Hey! Can I try that?

A Student Workbook for
Choosing and Using
Assistive Technology

by
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Please feel free to make as many copies of ***Hey! Can I Try That?*** as you need to, but please retain the authors credit and information.

References

If you'd like to find out more about self determination and assistive technology, here are some resources you could look at. We looked at them as we wrote this book.

For parents:

Assistive Technology Pointers for Parents. (Reed & Bowser, 2014). This short, easy to read manual is designed to help parents be active participants in assistive technology decision making. It contains examples of how parents can effectively work with school personnel at each of the Education Tech Points and provides questions and worksheets for the parent's use. It is available from the Coalition for Assistive Technology in Oregon (CATO) www.educationtechpoints.org/cato-publications/.

For teachers, therapists, and administrators:

Education Tech Points: A Framework for Assistive Technology Planning. (Bowser & Reed, 2012). This manual provides in depth information about the Education Tech Points and many practical tools that have been developed by school districts to help them provide efficient, effective assistive technology services. Education Tech Points is available from CATO (www.educationtechpoints.org/cato-publications/).

Student-led IEPs: A Guide for Student Involvement. (McGahee, Mason, Wallace, and Jones, 2001). This short book outlines specific steps to help students become more active in their IEP meetings. Available from ERIC (https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED455623).

My Interests, Hopes and Dreams. (Sonoran UCEED, 2011) An exploration tool and guide to student preferences, this workbook contains basic information to help students develop self determination skills as well as worksheets to help them explore the general topic of self determination. Available from Sonoran UCEED (https://sonorancenter.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2022-10/Preference Tool.pdf)

Hey! Can I try that?

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There are many things that you can use to help with school tasks such as reading and writing and studying. If school tasks are hard for you, there are some tools that you could try.

You could:

- ★ Use a computer or tablet instead of writing by hand.
- ★ Have a computer "read" things to you.
- ★ Look up words in an electronic dictionary and "cut and paste" the definition instead of writing it.
- ★ Use information from the Internet to help you prepare for a resource paper.
- ★ Use outlining app to help you organize your thoughts.

There are many, many more tools you could try. The above list is just a sample of some technology that many students use. Tools that help you to do things that are hard for you (because you have a disability) are sometimes called assistive technology. That's AT for short!

Learning about new kinds of technology can be fun and exciting. It can also help you to do new things that you may have thought were too hard for you. If you find the right tool, you may be able to improve your work in:

- ★ writing
- ★ learning from books and worksheets
- ★ listening
- ★ organizing your work
- ★ reading

The important thing is to know what you want to do.

Once you have an idea of what you want to work on, you can start by talking about it with someone who can help you find out about assistive technology. There are so many new kinds of technology these days that no one knows about all of them. It's a good idea to have the help of people who understand the kinds of technology that you might need.

TAKING THE LEAD:

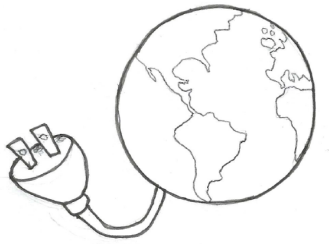
Self Determination and Assistive Technology

When you finish school it will be important for you to be able to make decisions for yourself and then follow through on those decisions. The ability to do this is called "self determination". Self determination means you have goals and work toward them. It also means you know your strengths and weaknesses. Self determination doesn't just happen. You learn it. Your teachers and parents can help you to learn self determination, but some of the work is yours. One part of self determination is to think about what things are really hard for you to do and what tools (or assistive technology) might help you.

If you are reading this, you probably have already taken the first step to finding the right tool for you. In the next part of this book, we'll tell you some stories about other kids who use assistive technology and the steps they took to identify what they wanted to do, choose their tools and learn to use them.

If you'd like to find out more about self determination in general, we suggest *My Interests, Hopes and Dreams.* (This workbook has been tried by many teens who found it helpful with the basics.)

You, your parents or your teachers can download it from https://sonorancenter.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2022-10/PreferenceTool.pdf. It helps you explore ideas and has many worksheets that can help you identify your own self determination style.



