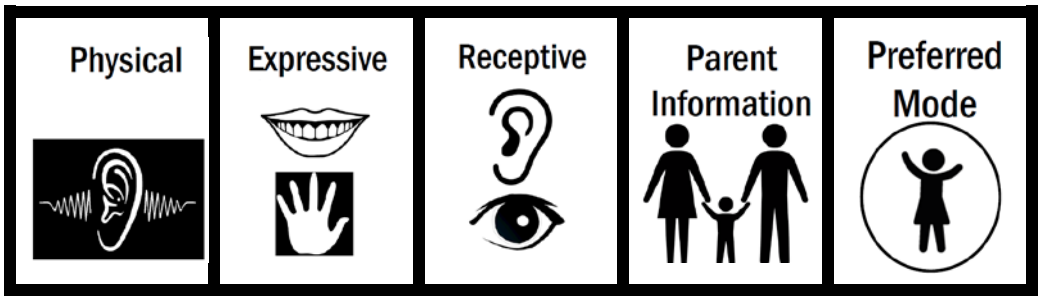
Guide to Evaluating the Essential Elements of Language and Communication Skills



Each section of this guidance document answers the following questions:

What is the skill? *How can it be assessed?* *Who can assess it?*

Accompanying Documents

- *Evaluating Language and Communication Skills of Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing Essential Elements of the Evaluation Report and/or IEP* (checklist)
- *Evaluating Language and Communication Skills of Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing Essential Elements of the Evaluation Report and/or IEP* (windowpane)
- *Example Language and Communication Narrative for FIIE*

This guide and accompanying documents can be found in the LiveBinder "Evaluating Language & Communication."

LiveBinder Table of Contents: https://www.livebinders.com/b/2395350

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PHYSICAL

Audiological information provides details about the student's hearing loss. The audiogram is one part of the report, providing a visible representation of something invisible (i.e. hearing ability). The audiogram shows the range of hearing a child has within an acoustically ideal environment. The speech perception and discrimination scores provide an idea of how the student's hearing loss may make it challenging to detect and recognize speech sounds. This can help educators understand how a student's development of spoken language might be impacted. If the audiologist recommends the student utilize hearing technology, this should also be included in the audiological report. Another critical piece of information that should appear in the audiological evaluation report is the potential impact of the hearing loss on the child's education as stated in TAC §89.1040 (c) (3). This information most commonly includes functional communication within a natural listening environment.

HOW: **1) Case history**: hearing history, prior medical treatment, educational interventions, family genetics etc., **2) Otoscopy and visual inspection**: external ear, the ear canal, and the tympanic membrane, **3) Behavioral assessment**: pure-tone air and bone conduction thresholds, speech thresholds, word recognition ability and **4) Physiological assessment**: acoustic imittance, otoacoustic emissions (OAEs) and possibly evoked potential measurements such as ABRs performed by clinical audiologists.

WHO: Audiological information must be provided by a licensed audiologist. This can be the child's clinical audiologist or the school's educational audiologist as stated in TAC §89.1040 (c) (3).

Otological information identifies the pathology or overall function of the ears. The exam includes an inspection of the outer and middle ear. The report should include medical history that is related to the hearing loss and the cause(s) of the hearing loss. This might include special circumstances such as a progressive, temporary, permanent, or fluctuating hearing loss. If an audiologist has recommended a student utilize hearing aids, the otological evaluation can provide the medical clearance needed to have him/her fit with hearing aids. If the student has abnormal pathology that can be treated medically, the examination report will document that.

HOW: Otological information gathered during a medical exam typically includes case history and otoscopy.

WHO: Otological information should be provided by an otolaryngologist. An otolaryngologist is a physician who specializes in disorders of the ear, nose and throat; also called an Ear Nose & Throat doctor (ENT). An otological exam can be performed by a licensed medical doctor only if an otolaryngologist is not reasonably available and documentation of such can be provided as stated in TAC §89.1040 (c) (3).

