Aligning a Child's Functional Skills with the Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes

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https://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/cos-align.asp

This document supports high-quality Child Outcomes Summary (COS) ratings by helping teams connect their observations of children's functional skills and behaviors with the Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes. Effectively aligning functional skills and outcomes will help Part C early intervention and Part B, Section 619 preschool special education program teams improve their outcome measurement.

By making connections between provider and caregiver observations with the three child outcomes, it becomes increasingly natural for teams to identify a child's functional skills, align those skills to the three child outcomes, and determine an accurate and consistent Child Outcomes Summary (COS) rating.

If a member of the team is new the Child Outcomes Summary (COS) Process, they may wish to increase their knowledge by taking the basic COS Process Online Module: Collecting and Using Data to Improve Programs.

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Understanding the Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes

Functional Skills

Each of the three child outcomes encompasses an array of functional skills involved in a child's participation in day-to-day routines. Functional skills are those skills a young child uses to complete tasks and participate in everyday life. To understand a child's level of functioning, the team must know the child's intent and purpose when using a skill. Functionality is not inherent to a skill itself, but can be found in a child's meaningful use of that skill.

For example, the ability to stand on one foot is an isolated, discrete skill. Determining function is a process of asking *why*—Why is the child standing on one foot? Is it to put on a pair of pants, to play hopscotch with friends, or so that a caregiver can dry the other foot off after bath time?

See also: Understanding Functional Skills: Background for the COS Process

Skill Bundles

Functional skills can be aligned to the three child outcomes. The *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes* includes six bundles of functional skills associated with each of the three outcomes. The bundles help teams gather information about a child's functional skills, and align them with an outcome. The bundles are not finite lists. A consistent and thorough understanding of the *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes* is necessary for teams to determine high-quality COS ratings.

KEY TAKEAWAY: The *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes* includes six skill bundles for each outcome that describe the breadth of the outcome's functional skills.

How Developmental Domains Differ from Skill Bundles

Early childhood typically organizes children's knowledge and skills into *developmental domains*. A child integrates their skills *across* developmental domains to participate in the activities that make up their everyday lives. While developmental domains are useful for some purposes, they often do not convey a *functional* use of a given skill. Additionally, all developmental domains, and many curricular-based skills inform multiple outcomes. The three child outcomes and their associated skill bundles span the developmental domains and curricular areas to reflect the integrated nature of a child's development and learning.

Example: Associating Developmental Domain Skills Across Outcomes

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills includes learning language, but the *communication* developmental domain does not map to just Outcome 2. Observation of a child's everyday communication is likely to inform all three outcomes. To determine the outcome to which the child's language skills correspond best, teams must consider the functional purpose of the child's communication.

Communication Domain Skills	**Outcome**
Talking with peers during play time	Outcome 1: Positive Social-Emotional Skills (including social relationships)
Learning increasingly complex communication skills	Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills
Communicating to express needs	Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

Similarly, although motor skills are often associated with *Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs*, depending on the purpose of a child's movement, the skill might provide information about the child's status on any of the three child outcomes.

Motor Skill Domain Skills	**Outcome**
Moving to greet, approach, and engage a peer in play	Outcome 1: Positive Social-Emotional Skills (including social relationships)
Manipulating objects according to their function in purposeful pretend play	Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills
Moving around to accomplish routine tasks such as dressing and eating	Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

KEY TAKEAWAY: Developmental domains and curricular areas contain functional skills that can be associated with any of the three child outcomes.

Using Skill Bundles to Inform Accurate COS Ratings

Accurate COS ratings require understanding the *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes*. When teams consider the full array or breadth of skills associated with each outcome and consistently align children's skills with the respective outcomes, they will produce more accurate COS ratings.

These ratings represent a synthesis of all that is known about a child's functioning in each of the three outcomes. Identifying the child's functional skills across the breadth of each outcome provides the most complete picture of the child's functioning in that outcome and, therefore, the most accurate outcomes measurement.

