

**INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT BASED ON
LEVELS OF SYMBOLIC DEVELOPMENT**

The three different entry points for each GE have been associated with **specific levels of symbolic communication development**. The descriptions in the chart below will provide the SET with information about the communication skills that are typically associated with each level. The descriptions of the Levels of Symbolic Development below are meant to support the instruction of students taking the VTAAP. The SET can use the descriptions to better understand the communication skills associated with each of the entry point levels. It may also be beneficial to see the overlap of the student’s communication skills, the common learning emphasis for the students at that level, and the assessment targets.

It is important to be clear that the purpose of these symbolic levels is to match the student’s form of communication with the demonstration expectations of the entry points as closely as possible. Students are not expected to exhibit all of the features listed for a particular entry point. This is simply a guide to some of the common characteristics of students at different levels of symbol use. Also, these levels are NOT meant as statements of cognitive functioning or potential for learning. In some cases, the student’s communication is restricted not by their abilities, but by their access to appropriate and effective assistive technology (AT) supports to compensate for their physical and sensory challenges. Other factors that impact the accurate identification of a student’s cognitive abilities include: physical disabilities that limit production of responses; sensory or physical access issues that impact the child’s ability to receive information; or limited access to learning opportunities that reflect an external barrier to experiences and resources. Given the difficulty in “knowing what they know”, especially for students without reliable signal systems in level C, it becomes even more important to provide access to information and opportunities for academic learning. Teams working with students identified as “B” or “C” level communicators should be providing opportunities for learning at and above the perceived level of their current abilities. They should also be actively involved in the pursuit of appropriate AT supports.

Level A	Level B	Level C
Abstract Symbolic	Early Symbolic	Pre-Symbolic
Expressive Communication		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses some sort of symbolic communication system: speech, signs, text, line drawings, photos etc • communicates in multi-word utterances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates using symbols of any kind: speech, signs, line drawings, photos etc. • communication purposes can range from primarily wants/needs to serving many functions (e.g. comment, question, socialize) • length of utterance ranges from single word to multi-word messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates with vocalizations, actions, gestures, eye point, facial expressions, change in muscle tone, etc. • inconsistent use of symbolic or representation communication system (e.g. words, pictures, signs, etc.) • may be working to develop a consistent motor signal for communicating (e.g. controlled start/stop to move hand, raise eyes, vocalize etc.)
Reading Skills		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has some reading abilities: simple CVC words, individual sight words, short phrases, or simple connected text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May know the names of letters; recognizes text vs. illustrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning awareness of text as meaningful

Level A	Level B	Level C
Abstract Symbolic	Early Symbolic	Pre-Symbolic
Writing Skills		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has some basic writing skills: generating a word, phrase or sentence related to a topic • may use letter tiles, paper keyboard, computer, speech device or other AT tools to create product due to physical access issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produces written work using line drawn or picture supports • uses spoken words to dictate thoughts that are written by a scribe • uses typical or adapted tools to write, trace, or manipulate letters, make marks, draw 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explores range of writing tools: pencil, pen, marker, keyboard, letter tiles
Speech Generating Device (SGD)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may use a high-tech dynamic display system • large vocabulary set • text-to-speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can use high-tech (computerized) or mid-tech (recorded) speech system • vocabulary set size varies based on language needs, but should include sufficient words/phrases for participation in curriculum activities and learning higher levels of language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can use pre-programmed single-target/message devices paired with specific activities • multi-message devices can be used as tools for curriculum participation, social interactions, learning language and access skills
Learning Emphasis		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expanding existing academic concepts, skills and knowledge • establishing a basis for future learning • generalizing application of learned skills • developing facility with selecting and using appropriate learning tools (e.g. AT supports, graphic organizers, resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing and strengthening foundational academic skills • applying existing skills to new activities, formats, and materials • developing more abstract forms of communication and representation • expanding repertoire of learning contexts to expand vocabulary and language functions • opportunities to develop conventional literacy skills • opportunities to expand personal knowledge • developing facility with AT tools to support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • producing more consistent signals for expressive communication • pairing specific responses to particular contexts and/or materials to demonstrate learning • Increasing discrimination skills across materials and contexts • Increasing engagement with a range of activities, environments and materials • developing facility with AT tools for independence and success
Performance Options – Complexity *		
<p>conduct determine analyze classify predict generate compare justify describe compose organize plan</p>	<p>choose identify examine sort supply complete discriminate select recall locate name</p>	<p>indicate acknowledge explore anticipate respond imitate copy repeat recognize signal find match demonstrate distinguish</p>

* These terms are only a guide, since task complexity is determined based on a combination of the verb and the application.