Hearing technology refers to personal and classroom technology used by the student. Technology information included should address individual or personal devices such hearing aids, cochlear implants,

bone anchored hearing aids, or auditory brainstem implant. If hearing assistance technology is used to enhance an auditory signal in the classroom setting, such as a frequency modulation (FM) or digital modulation (DM) system, that too should be included in the summary. The date that a student was amplified or implanted helps the educational team identify how long the student has had auditory access. This information can be used when analyzing present levels of progress for listening and spoken language skills. Information such as consistency of use and benefit of the hearing technology should also be included in the summary. If a goal for the student is to develop listening and spoken language skills, it is critical that his/her team have a good understanding of how hearing technology impacts that development.

HOW: 1) Audiology case history; 2) Daily logs on hearing technology usage; 3) Audiogram with aided results and with FM or DM system; and 4) Functional Listening Evaluation inside classroom with and without technology.

WHO: Hearing technology information can be gathered and summarized by a variety of professionals including an audiologist, teacher of the deaf, or a speech language pathologist. Any of these individuals should have access to the details of a student's hearing technology. Parents and caregivers may also have information to contribute.

EXPRESSIVE

Articulation is the ability to form and produce speech sounds accurately. This includes competencies of speech sounds, sound combinations, sounds in various word positions, etc. Typical errors include omissions, substitutions, additions and distortions.

HOW: **1) Case history**: family concerns, hearing history, languages spoken in the home, language spoken by the student **2) Oral mechanism exam**: teeth, hard and soft palate; function of the lips, jaw and tongue; and **3) Speech sound assessment**: measured by both single word testing and in connected speech sampling.

WHO: A speech language pathologist (SLP) is the professional who collects the data on students' speech articulation skills. An SLP is trained to look at individual speech phonemes and has the evaluation experience to collect formal data related to these skills. This information is typically collected during a Full Individual and Initial Evaluation (FIIE) or a Reevaluation, and can be used to determine whether or not the student has articulation as an area of critical need which may require specially designed instruction for speech and language development.

Intelligibility is how much of the student's communication is understood by his/her communication partner. Intelligibility for signed as well as spoken communication can be measured. The degree of

intelligibility is subjective; however, measures can lead to quantitative information. All students should be able to effectively express themselves in a way that others understand their thoughts, feelings, wants and needs. The intelligibility of a student's expressive communication is helpful in guiding the educational team on possible interventions that a student may need.

HOW: **1) Take a recorded sample of student's language/communication.** This can be measured by sampling a student's communication (whether signed, spoken, or a combined mode) and having familiar and unfamiliar listeners listen/view the utterances to calculate the percentage of the message that was understood to them. **2) Observe an interaction between the student and a communication partner.** Have the communication partner repeat back exactly what he/she heard and/or saw the student communicate. Determine how much of the message can be understood by familiar and unfamiliar communication partners.

WHO: Both the Speech Language Pathologists and teachers of the deaf can collect this informal data.

Components

Phonology consists of the small parts of a language. For spoken language these are the speech sounds and phonemes. For sign language these are handshape, location, movement, non-manual markers, and orientation of the signs.

Morphology consists of the rules that govern how those small parts of language are used. An example of English morphemes are affixes to show tense and plurality. An example of ASL morphemes are body posture, sign repetition, and facial expression to show tense and plurality.

English Language plural example: girl + s = girls
American Sign Language plural example: GIRL GIRL = girls

Semantics is the *meaning* of words and combinations of words in a language. This skill allows students to label items, categorize, use descriptive words, show action, as well as understand multiple meaning words and figurative language.

Syntax consists of the rules that pertain to the ways in which words can be combined to *form* sentences in a language. The levels of language form include word order which is the basic grammatical frame of an utterance; rule level which uses phonology and morphology to change the meaning of a word or utterance; and complex level which is combining more complex unties of language.