Chuck's Story

Chuck was in the fifth grade when he really started to get mad about school. Everything he tried to write came out looking like a little kid's writing. He got really bad grades on his class assignments because the teacher couldn't read them and he had almost given up on doing homework.

Chuck talked to his mom one night at dinner. He told her that he was trying as hard as he could to make his writing better, but it just wasn't working. He said that he needed her help. He was starting to hate to go to school. The only thing that really kept him going was that he loved being on the basketball team.

Chuck's mom agreed to talk with his teacher. They thought that maybe he could tell the teacher his answers instead of writing them. They hoped she had some other ideas. Chuck did not want to sit at the teacher's desk all the time while other kids wrote.

Chuck's teacher talked about some tools that other kids with the same problem sometimes used. She said that if Chuck was willing to do some extra work to learn to use a computer program that was specially designed for writing that might help. She also showed him some other writing tools they could try.

It did take some work for Chuck to learn to use the new computer software. He had to go to the learning center to get lessons on the software and on how to do his assignments on a computer. Once he was comfortable, he started doing all of his longer English assignments on the computer. His teacher always allowed kids to choose whether to use a pencil or a keyboard, so he didn't feel different from the others.

Chuck's grades on his written work improved a lot. His teacher could read what he wrote down and he had a lot of good ideas in his head. He was finally able to get them on paper.

DOING MY SCHOOLWORK:

What's the Problem?

Before you can decide which one, or two, or more tools might help you, you need to think about what tasks you need help with:. That means setting some goals for yourself.

The steps for setting goals are:

1. Look at what you are doing now.
2. Look at what you want to do better or in a different way.
3. Choose one thing you want to work on.
4. List the actions you need to take to reach the goal.
5. List the difficulties you may run into.
6. Describe how you will know when you have reached your goal.

Make sure that the activity you choose to work on is important to you. It's a good place to start if you really want to meet the goal. For example, some students have an especially hard time with tests. They can learn a lot from the things that go on in their classes, but they can't always show what they know. Tests can be hard because they have to be done in a short period of time. Sometimes answers have to fit in a particular space. Even though you may know the answers, you may find tests even harder than the classes themselves.

Tests are so important. It can really help to take a look at how assistive technology could help. Sometimes, it's possible to take tests in a little bit different way than other kids do it so that you can show what you really know.

Pat's Problem

Pat is in the eighth grade. Reading has been hard for her since the first grade. Pat has been working every day to keep up with her schoolwork. She does a pretty good job. But this year, her Earth Science class is just too hard. She can't read the book and she is spending two hours every night just on Earth Science.

Pat is ready for a change. She wants to keep trying to learn to read better, but she also needs help right now with Earth Science. Pat filled out the worksheet on the next page to help her describe her difficulties. When she was done, she asked to talk about it with her parents and her Earth Science teacher.

What kind of problem are you having with your school work? Fill out Worksheet #1 and discuss it with your parents and teachers.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

- Classes that are the hardest for me: _____

_____

- In my classes, the tasks that are the hardest: (like copying from the board, understanding the book, writing math problems, etc.) are: _____

_____

- When I need to take a test, the hardest part is: _____

_____

- Taking tests would be easier if I could: _____

_____

- Ideas I have about tools that might help me: _____

_____

- Things I want to tell the teachers and others about my school work:

_____

_____

- Questions I want to ask: _____

_____

_____

FIGURING IT OUT:

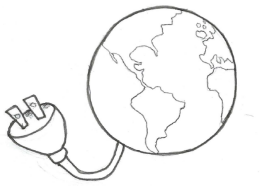
What's the Situation?

The best way to get help in figuring out what AT you need is to make sure that the people on your team know as much about you as possible. They need to know more about you. They need to know about the things that are hard for you. And they need to know about the places that you do those hard things.

You already have set your goal. If you are going to figure out how to meet this goal, you need to figure out what the AT would do to make things easier for you. Maybe you want it to help you spell better. Maybe you want it to help you write. It will help your team to know about things you use now to do schoolwork. How do those things help? What else do you wish they could do? Maybe you even use some AT already! Some tools like calculators and apps are used by a lot of kids in school. You may just need to use them in a different way or use them more often.

Another good thing to think about is the things you have seen other kids do. What tools have you seen in your school that you might want to try to help with your goal?

