

## Communication Systems – Spelling Boards

Many individuals experience communication difficulties or have limitations in their speech, language, reading and writing as a result of acquired disabilities, congenital disabilities, or neurological differences. A Speech Pathologist can assist individuals with communication impairments and their family and friends to find ways to improve communication, such as using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

AAC is a broad term for a group of components such as symbols, selection techniques and strategies that support the use of functional and effective communication. Some AAC systems include using written words, spelling boards, picture symbol books, key word signing, and speech generating devices.

While there are basic strategies that anyone can try, an effective communication system is as individual as the person who uses it. The AAC system must take into account the person's skills and communication style, their communication partners, the environment/s in which they communicate, and the functions of their communication.

### **This fact sheet focuses on spelling boards**

To use a spelling board successfully the individual will need to be able to spell effectively. Be aware that although a person may understand what you say to them and be able to read, they may still find spelling difficult and confronting. They may have difficulty thinking of the words they want to use, as well as problems remembering what they were spelling. Look out for signs of frustration or embarrassment and try to set the person at ease. You may need to consult a Speech Pathologist to find another way of communicating.

Other access methods are possible for people who cannot clearly point to the letters on the spelling board. Talk to a Speech Pathologist and Occupational Therapist to find out more.

## Making a spelling board

You can make a simple, cheap spelling board using paper, pens, or cardboard. Laminate the board or place in a plastic sleeve for durability. For a more professional looking result use the computer to print a spelling board. Commercial boards are also available.

A Speech Pathologist can assist you to design and produce a spelling board suited to the individual.

## Layout and information

### Case and Font

Generally upper case/capital letters are clearer to see. If printing a spelling board on the computer use a clear large font and allow for adequate “white space” around each letter.

### Use of words and phrases

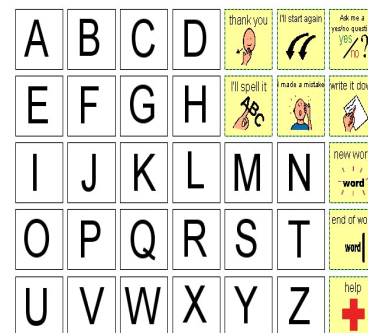
No matter how quick someone might be able to spell out words, it is always good to have some quick common words or phrases printed on a communication spelling board.

### Suggested phrases include:

- Can you write it down?
- It starts with...
- I'd like to ask you something
- Do you understand?
- I don't understand
- I'll show you
- End of word
- New word
- I made a mistake, I'll start again
- I'm not sure how to spell it
- I need some help
- Thank you
- Yes/No (may be needed if a person can't clearly nod and shake their head)

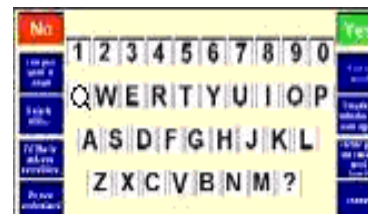
### Alphabetical order

This can be easy to follow and understood by most people. However, it can be slow, as people tend to start at A and work their way through, rather than visually searching for the letter. An alphabetical layout can be displayed in a range of ways, but it may be efficient to split the rows so that each new row starts with a vowel (a,e,i,o,u).



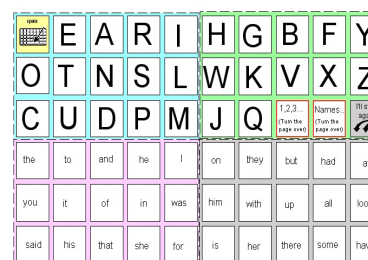
### QWERTY order

People who are familiar with a computer keyboard or typewriter might prefer the QWERTY layout.



### Letter frequency order

Charts arranged by the most frequently used letters take some getting used to. However, once learnt, they can be faster to use and require less movement, and therefore less tiring.



## Hints for being a good communication partner

- As the person selects the letters say the letter out loud so they know you've understood. You may want to write the letters down so you can follow along.
- Don't be afraid of saying you don't understand.
- Ask the person if it's okay before guessing and finishing off their words. While it can speed up the conversation, it may frustrate the person, especially if you are on the wrong track.
- "Listen" with your eyes and your ears.
- Find a quiet space to sit and allow plenty of time for communication.
- Be aware that using any form of alternative communication takes time and energy; there will be times that the person just doesn't feel like communicating.
- For quick communication it may be easier to ask questions that the person can answer with a "yes" or "no". Just make sure this is not the only type of communication you use.

# More information

For further information, or advice, about any item contained in this information sheet, please contact Independent Living Centre Tasmania Inc.(ILCT):

- Call 1300 452 827 to speak to a health professional.
- Visit our website [www.ilct.com.au](http://www.ilct.com.au) or email [info@ilct.com.au](mailto:info@ilct.com.au).
- ILCT visits communities around Tasmania. Contact ILCT to find out when we will be in your area.

ILCT provides Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Speech Pathology, and Allied Health Assistant services, on a fee-for-service basis. Our team delivers comprehensive assessments and support that may include assistive technology, home modifications, communication aids, and other tailored interventions to enhance independence and quality of life.

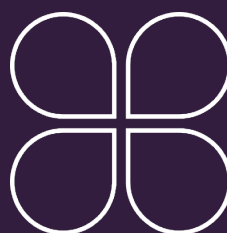
ILCT specifically provides supports to those aged over 18, who are Tasmanian residents and are of any culturally-diverse background. ILCT are a registered provider under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Independent Living Centre Tas Inc. (ILCT) acknowledges the generous support of the Tasmanian Government – Department of Health through the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program, and the Australian Government – Department of Health and Aged Care through the My Aged Care – Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP). Their ongoing contributions enable the continued provision of these information sheets and our information services.

## Disclaimer

Independent Living Centre Tasmania Inc.(ILCT) is a not-for-profit organisation and does not sell, design, or manufacture equipment or products. Information provided by ILCT is intended as a general guide only, and may not be comprehensive, or up to date. Whilst every effort is made, to ensure accuracy, ILCT cannot guarantee that all information provided is correct. Any pricing information is indicative only and may be subject to change. Users should contact suppliers directly for current pricing and product availability. The inclusion of product or service information does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by ILCT. Individuals are responsible for making their own informed choices and are strongly encouraged to seek professional advice before selecting equipment or services. ILCT accepts no liability for any loss, damage, or injury arising from the selection, or use of products, or services, based on information provided. Users must always follow any professional advice received and the manufacturer's instructions for use.

© 2025 ISCO-04



**Independent  
Living Centre  
Tasmania**