English language pattern examples: Noun Phrase + Verb Phrase *The boy looks happy.*
Subject + Verb + Object *I washed my car last week.*

ASL pattern examples: Topic + Comment BOY LOOK HAPPY
Time + Topic + Comment WEEK PAST I WASH MY CAR

Pragmatics are the rules associated with the *use* of language. Language can be used to accomplish a variety of communication goals such as making a request, providing a response, describing, code switching, etc. Pragmatics make up the rules for social language.

Areas of expressive communication include spoken, signs, and fingerspelling. If a student uses both spoken and manual modes of communication, it is helpful to consider collecting data in all 5 areas of language (phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics) for each mode of communication. If a student uses manual communication, such as ASL or a signed system such as Signing Exact English, the specific form that was evaluated should be indicated in the summary.

Types of manual communication should be identified: Signing Exact English (SEE), American Sign Language (ASL) and Conceptually Accurate Signed English (CASE). Below is an example of the same message with signs transcribed in each of the 3 sign systems.

American Sign Language

Hello. Name me what?

Dennis last name *Davino.*

want inform program what?

Interpreter train.

for for? Interpret

work where? School all

program where? *Cypress College*

class class many variety different look can

start when? Week Aug 22, 2005

come on.

Conceptually Accurate Signed English

Hello,

My name *Dennis Davino*

Welcome *Cypress* College educate interpret train program

Look class class we are plan plan

Our class start week *Aug* 22nd, 2005

Hope see there

Signing Exact English

Hello. My name is *Dennis Davino*. Welcome to the *Cypress* College Educational Interpreter Training Program. Look at the classes we are planning. Our first classes begin the week of *Aug* 22nd, 2005. Hope to see you there.

HOW: Collecting and analyzing language samples of at least 50 utterances can provide performance information on the 5 language components. Video recorded and/or audio recorded allow the evaluator to review the utterance multiple times.

Taking a language sample is simply transcribing what the student says and/or signs. Determine what transcription system you want to use to make your transcriptions easy to take and consistent to analyze. There are many ways to transcribe so determine what works best for you.

One example of a Transcription Key:

capital letters for a signed word	GIRL MAD
lower case letters for spoken words	flower purple
hyphenated capitals for fingerspelled word	T-R-A-I-N
underline for words spoken and signed	i DON'T CARE HOW it HAPPENed
parentheses for pointing or gesture	TEACHER IS (over there)
CL to indicate use of classifier	THE CAR FAST. CL:3 SPED PASS ME

WHO: A teacher of the deaf and a Speech Language Pathologist can collect and analyze this data. An SLP is trained to look closely at language components and has the evaluation experience to collect formal data related to spoken skills. A teacher of the deaf has the sign language background to determine competencies of signs and fingerspelling. In addition, other educational staff who work with the student can also collect language samples for the teacher of the deaf or the SLP to analyze.

Competencies is the area of expressive language and communication that provides an overview of how a student utilizes language in a variety of ways.

Student utterances provide examples of real language use. Transcribing their utterances word for word and/or sign for sign illustrates a picture of students' expressive language.

Language competencies such as number of different words used and average length of utterances can also provide valuable information on a student's language proficiency. The number of different words used in a set of utterances identifies how much variety a student has in his/her language. The average length of utterances can indicate whether or not a student's expressive language is progressing typically according to his/her chronological age.

Academic language consists of academic vocabulary and is used in academic discourse. Characteristics include:

- requires less face-to-face interaction
- involves information from a textbook, assessment, teacher, or other school source
- talk/sign, read and write about less familiar, more abstract, more distant topics
- using low frequency/ complex vocabulary
- using complex sentence structure and grammar

Functional language is basic interpersonal communication skills. Characteristics include:

- maintaining face-to-face conversation
- involves meaningful social context
- talk/sign, read, write about familiar content that is more concrete in nature
- using basic/high frequency vocabulary
- using simpler sentence structure and grammar

Developmental language is how the child's levels compare to his/her chronological age and his/her hearing age.