And finally, what have you tried already that did not work? What was wrong with it? If you could have changed it in some way, would it have helped more?



Pat's Situation

When Pat really thought about it, the problem was not with all of her reading. She could get along in her English, math and social studies class. It wasn't easy, but she could do it.

The science book was just too hard. There were many words that she did not know stuck in between the ones she did. She had tried highlighting the important words but that didn't help her read them any better.

She wished that she had some way to read what she could and get help with the hard words. She was asking her mom and her teacher for a lot of help or just skipping over those hard words. Either way, it was a lot of trouble.

Pat had seen an app that read the words out loud. She wanted to know more about that kind of app. She also wanted to know more about other tools that kids use for reading.

What kinds of things have you tried to help with your goal? What other things would you like to try? Fill our Worksheet #2 and discuss it with your parents and teachers.

WHAT'S THE SITUATION?

What I want AT to do for me: _____

_____

What I do now to help with this problem: _____

_____

AT I already use: _____

_____

What have I already tried that did not work? Why didn't it work? What would have made it better: _____

_____

Things that other kids use or that I have seen that might help me: _____

_____

Things I want to tell teachers and others about things I have tried or want to try: _____

_____

_____

Questions I want to ask: _____

_____

_____

_____

TRYING NEW THINGS:

Would I use this AT?

When you have tried a new tool to help you meet your goal, you probably found some things you liked about it and some things you didn't like. It is important that everyone knows how you feel about the tools you try. But sometimes, in a meeting, it's hard to say what you think.

What if you don't like AT? What if you don't like something about the AT that you tried? The hard part about telling people you don't like something or that you don't want to do what they suggested is that you have to stand up for yourself without being rude. This means that you have to be assertive. Being assertive means being clear and saying what you want in a respectful way.

Here are some steps to bing assertive

1. Look them in the eye.
2. Speak calmly and firmly.
3. Share your ideas in a way that people will understand.
4. If they disagree, find another way to ask again and get help if you need it.

Pat's Look at Some Tools

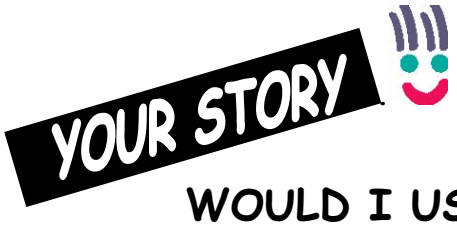
Pat's mom and dad sat down with her and two of her teachers to talk about the trouble Pat was having in Earth Science. They thought of several ways that Pat might be able to spend less time trying to read her text book. They made a list of the tools they knew about that Pat might try.

- ★ The book was available as a recording. Pat could listen to it.
- ★ Pat could use a spelling app, type in the words she didn't know and let it read them back to her. That way she wouldn't have to sound them out.

Pat agreed to try the spelling app and the recorded book for two weeks. At the end of that time she filled out Worksheet #3. She liked the spelling app. The recorded book did not help with her goal of spending less time on her science homework. She didn't like it much.

Pat still wanted to know if there was a kind of computer that could read the hard parts of the book to her so she wouldn't have to listen to the whole book. One of her teachers said she would try to find out.

If you have tried some AT that might help you meet your goal. Fill out Worksheet #3 and discuss it with your parents and teachers.



WOULD I USE THIS AT?

- Things I like about the AT I tried: _____

_____

- Things I don't like about the AT I tried: _____

_____

- If there was more than one tool to try, the one I liked best was: _____

_____

- Why I liked it best: _____

_____

- If I was the only one using technology, how did that feel? Is it OK? _____

_____

- Things I want to tell the teachers and others about the AT that I tried: _____

_____

_____

- Questions I want to ask the teachers and others: _____

_____

_____

_____

Making a Plan:

What will I use and how will I use it?

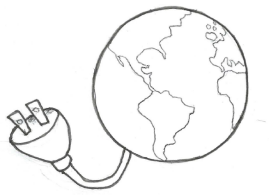
Now that you have tried some things, it's time to make a plan. That means you will have to decide exactly what you are going to do. A lot of kids pick a goal like "Do better in writing". That is an OK goal, but to make it a really great goal you need to make a goal that says exactly what you will do. One way to make sure that a goal is a great goal is to ask yourself what it will look like if you meet your goal. If you can imagine what it would look like, you can tell if you are there!

