ASSESSING SYMBOL USE FOR COMMUNICATION

Steps

1.   Select up to 20 concrete, familiar items to the student (consult with family, support people).
Examples: hat, sock, cookie, juice box, banana, book, cup, toothbrush, dog.

2.   For each of these items, find the following symbols:
- Actual object
- Colour photo of the object – ideally 4" x 6"
- Colour picture symbol (e.g., Picture Communication symbol) – 2" x 2"
- Black & white symbol – 2" x 2"

3.   Follow formats on following pages (Receptive Language; Yes-No; Match to Sample; Functional Use).

4.   Analyze the Results.
- Did the student do better with three dimensional rather than two dimensional symbols?
- Did the student do better with some photos than others – could the 'problem' photos have too much background detail that competes with the target item? Would they do better if the object was cut out and placed on a plain background with a contrasting colour?
- Did the symbols seem to be too small? Try enlarging them to see if that helps. If the student accurately matched using the 2 " x 2" symbols, try making them smaller and see if the student is still able to accurately match the symbol to the object.

5.   Start using symbols that the student correctly responded to 80% accuracy. Limit the number of symbols in an array to the number that the student responded to best (i.e., 2, 3, 4, etc.). Use any of the formats that the student responded to with around 80% accuracy.

References:
Beukelman, David, R. and Mirenda, Pat. (1998). Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Management of Severe Communication Disorders in Children and Adults. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, Publishing.

Fossett,Brenda (1998). Supporting Individuals Using Picture Communication Symbols. SET-BC highlights.

Johnson, J.M., Baumgart, D. Helmsletter, E. & Curry, C.A. (1996). Augmenting Basic Communication in Natural Contexts. Baltimore, BD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.