Chronological age refers to the student's age- the number of months or years since he/she was born.

Hearing age refers to the time since the child has been receiving auditory input through appropriate hearing technology- the time since the child received hearing aids and/or cochlear implants.

HOW: Record written transcriptions of utterances into annual IEP PLAAFP or evaluation report.

Calculate language competencies such as number of different words used in a sample, and mean length of utterance (MLU). MLU is measured in morphemes and calculated by dividing the number of utterances by the total number of morphemes. Example: Imagine a child said/signed the utterances below.

I	live	in	house	
1	**1**	**1**	**1**	**= 4**
You	go	now		
1	**1**	**1**		**= 3**
Mommy	kiss	-ed	Daddy	
1	**1**	**1**	**1**	**= 4**
			Total morphemes	**11**

11 (total number of morphemes) divided by 3 (total number of utterances) = 3.66 MLU

10 different words were used in those 3 utterances.

Academic language can be tracked by observing students talk about the content they've learned in class. This can be done in small group discussions or when students are making formal presentations to the class. It may be helpful to utilize a more structured approach by identifying the targeted academic vocabulary at the beginning of each new learning objective or concept. In addition, the teacher must determine the purpose of the academic language assessment. If the purpose is to discern a student's ability to participate in and understand conversations related to grade level content, then the assessment should be performed in the student's primary or dominant language and mode of communication. If the

purpose is to discern a student's ability to read and write about grade level content, then the student's literacy proficiency should be taken into consideration.

Assessing students' functional language or basic interpersonal communication skills can be done in a variety of ways. There are formal pragmatic language tools which measure students' functional language such as giving directions, conversation skills, self-expression, etc. More informal methods include analyzing expressive language samples to determine how a student uses language to communicate, or having members of the educational team complete social skills checklists. Whatever method of data collection is used, it is important to note functional proficiency in students' primary or dominate language(s).

Calculate a student's hearing age by subtracting his/her age when he/she received listening technology from his/her chronological age. Example: Mia was born January 21, 2012. Today is January 21, 2018. Mia's chronological age is 6-0 (six years, zero months). If Mia received a cochlear implant at 13 months of age (on February 21, 2013), her hearing age is 4-11 (four years, eleven months) or one year and one month less than her actual, chronological age.

WHO: A teacher of the deaf, an audiologist, and a speech language pathologist can work together to gather expressive language competencies. Additional classroom teachers may also contribute collected language samples and/or complete social language checklists.

RECEPTIVE

Functional Listening is the sound a student has access to within his/her environment. Assessing functional listening abilities with and without hearing technology can help illustrate any benefit a student receives from using his/her hearing technology within an educational setting.

HOW: 1) Conduct regular listening checks of hearing technology to monitor what signal the student is receiving. **2) Perform a functional listening evaluation** to determine the space around a child where he/she can access and understand spoken language (the proximity of the sound source). The following areas of performance should be assessed: with additional noise and without, near and with distance, and with visual cues and without.

WHO: Functional listening information can be collected and interpreted by a teacher of the deaf or an educational audiologist.

Auditory skills, or audition, is what the brain does when the ears hear sound. Both spoken stimuli and meaningful environmental sounds should be considered. The development of auditory skills is

hierarchical. Attention/detection level is the ability to perceive whether sound is or is not present. Discrimination level is the ability to attach meaning to sound. Identification level is the ability to recognize a spoken word or phrase and either match it, point to it, or retrieve it when asked to do so in spoken language. Comprehension level is the ability not only to understand what is heard but also to respond in a fitting manner.

HOW: It's best to use a published tool to assess the hierarchy of auditory skills. The student must be wearing his/her hearing technology and the environment should be acoustically appropriate. Before giving the student test items or collecting data, ensure he/she understands the task.

WHO: A teacher of the deaf or an SLP could assess a student's auditory skills.