Here are some sample goals that you might be able to see.

- ★ I'll be able to write a two page paper with only three spelling errors.
- ★ I'll be able to write ten sentences in fifteen minutes.
- ★ I'll be able to complete all the math problems in my homework in less than one hour using a calculator.

People don't always agree. Sometimes you may not agree with the plan that the rest of the people on your team want to make for you. When that happens, you need to negotiate. Negotiating means working out something you can both agree on. Here are four steps to negotiation.

1. Listen to what other people want
2. Think about what you want
3. Decide what you can live with
4. Compromise - Make a plan together that everyone can live with



Pat's Plan

Pat and her team decided that the talking spelling app that she had been using was a good tool for her. It allowed her to hear the words in her Earth Science book that she didn't know. And she only used it when she needed it. Pat liked that she got to decide about that. Pat's team wrote the talking spelling app into her plan so that all of her teachers would know about it.

Pat's goal was to be able to answer all the questions on her homework and weekly tests in science. She wanted to get a "B" average on these tests without help in reading. Pat's mom and dad wanted her to work for a "C" average, but Pat thought she could do better than that. They talked about it and Pat convinced them that she really wanted to try it. They wrote it into the plan.

If you think you are ready to use some assistive technology on an every day basis fill out Worksheet #4. Then discuss it with your teachers and parents.

WHAT WILL I USE AND HOW WILL I USE IT?

- What exactly do I want to work on: _____

_____

- How do I think assistive technology that I have tried might help me meet my goals: _____

_____

_____

- What problems do I see in meeting these goals: _____

_____

- What is my opinion about what we should do? Do I agree with what the team decided? _____

_____

- Do I need to compromise? How am I willing to compromise? _____

_____

_____

- Things I want to tell the teachers and others about assistive technology: _____

_____

_____

- Questions I want to ask the teachers and others: _____

_____

_____

USING AT:

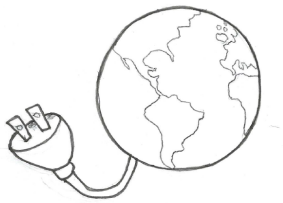
What needs to be done?

Having an AT tool is not the same as being able to use it. Some AT tools are easy to use and don't take much to keep them going. Other tools, like computers are more complicated and you will need to know a lot about them to make sure they work correctly.

Here's some questions that might help you think about using your AT every day. Only you know the kind of help you need. That means only you can really answer these questions.

1. What things do I need to have with me to use my AT?
2. What do I need to do every day to make sure my AT is working?
3. What kind of help will I need from my teachers and others?
4. What will I need to learn in order to use my AT?

You might want to consider asking one of the adults in your life to be your "coach" on your AT. It might be a teacher or one of the other people who work with you at school that you can go to for help. It might be your mom or your dad. No matter who you choose, it's a good idea to make your plan with that person and make sure he or she knows how it's going.



Pat Using AT

At first Pat only used her spelling app in the resource room. She and her teachers decided that she would need some practice and some instruction in picking the words she wanted to have it read to her. She started by reading out loud with a teacher and talking about when to check out words. Later she practiced doing it on her own.

Pat finally decided that she was ready to try the spelling app in her science class. She took it with her on Monday and during the first class there was a reading assignment. Pat realized there was something she had not thought about. The spelling app talked outloud. Everyone else in the class was doing silent reading. How could she use her spell checker without making everyone stare at her?

Pat went back to her resource room after class and talked with her teacher. about this problem. They realized she could use her earbuds. It worked just fine! After that Pat used the spelling app in Earth Science every day.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- What kind of help will I need to use my technology? _____

_____

_____

- What will I need to learn in order to make my AT work? _____

_____

_____

- What will I need to do every day to make my AT work? _____

_____

_____

- Problems I am having with my assistive technology: _____

_____

_____

- Things I want to tell the teachers and others about my assistive technology:

_____

_____

- Questions I want to ask the teachers and others: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

REVIEWING THE PLAN:

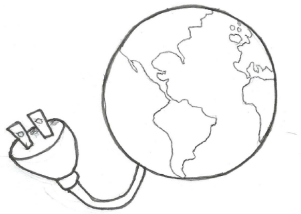
How is my AT working for me?

