Understanding Curriculum-Related Communication in edTPA:
Supporting the Focus Learner's Use of Expressive/Receptive Communication

Curriculum-related communication in edTPA is the means by which learners develop and express content understandings related to the learning goal and lesson objectives. It can focus on understanding or interpreting communication or on its actual use. Communication includes language content, form, and sequence; various communication modes or forms, including augmented communication, verbal or nonverbal communication, and devices and other technology; expressive or receptive communication; and initiative or responsive communication. Communications can range from nonverbal signals or one-word answers to paragraphs, essays, and laboratory reports, depending on the learner's developmental needs and the learning goal.

As directed by the edTPA handbook:

- Candidates identify **one** important *expressive or receptive communication skill* that the focus learner will use in order to participate in learning tasks or demonstrate learning **related** to the learning goal (Planning Task 1, Prompt 4a).
- Next, candidates must identify and describe how they plan to support the focus learner in understanding how to use the communication skill (Planning Task 1, Prompt 4b).
  - *Communication supports* are strategies that are used to build the focus learner's goal-related communication within a learning task or demonstration of learning. Strategies involve modeling the appropriate communication skills for learners to understand or use in a specific context as well as opportunities for guided practice, generalization, and maintenance. Communication supports can also include assistive technology and other mediators.
  - Examples of supports include modeling, rehearsal, guided practice, word walls, graphic organizers, language frames, and examples of communication use.

This handout provides definitions for and concrete examples of communication skills and supports to help teacher candidates and educator preparation programs understand edTPA Rubrics 4 and 14. See the edTPA Special Education Assessment Handbook glossary and the Understanding Rubric Level Progressions for Special Education for additional examples.

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Communication Skills Related to Academic Language

Most learners will be engaged in academic curriculum-related communication, also known as Academic Language, while learning the language of the discipline, including how language functions, vocabulary, discourse, and syntax are used to access and express knowledge. Some learners will be engaged in functional academic curriculum-related communication, applying academic skills (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening, knowledge of community structures) in a community setting or to daily living. Candidates are directed to identify a communication skill that is related to the learning goal, but also distinct from the learning goal, which allows the focus learner to participate in the learning tasks or demonstrate learning.

Learning Goal	Related Communication Skill
The focus learner will demonstrate reading comprehension by identifying elements of the story (characters, setting, plot, point of view, theme).	Verbally identify story elements using the appropriate vocabulary to provide specific examples from the text of characters, setting, plot, point of view, and theme
The focus learner will add coins of various denominations together.	Identify different coins by their name and value
The focus learner will add fractions with like and unlike denominators.	Explain how fractions with like and unlike denominators are added together, using an If…then… sentence frame
The focus learner will analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.	Compose a paragraph explaining how one key event led to the American Revolution with a claim and appropriate supporting evidence

Some candidates will be working with early childhood learners with exceptionalities. These candidates will most likely focus on vocabulary development (similar to early childhood educators in general education). Here is a sample learning goal and related communication skill:

Learning Goal	Related Communication Skill
The focus learner will identify emotions using facial expressions.	After being presented with a picture of scenario, the focus learner uses appropriate vocabulary (e.g., happy, sad, or mad) to describe the facial expression in the picture

While most learners will be engaged in disciplinary tasks, some learners will be applying academic knowledge in community settings or daily living.

Academic Content Area	Examples of Communication Skills Related to Functional Academics or Early Literacy/Numeracy
Literacy	• Interpret a bus schedule • Respond appropriately to items on a job application • Point to correct object when prompted (vocabulary development for early literacy) • Write his/her name (early literacy) • Demonstrate how to hold a book (early literacy) • Retell a familiar story (early literacy)
Mathematics	• Compare price of item to the amount of money in hand • Select the appropriate time on a clock (digital or analog) for leaving for school • Answer the question "How many do you have?" (early numeracy)
History/Social Science	• Identify who needs to be called to put out a fire or when you're sick • Describe where to buy food vs. clothing • Describe how to go home from school
Science	• Categorize given foods as healthy or unhealthy

Depending on learner needs, the communication skill for learners focusing on academic content may not focus on academic language per se, but on another communication skill needed for the focus learner to participate in learning tasks or to demonstrate learning.