Speechreading is the process of understanding a spoken message by observing all or part of the speaker's face. Assessing speechreading can give you answers to these questions:

1) Does the student use speechreading as a communication strategy?
2) How much does speechreading assist the student's understanding of spoken communication?
3) How can the student's speechreading be improved?

HOW: Speechreading is usually not formally addressed in an IEP until early elementary. Consider assessing this skill in a variety of complexities:

1) cognitively undemanding with context embedded- What color is this table? Who is sitting next to you?
2) cognitively undemanding with context reduced- Who is (teacher's name)? What color is your bedroom?
3) cognitively demanding with context embedded- What do you think this textbook is about? How does electricity make this light work?
4) cognitively demanding with context reduced- How is a state different from a country? What is similar about Earth and Venus?

Also monitor the linguistic demand of the stimulus: monosyllabic words, spondees, longer words, short sentences/phrases, longer sentences/phrases.

WHO: A teacher of the deaf and an SLP can gather this data.

Components

Data collection in this area helps identify how much information a student can access and comprehend via listening, sign language, and fingerspelling. This information can also be used to help determine or confirm students' primary receptive communication mode.

HOW: Conduct comprehension checks of messages presented in different communication modes. Determine comprehension level of a student when he/she watches/listens to someone tell a short story. After each story is presented, ask the student questions to assess his/her level of comprehension. (e.g. presentation 1- listening only; presentation 2- signing only; presentation 3- listening and signing simultaneously) A comparison of comprehension levels for each presentation can then be made.

WHO: A teacher of the deaf, an SLP, and a sign language interpreter can work together on gathering this data. General education classroom teachers can also contribute to the collection of this data.

Competencies

It's important to note how much a student understands academic, functional, and developmental language and communication.

HOW: This data should be collected in a variety of settings to include content related conversations as well as social interactions. Information could include how much pre-teaching and repetition a student requires to grasp academic vocabulary and concepts; how effective he/she is at following directions given by others, etc.

WHO: A teacher of the deaf, general education teacher, sign language interpreter and an SLP could collect various parts of this component.

Supports

There are a variety of supports students who are deaf or hard of hearing can use to facilitate their comprehension of receptive communication (in addition to hearing technology): sign language interpreting, Communication Access Realtime Transcription (CART), closed captions, and speech to text. Whatever system or support a student uses, staff should evaluate how proficient the student is and how effective the system or support is for him/her.

HOW: 1) Chart student use of support via observation. Specific behaviors can be monitored and tracked during the observation, as well as anecdotal notes about the environment. For example, you may want to note where the student's attention is focused every 15 seconds during a ten minute observation (interpreter, teacher, classmates, instructional materials, etc.). **2) Assess additional areas such as** how the student manages the communication support, how the student learns through the communication support, and his/her awareness of the process for interpreting, CART, closed captioning, and speech to text.

It is also critical to get feedback from the actual service provider for interpreting and CART. This will provide a comprehensive picture of day to day performance.

WHO: Depending on the support and where it is used, data could be gathered by a sign language interpreter, CART provider, general education teacher or teacher of the deaf.

PARENT INFORMATION

Home language identifies the primary language used by the family in the home. It's important to know what language(s) the child hears and/or sees when they are at home. Communication between the child who is deaf or hard of hearing and his/her family should also be addressed. To gain a better understanding of the whole child, it's necessary to know how he/she expresses his/her wants and needs at home, how family communicates with him/her, how he/she communicates with siblings and extended family members, how he/she communicates within the community, etc.

HOW: The home language survey or child case history form provided by the campus is one source to identify which language(s) is spoken at home. Staff should also consider dialoging with the family- verbal or written- about home communication. Ask open ended questions such as "Tell me about Maria's routine for wearing her hearing aids." ***not*** "Does Maria wear her hearing aids at home?" "How do Miles and his little brother play together?" ***not*** "Do Miles and his little brother play together?"

WHO: A teacher of the deaf, a diagnostician, or an SLP can gather this information.