You are learning things every day. If you've been using AT, you have probably been learning about it too. You may have found some things you wished it did better. You may have found that you don't need it as much as you thought you would or you may have found that you want to use it more than you thought.

It's a good idea to sit down with your team and review how things are going. You should do this at least once a year but you might want to do it more often. When you meet with your team, you might want to talk about questions like these.

1. What have I accomplished?
2. How has my AT been helping me?
3. Do I still want to use this AT?
4. What else do I want my AT to do for me?
5. What's next?

When you talk about the answers to these questions, you might decide that things are going well and you want to keep using your AT in just the way you have been using it. Or you might find that you need a change. The most important thing to remember is that AT is a tool to help you. It's your job to say how it helps.



Pat's New Goal

Pat worked with the spelling app for the rest of the year .It really helped her get through her Earth Science class. At the end of the term Pat asked for another meeting to talk about her AT.

Pat told her teachers and her parents how much help the spelling app had been. But she also said she was worried about next year. Her subjects were getting harder and she knew the reading was going to get harder too. Pat thought she could understand the material in her classes and do the work if she could only get the information out of those books and worksheets. Pat asked her team to help her with this problem.

Pat's teacher had some good news. She had looked around for a way for a computer to read textbooks to Pat and found something she thought might work. There was a service called Bookshare that she could use to get digital copies of all of her textbooks.

Everyone knew it would take more work and more learning to use this new tool. Pat also knew it might not work for her. She hoped she would like it but she wasn't sure. She *was* sure she knew the steps to take to try it!

YOUR STORY

HOW IS MY AT WORKING FOR ME?

- How I use the AT now: _____

_____

- Things I like about the assistive technology I use: _____

_____

- What isn't working for me: _____

_____

- Other tasks I wish I had help with: _____

_____

- My future plans: _____

_____

- Changes in my AT that will be needed because of my future plans: _____

_____

- Things I want to tell the teachers and others about my assistive technology: ____

_____

- Questions I want to ask the teachers and others: _____

_____

_____

_____

Some Thoughts for teachers and parents on using

Hey! Can I Try That?

You may be wondering, “How might this workbook be useful?” *Hey! Can I Try That?* is meant to be a resource that students can use entirely on their own. That is especially true for older high school students and students in post-secondary settings. But that is not the only way to use it. As a teacher or parent, you can use it in a number of ways. For example, you can sit with your student and read the questions aloud and then record their answers for later discussion.

It is important to note that you may want to only use the sections that apply to the current situation. If your student is getting new AT or AT is being thought about for the first time, then use the first part of the workbook to help them identify and focus on the times and places where the problems occur. The first two worksheets are intended to help your student focus on that and what might help. However, if they already have AT, but there are issues with it, then the last three worksheets may be more useful.

The *Hey! Can I Try That?* workbook can also be used for a classroom group activity to teach kids basic ideas about AT and the role it can play in their educational program. It can be used with students who have AT already or those who are just thinking about getting it. It is especially nice when students can work through this workbook and also have the opportunity to try out the AT tools that might be useful to them.

Hey! Can I Try That? is also useful as an interview tool if the teacher/AT specialist/other concerned adult is unfamiliar with the student. Just remember that it is important not to give input, but just listen and record. You may be surprised at what you hear.

The information gained from the answers to the questions in *Hey! Can I Try That?* can be very important in an IEP team meeting where AT is being considered. Because some students are hesitant to attend their own IEP meetings or hesitant to talk about themselves and their needs/ interests/ideas in that setting, the authentic responses from the worksheets can be key to better understanding the student and to developing a better IEP.

At home *Hey! Can I Try That?* can provide some carefully crafted questions to help get at what your student is experiencing at school and any concerns that may be developing. Asking just one question at a time may lead to positive discussions and prevent a student from turning off to school entirely or deciding they are a failure.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is to refrain from telling a struggling student to “work harder”. Instead, *Hey! Can I Try That?* can help us to become their partner in figuring out how to work smarter.

Gayl & Penny