

# Assessment for Switch Use

Prior to introducing switching it is a good idea to do an assessment of the student's current skills, consider all access methods and set student goals. This could be done using the framework mentioned in *Unlocking Abilities: Introduction to Developing Touchscreen, Switching and Eye Gaze Skills*.

Below are some assessments that could be useful in assessing the student's specific skills in relation to switching;

1. **Unlocking Abilities: Switching Monitoring Sheet.** Could also be used as screening tool to see where the student's skills are currently and what skills to target in intervention.
2. **ACE Centre North – Switch Assessment and Planning Framework for Individual with Physical Disabilities:**  
<http://acecentre.org.uk/Websites/aceoldham/images/InfoSheets/SwAssessmentFramework.pdf>
3. **Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (WATI) Assistive Technology Assessment – Section 1 – Fine Motor Related to Computer (or Device) Access and Section 4 – Communication: [The WATI Assessment Package \(wi.gov\)](#)** This provides a guide for assessing the student's fine motor skills and other aspects impacting on use of switches.

## Choosing a switch site

There is no perfect switch site, but we want to make accessing a switch as easy as possible for the student.

Remember that we may be asking the student to perform an unfamiliar movement and it will take time and repetition for the student to learn the motor pattern for switching. If motor skills are difficult for the student, you may need to try a range of different switch sites.

**Step 1:** Consult carers or support people for the student in regards to what the student's best or most used movements are.

**Step 2:** Observe the student during rest and during activity to observe their movement patterns.

**Step 3:** Choose some possible switch sites to trial. Don't wait to find a perfect switch site, give it a try!

Considerations for choosing switch sites to trial;

- Avoid movements that may cause discomfort for the student.
- Avoid large movements that could be fatiguing. Later on we will be expecting the student to activate the switch numerous times throughout the day.
- Avoid using reflexive or uncontrollable movements.
- Avoid movements that increase tone or create accessory movements of other body parts.

- Movement generally develops proximally (from the core of the body) to distally (the limbs). Therefore, movements of the head and trunk may be easier to control than movement of the limbs.
- Try to use a movement that the student can produce reliably with speed. Although this will improve with practice.

## Choosing a switch

Start out with a regular mechanical switch; e.g. Jellybean, BigRed, Buddy. These are most commonly used as they provide both auditory and tactile feedback for the student. If the student has difficulty accessing this, below are some possible options to trial to overcome challenges.

Challenge	Possible Solutions
Student has difficulty applying pressure to switch	Membrane switch Proximity switch Micro light switch
Student only has a very limited movement to activate switch	Proximity switch Micro light switch
Sensory aversion to touching a switch	Pillow switch
Student is overly forceful or injures themselves when hitting the switch	Pillow switch Lever switch
Student is swatting at switch and appears to focus on sensation of hitting the switch	A smaller switch requiring more precise movement Pillow switch
Unable to identify reliable movement. Would like to try other methods.	Sip/puff switch Twitch switch Sound switch (can be sensitive to other external noises)



Membrane



Proximity



Pillow



Lever



Micro light