Parent's preference on the communication mode for their child should also be included in each evaluation report.

HOW: Gaining insight on parents' preferences for their child's communication can be achieved informally through a parent interview (face-to-face, phone, or written feedback form). Ask parents what communication goals they have for their child and ask what mode they prefer their child to use. Find out what they do at home to support their preferred mode of communication for that child.

WHO: A teacher of the deaf, a diagnostician, or a n SLP can gather this information.

Parent and caregiver input on all essential elements is crucial in order to obtain a complete profile of the child's language and communication. Families should be asked to contribute information such as hearing and family history along with expressive and receptive communication skills.

PREFERRED MODE OF COMMUNICATION

The students' preferred mode of communication needs to be clearly stated. Please remember that total communication is a philosophy, not a communication mode. Educational programs have total communication philosophies but students have individual and specific modes of communication.

This chart represents the full continuum of communication.

Expressive	S Signs 	So Mostly sign with oral support	SO Equal use of sign and oral	Os Mostly oral with sign support	O Oral 
Receptive	V Visual 	Va Mostly visual with auditory support	VA Equal use of visual and auditory	Av Mostly auditory with visual support	A Auditory 

This chart shows specific modes for each expressive and receptive language and communication.

Expressive  	Spoken language Conceptual signs English signs Fingerspelling Gestures Tactile Symbols (signs or symbols) CUED Speech Augmentative & Alternative Communication

Receptive 	**Listening language** **Conceptual signs** **English signs** **Fingerspelling** **Gestures** **Speechreading** **Tactile (signs or symbols)** **CUED Speech**

Conceptual Signs: American Sign Language, Pidgin Signed English, Conceptually Accurate Signed English
English Signs: Manually Coded English, Signing Exact English, Morphemic Sign System
It is also helpful for the IEP team to know if the student is able to adapt his communication mode depending on his/her communication partner. This is an indicator of a student's language abilities in the area of social interaction skills. It can be a predictor of how a child might adapt in different situations.

It is important to understand that a child's preferred or dominate mode of communication may change over time. For example, consider a child who is born with a profound hearing loss and does not receive a cochlear implant until the age of 3 years. She will most likely be a visual/manual communicator for the beginning years of her life. With proper interventions and benefit from her hearing technology though, she may move across the continuum as she begins using listening and spoken language.

When students use multiple modes of communication, it is important to indicate how they use them and when. For example, a student might require auditory and visual supports input when learning about new and abstract concepts. And he might only require auditory input when receiving information about a topic in which he is familiar. In this student's case his receptive communication mode differs depending on the context and content of the learning. Another example is when a student uses one mode of communication or language at home but a different mode of communication at school. In this student's case his expressive communication mode differs depending on his environment and communication partners.

Examples of communication statements-

1. Receptively, the student uses Conceptually Accurate Signed English and audition to understand communicated messages. Expressively, the student uses simultaneous communication of Conceptually Accurate Signed English and spoken English to communicate a message.

2. Receptively, the student utilizes basic conceptual signs, audition, and pictures to understand communicated messages. Expressively, the student uses signs and voice approximations, as well as gestures to communicate a message.

3. Receptively, the student utilizes audition to understand communicated messages in social settings and when discussing familiar content. She requires the addition of conceptual signs

when learning about new or abstract concepts. Expressively, the student uses primarily spoken language with occasional sign support to communicate a message.

4. The student uses American Sign Language for both receptive and expressive communication. He is able to code switch to an English Sign System when communicating with non-ASL signers.

HOW: When identifying a student's preferred mode of communication, address both expressive and receptive modes. **1) Expressive**- language samples or formal data can be used to determine the mode(s) in which a student communicates. **2) Receptive**- informal and formal data can be analyzed to determine student's receptive comprehension in various communication modes.

WHO: The teacher of the deaf or the SLP can identify the mode of communication(s) the student uses. A sign language interpreter can also contribute to the assessment of students' preferred mode of communication.