



Project Core

A Stepping-Up Technology Implementation Grant
Directed by the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies at UNC Chapel Hill

Modeling the Universal Core

Importance

Modeling is a powerful way to support communication and language development. Without our models, students who are learning to use the Universal Core will hear spoken language or see sign language, but they will not experience others communicating in a way they can use. Modeling the Universal Core as often as possible is a critical way to help students learn to use symbols to communicate. It is important to begin modeling the use of symbols as soon as possible – even before students communicate with us intentionally, we can attribute meaning to their behaviors (e.g., A child turns away from an activity. We attribute meaning - “you want something different” or “you do not want it.”) and model a symbolic alternative (e.g., Point to different or not on the Universal Core).

Ways to model

The goal of modeling is to encourage symbol use without requiring it. When modeling, be sure to speak at a slow pace and point to or otherwise highlight the symbol until the student sees, or in the case of tactile symbols, feels it. Also, model in ways that match the ways students select symbols to communicate (e.g., pointing, looking at, scanning). The table below offers examples of ways to model.

Situation	Student Behavior	Adult Behavior
During Instruction	Watching or listening to the teacher	Intentionally point to and say words from the Universal Core while teaching.
Student who is not yet using symbols	Student reaches for an item you are holding.	Adult attribute meaning, “I see you reaching.” Then models a symbolic alternative “You could say want . You want it .”
Student uses a single symbol	Student sees an item you are holding and points to the symbol, want .	Adult repeats, “ want ” saying the word while pointing to the symbol, and then expands by saying another word, “want it” while pointing to the symbols.

When to model

Model the Universal Core throughout the day. Make sure systems are always available for adults to model and for students to use. Think broadly about modeling during every day classroom routines (e.g., *go, get, put*) and during academic instruction (e.g., *it, same, different, all, some, what*).

Benefits of modeling

Modeling shows where symbols are located in their core systems and how symbols can be used to communicate various messages. Modeling helps students: (1) understand that their behaviors carry meaning; (2) learn how they can use symbols to communicate more conventionally; and (3) develop language by showing how to expand messages by adding additional symbols.