

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR VOICE OUTPUT

1. The voice output device is the student's voice.

Messages should be based on this understanding.

Example of an appropriate message: "I'd like to hear a joke."

Example of an inappropriate message: "Sam would like to hear a joke."

It is preferable to use the same sex voice as that of the student when using a voice output device. The voice recording can be made by peers, siblings, parents, teachers, teaching assistants, etc.

2. The student should have many opportunities each day to use the voice output device (see Elementary and Secondary School Ideas for Talking Switches in this section).

3. The student's peers should be involved in programming the voice output device.

Peers should have opportunities to play with voice output device(s) if they are going to be involved in programming them or using them with the student. Give them instruction on how the device(s) can be used and their role in recording messages. The student's peers most likely will generate some very fun and interesting messages for him/her to use with others.

4. The student should have the voice output device with them at all times.

5. Record messages that make a difference.

The messages should be motivating for the student to hear or result in some positive feedback. Be creative and keep the messages changing. As a team, brainstorm ideas for the device so that some messages are routine and predictable for the student while others are new and enticing. Listen and observe peers' comments and language for ideas of what to record. Novel messages will keep the listener interested. (See Elementary and Secondary School Ideas for Talking Switches in this section)

At one busy high school, the students recommended that the message, "Get out of my way!" in a wild cartoon like voice would be a good thing to put on the students' Step-by-Step during transitions to other classrooms. It was a great attention-getter and it certainly requested something legitimate. It's not likely that adults would have chosen that message, however!

The voice output device can be used to convey messages from home to school or the reverse. The student could ask her Mom, "Guess what I did at school today?" Mom could then guess, and the student could respond with another message, such as "I went swimming."

The voice output device can be particularly effective when an object or picture is part of the message to encourage and spark peers and adults' curiosity.

6. Honor the sincerity rule of communication.

When recording messages for the student, be clear about who will receive the message. It should be for someone other than the person who recorded the message. The most common violation of the sincerity rule occurs when an individual records a message on the device in front of the student who will be using the device and the message is directed to the same person who did the recording. The student is then asked to play the message. Both the student and the individual already know the information and were present at the time of recording. This violates a sincerity rule of previous knowledge.

For example:

Educational assistant (EA) records a message on the student's device "I went shopping today." The student is present when the message is being recorded. The EA then gives the device to the student, and encourages him to activate the device. The student knows he went shopping and also knows that the EA knows this information. In this example, the student is not motivated to activate the device. Why? Maybe it's because he has already heard the message and is aware that the EA already knows the information. The information is repetitive.

The violation of the sincerity rule can be avoided if the person who records the message is not also the receiver of the message. In other words try sending the message to someone else besides the person who did the recording.

7. Be spontaneous when using the voice output device.

Often the most fun, interesting and practical uses for voice output come when it is used spontaneously. Look at the activity or situation and think... what is one thing a peer might say in this situation? Record the message and go!

8. Check the volume regularly to avoid having the student repeat the message.

Using a voice output device can be effortful for some students and having to repeat messages can also be frustrating for everyone involved. Regularly checking the volume of the device avoids frustration and wasted energy.

9. Make use of planned and predictable classroom opportunities.

Some classroom activities can be predictable and thus lend themselves well to providing opportunities for using voice output devices. Keeping one step ahead of the student by being aware of what's coming next in the way of natural communication opportunities.

10. Participation is more important than the message.

For many students, they may not understand the message and the message itself is not the focus. What's important is to have an opportunity to participate in as many of the activities with peers and an opportunity to have a voice like everyone else. A voice can be a people magnet!