Communication Skills Supporting Participation in Academic Tasks to Meet the Learning Goal	Examples
Social communication skills	• Claim attention by raising a hand • Adjust vocabulary, tone, volume appropriately to situation and audience • Ask for assistance • Agree/disagree/build on a comment made by a peer
Communication skills related to self-management	• Express a need for adjusting the environment to focus attention • Create or interpret a schedule or graphic organizer to complete tasks • Review work for completeness using a checklist

Communication Skills for Learners Not Working on Academic Content

Some learners will be working on communication skills that are not related to academic content.

Examples of Communication Skills for Learners Not Working on Academic Content

Learning Goal	Communication Skills Examples
The focus learner will demonstrate behaviors related to developing self-determination skills.	- Indicate preference with an eye gaze - Signal hunger by pushing a switch to turn on a light - Order a meal using a picture exchange communication system (PECS) card - Accurately select and name women's bathroom sign from an array of sign symbols/picture cards - Use communication device to signal "my turn" during a game - Identify one area of strength and one area of need during the focus learner's annual IEP meeting

Communication Supports

Candidates are prompted to explain how planned supports facilitate the focus learner's use of the communication skill. The identified supports and explanation should be specific to the focus learner's use of the communication skill to demonstrate learning or participate in learning tasks.

Learning Goal	Identified Communication Skill	Identified Communication Support (Specific to the Use of the Skill)
Early Childhood Example		
The focus learner will respond appropriately to questions from others.	The focus learner will respond with either "yes" or "no" to questions about a personal experience.	- Modeling with "think-alouds" providing examples and nonexamples - Picture cards illustrating various meanings of "yes" and "no"

Learning Goal	Identified Communication Skill	Identified Communication Support (Specific to the Use of the Skill)
Academic Examples		
The focus learner will solve two-step word problems using the four operations.	Orally describe steps taken to solve a word problem (mathematics)	- Model problem-solving steps through think-alouds - Prompt learner when a step is skipped - Review required vocabulary (e.g., more, total, number sentence for addition problems) in advance and provide a graphic organizer for remembering the vocabulary
The focus learner will improve reading comprehension by responding to questions and supporting claims with evidence from the text.	Use "wh" words (who, what, when, where, why) to respond to questions being asked and construct appropriate response	- A graphic organizer with "wh" words and sample responses - Think-alouds - Rehearsal
Example Incorporating Alternative Augmentative Communication Device		
The focus learner will distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.	Select a picture choice from an array when asked a question	Model, prompt, and expose the learner to different types of assistive communication, for example, modeling how to respond to questions using the GoTalk communication device or prompting responses using a graduated guidance procedure.
Other Communication Skills Supporting Participation in Academics		
The focus learner will solve multi-step real-life problems with positive and negative numbers.	Express frustrations appropriately (for a focus learner who shuts down or stops participating when work is too difficult)	- Provide a sentence frame "I am frustrated by _____ because _____" - Model use of the sentence frame in different scenarios - Provide options for expressing frustration (oral conversation, writing a note)

Learning Goal	Identified Communication Skill	Identified Communication Support (Specific to the Use of the Skill)
Support for Communication Skills for Learners Not Working on Academics		
The focus learner will identify his/her own first name on an index card.	Identify and say his/her name printed on an index card	• Provide examples and nonexamples • Review other words that begin with the same first letter as the focus learner's name • Rehearsal
The focus learner will use public transportation to travel from home to school.	Interpret the sign at the top of the bus to board the correct bus (functional academics—reading)	• Provide a chart with signs for buses on routes most often traveled • Practice comparing and contrasting with signs for other buses using the same stop • Rehearsal