

Video Transcript

Universal Core Vocabulary

Slide 1. [Project Core Presents]

Slide 2. Welcome to the Project Core professional development modules. This module, *Universal Core Vocabulary* discusses what core vocabulary is, the value of teaching core in everyday environments, and how to get started. Project Core is being conducted by the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, a unit in the Allied Health Sciences Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Slide 3. Core vocabulary are the words we all use every day.

Slide 4. Core vocabulary is supported by years of research. Study after study shows that about 85% of what speaking individuals say every day could be expressed with approximately 250 to 350 words. This includes core words like FINISHED, TURN, OPEN, GOOD, GO, LOOK, DIFFERENT, LIKE, PUT, WANT, GET and STOP.

Slide 5. For our students with significant cognitive disabilities, who do not currently have a symbolic means of communication, this is excellent news! We can get them started with a small set of powerful words. Core vocabulary provides an important foundation for communication. You have likely used all of the words pictured here several times already today, with a variety of different people, to talk about a range of topics. Core words are flexible and the same word can be used in a variety of different ways.

Slide 6. Take for example the word TURN.

Slide 7. It can be used to say things like, I want a TURN, or

Slide 8. TURN your head

Slide 9. TURN on the lights

Slide 10. TURN the page

Slide 11. TURN up the music

Slide 12. give the wheel a TURN

- Slide 13. Or to predict that the ice will TURN into water during a science lesson. The list goes on of the many ways this powerful core word, TURN, can be used.
- Slide 14. The Universal Core vocabulary is a list of core words, like the word TURN, that have been prioritized based on their usefulness in the classroom and academic contexts. This set of Universal Core words are intended to serve as a foundational, tier 1, vocabulary for all students. Listed here alphabetically, this small group of 36 words were selected because they apply across so many different teaching situations. These are words that teachers can demonstrate and students can use across their entire day, not just in one activity or setting.
- Slide 15. The Universal Core vocabulary are represented by symbols to support access and use by beginning communicators. For example, the Universal Core vocabulary are shown here with Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) by Mayer-Johnson in a layout with all 36 on one page.
- Slide 16. The use of core vocabulary differs from the use of more concrete vocabulary that is linked to a specific topic or activity. While students often demonstrate success matching spoken words to specific symbols representing things like animals, photographs and graphic symbols, representing specific nouns are often of limited value for communicating about other topics and for different purposes.
- Slide 17. Also, for far too many years, we believed that students had to understand more concrete representations using real objects or photographs, like this picture of a cat, before we taught them other types of graphic symbols, like the colored line drawing, or written words. What we now understand is that this idea of a symbol hierarchy is not supported by research. Instead, the research suggests that students learn to use the symbols that they are taught. Therefore, in Project Core we begin with abstract symbols and maximize opportunities for teaching and learning.
- Slide 18. We recognize that core vocabulary words and the symbols that represent them are conceptual and abstract. The fact that these words are not concrete with single meanings is what allows for their flexible use. While the symbol of a green arrow to represent the conceptual word "GO" is abstract, the opportunities to teach this word and symbol in meaningful contexts throughout the day are nearly endless. Consider the number of times you and your student "GO" during a typical school day. Consider the number of activities that involve making something "GO." Consider how often characters

- in books “GO” somewhere. All of these interactions provide opportunities to teach the word and symbol for go in useful contexts. Core words are not limited to a single lesson or activity, they generalize across all lessons and activities.
- Slide 19. For example, compare the pronoun, IT, which is a core word, to the name of a specific thing, such as Earth, which is a content specific word that has little use outside of discussions about our planet. Think about how often each word could be used throughout a typical day. While Earth might be something discussed during a science unit or after reading a particular book, Earth is not likely to be used in many other activities. In contrast, the word IT is used frequently across contexts. A student could use IT to refer to the Earth as well as other nouns in different lessons and activities.
- Slide 20. Or, consider the use of the word SHE to refer to important characters in books, as an alternative to teaching students to identify symbols that represent specific characters. In Project Core, the suggested focus is on core words that allow students to communicate about the characters, using combinations of core words such as, SHE CAN, SHE HELP, SHE GOOD, or SHE DO, and even more complex constructions such as SHE DO GOOD. Interactions with students can go far beyond symbol identification tasks, that usually start with teacher requests to, “show me” or “point to”. These identification tasks provide little insight into what students know or want to communicate about a topic. In contrast, core words have the potential to allow students to initiate and respond in novel ways.
- Slide 21. For students who are at the beginning stages of learning to communicate and have limited number of words and symbols in their expressive vocabulary, selecting what words to focus on during a lesson should be driven by how useful the words are for communication beyond the lesson not by how quickly the student can learn and use the word in a particular lesson.
- Slide 22. Core words are a good choice because they are useful for all communication purposes, including obtaining things and activities that are desired, refusing things that are not, interacting with others socially, and seeking and sharing information.
- Slide 23. Core words are a good choice because they generalize across all academic and daily routines.
- Slide 24. Core words are a good choice because they can be used to talk about infinite topics and activities.

