelligibility.

Start with individual words and then move onto phrases. Use the pacing board to improve intelligibility for a word or phrase. If you’re attempting a word, have your student touch a circle for each syllable in the word. This naturally slows the student down and gives them time to better articulate.



In order to improve intelligibility even further, model each syllable in the word using the pacing board and have the student repeat after you. Once the student can produce an approximation of each syllable separately, model the entire word with the pacing board while putting a boundary between each syllable (um-brell-a). Have the child imitate you. It can be helpful to do backward chaining here (starting with the last syllable (i.e. ‘a’) then chaining the second syllable on (e.g. ‘brell-a’), then the next syllable (e.g. ‘um-brell-a’) and so on. Now model the word using the pacing board at normal speed (‘umbrella’) and have the student copy you.

If you're attempting a phrase, use the pacing board in the same manner. It's okay to sometimes touch a circle per word vs. syllable when using the pacing board with longer phrases. The purpose of the board is to naturally slow the student down and allow for increased intelligibility, so it will fulfill its purpose regardless of whether it is used per syllable or per word at this level.

Remember that students will need the pacing board to be modelled for them before they are capable of using it on their own.

If you understand 1 or a few words of the message, repeat the word(s) you understood and encourage repetition (i.e., "You're talking about your cat. Tell me about your cat again.")

GAMES FOR PRACTICING CLARIFICATION

Playing some of the games below can provide natural opportunities for a child to practice using their clarification strategies and AAC tool, to assist them when their speech is not understood by others. Sometimes even familiar adults or children won't understand the child when they can't see what the child is talking about.

Some game ideas for practicing clarification include:

1. Barrier Games

- What you need:
 - Pairs of identical items (e.g., 2 red cars, 2 blue cars, 2 red blocks, 2 chairs, etc.),
 - A barrier such as pillow so you can't see each other when you play
- How to play:
 - Give a verbal direction to the child with the barrier up, blocking their view of your playing area. (e.g., "Pick up the blue block and put it on the car")
 - Child follows the direction.
 - Take away the barrier to see if you both did the same thing.
 - Switch roles. When the child gives the direction and is not understood, say "I don't understand you" and then prompt the child to use their AAC tool to clarify
 - Talk about how the use of the AAC tool helped (e.g., "When you used your iPad, it helped me understand you were saying...")

2. Hide and Find

- What you need:
 - Items to hide
- How to play:
 - Child covers their eyes and counts to 10 while the adult hides an item in the room.
 - Adult then gives the verbal direction to find the item (E.g., "Look under the sofa.")
 - Switch roles. When the child gives the direction (you may need to remind the child not to point to the location) and is not understood, say "I don't understand you" and then prompt the child to use their AAC tool to clarify.

- Talk about how the use of the AAC tool helped (e.g., “When you used your iPad, it helped me understand you were saying...”)

3. **Books**

- What you need:
 - A book with pictures that has multiple items per page
- How to play:
 - Adult gives the verbal direction to find something on the page without showing the book to the child (E.g., “Find the cow”).
 - Show book and have child follow the direction.
 - Switch roles. When the child gives the direction and is not understood, say “I don’t understand you” and then prompt the child to use their AAC tool to clarify.
 - Talk about how the use of the AAC tool helped (e.g., “When you used your iPad, it helped me understand you were saying...”)

Taken from: “Clarification Strategies.” *Children’s Treatment Network*, Children’s Treatment Network of Simcoe York, www.ctnsy.ca/Program-Services/Augmentative-Communication-Consultation-Services/Clarification-Strategies.aspx.

Have fun!