- Slide 25. Core words are a good choice because they provide many opportunities for educators and all classroom staff to teach communication all day, every day.
- Slide 26. Project Core is focused on the classroom, teachers, and other classroom staff. These are the adults who interact with students most frequently during a school day, and they are the adults who are responsible for delivering Tier 1 instruction in the classroom. Communication instruction using the Universal Core vocabulary supports this tier 1, universal instruction because the words are very useful for all students with significant cognitive disabilities who have limited communication. It offers a classroom-based approach for supporting communication learning and use throughout the school day.
- Slide 27. Pause for activity one.
- Slide 28. Access to the Universal Core vocabulary may be provided on a communication app or speech generating device, in the form of a print-based communication board or book, or through 3D symbols.
- Slide 29. There are print-based formats available from the Project Core website. These are intended to serve as a starting point if students do not already have access to an AAC system that includes the words in the Universal Core vocabulary. An online selection tool is available to help teachers or teams choose an initial format that best meets each student's motor and sensory needs.
- Slide 30. There are also 3D symbols for students who are blind. You can download the print-ready computer-aided design or CAD files from the Project Core website. These files are ready to send to a 3D printer. You can also access initial guidance for getting started with the 3D symbols on the Project Core website. These guidance documents will continue to be updated as the development team learns from the current work with partner schools and students learning to use these symbols.
- Slide 31. To be included in the Universal Core vocabulary, words had to be meaningful when used individually.
- Slide 32. For example, the word OPEN can be used as a single word message
- Slide 33. or combined to say things like I OPEN
- Slide 34. or OPEN IT

- Slide 35. or HELP OPEN IT. This makes it easy to expand on student messages to demonstrate how to put words together in meaningful ways.
- Slide 36. Pause for activity two.
- Slide 37. When the Universal Core vocabulary is first introduced to a student, it will be unfamiliar. You should not expect them to begin using it right away. The Project Core implementation model guides teachers to encourage and invite students to communicate using the Universal Core vocabulary, but without requiring them to respond, or point to symbols.
- Slide 38. In addition to being a communication support for your students, think of the Universal Core vocabulary as a teaching tool that you use to demonstrate how symbols work for communication. Your use of the Universal Core vocabulary, to show students what they could say using these words and symbols, is central to the Project Core teaching practices.
- Slide 39. This teaching practice of pointing to one or more key symbols while speaking is called aided language input. There is strong research supporting the benefits of aided language input to help students learn to use symbols to communicate. Aided Language Input is a critical component of Project Core and there is a module that specifically addresses this important teaching strategy.
- Slide 40. Another strategy involves following your students' lead and carefully observing how and what they are communicating. Whenever possible, adults should attribute meaning to behaviors you observe and make meaningful connections to symbols in the Universal Core vocabulary. For example, when a student is visibly excited about an activity, the adult might say, "I see you smiling" or "I hear you laughing" and then point to the symbol for like while saying, "I think you LIKE it."
- Slide 41. If the student points to a word such as like, adults can respond by pointing to LIKE while saying like, and then adding a little more by pointing to the word IT, while saying the words, "like it". This repetition and expansion of a student's initial efforts is critical to communication and language development.
- Slide 42. It is important to remember that no student will be able to use the Universal Core vocabulary to communicate and develop language without instruction. Throughout the school day, adults in the classroom are the students' most consistent communication partners. These adults can use all of their daily

interactions with students as opportunities to teach communication. These adults should use Universal Core vocabulary on either the student's personal AAC system or a classroom display that is similar to the student's to provide aided language input.

- Slide 43. To summarize, all students need personal access to the Universal Core vocabulary to benefit from instruction.
- Slide 44. All words in the Universal Core vocabulary should be used frequently throughout the day.
- Slide 45. All adults actively show students how to use the Universal Core vocabulary throughout the day.
- Slide 46. And adults help students make meaningful connections between the use of symbols and their other forms of expression, like smiles and vocalizations and body movements.
- Slide 47. Furthermore, adults encourage students to communicate and use the Universal Core vocabulary but do so without requiring students to respond or point to specific symbols.
- Slide 48. And all adults teach communication all day.
- Slide 49. You can get started right away by downloading the Universal Core vocabulary arrangement that you think is best for your students at www.project-core.com. This concludes the module. Your feedback is important to us. Please take a couple of minutes to complete a brief survey about this module. Thank you for your participation. To learn more about Project Core and to access free resources and materials visit the website at project-core.com.
- Slide 50. [disclaimer]