Example: Using Skill Bundles to Inform COS Ratings

The following table shows the difference between two teams' consideration of Outcome 3 skill bundles. **Team A** bases their rating (3) primarily on how children move around, manipulate things, and eat and drink with independence. **Team B** bases their rating (5) on all Outcome 3 skill bundles. Team A's lack of consideration for all skill bundles leads to inaccuracies in ratings, and inconsistencies that impact overall COS data quality.

	Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs	Team A	Team B
	Moving Around and Manipulating Things to Meet Needs	YES	YES
	Eating and Drinking with Increasing Independence	YES	YES
	Dressing and Undressing with Increasing Independence	NO	YES
	Diapering/Toileting and Washing with Increasing Independence	NO	YES
	Communicating Needs	NO	YES
	Showing Safety Awareness	NO	YES

KEY TAKEAWAY: Teams should consider all the skill bundles in the *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes* to align functional skills with outcomes and to determine consistent COS ratings.

Aligning Functional Skills with the Three Child Outcomes

Step 1. Provide Detail

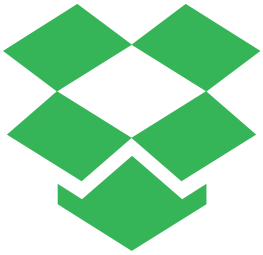
Is there sufficient detail that describes what the child is doing?

If not, the team will have to gather more information. If the information is too broad or nebulous, teams will struggle to understand the child's skills.

Step 2. Convey Function

Does the detail convey the functional nature of the child's skills?

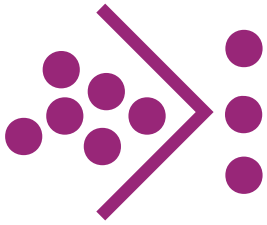
Teams must not only gather detailed information about a child's skills, but they must also gather detailed information about how the child uses those skills across the settings and situations in their day-today actions and interactions.



Step 3. Unpack into Functional Skills

Does the observation of the child's functioning include multiple skills? Do the skills require unpacking to align with an outcome?

Observations and conversations with caregivers often provide information about multiple skills. When this occurs, teams must unpack the information by separating them into functional skills that can be effectively aligned with one of the three child outcomes.



Step 4. Align with an Outcome

To which skill bundle and outcome does each functional skill align?

With detailed descriptions of a child's functional skills, sufficiently unpacked, teams can align those skills with the appropriate outcome and corresponding skill bundle.

KEY RESOURCE: Each of the three child outcomes encompasses an array of functional skills. The *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes* highlights six bundles of functional skills associated with each outcome. The bundles help teams consider the breadth of a child's functioning within each outcome and align skills with an outcome to determine accurate Child Outcomes Summary (COS) Process ratings.

Step 1. Provide Detail

Is there sufficient detail that describes what the child is doing?

If not, the team will have to gather more information. If the information is too broad or nebulous, teams will struggle to understand the child's skills.

Information gathered about a child's skills must include rich, descriptive detail for teams to understand what the child does and does not do. When information is too broad or nebulous, teams struggle to understand the child's functional use of their skills. Having detailed observation or interview notes is essential for understanding a child's functioning and for alignment of functional skills with outcomes.

Example: Providing Detail, Purpose, and Context in Observations

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills includes learning language, but observation of a child's everyday communication is likely to inform all three outcomes. To determine the outcome to which the child's language skills correspond, teams must consider the functional purpose of the child's communication.

Observation	**Is there sufficient detail in this observation?**
Laszlo is improving his independence.	**Lacks detail** — It is difficult to understand specific actions Laszlo takes that show improvement in his independence, or any function behind those actions. It is impossible to align this observation with an outcome. The team will need to make additional observations, ask more questions, and review assessment data.
Laszlo cleans up after snack time.	**Has context but lacks detail** — Important information about the context of the skill is provided, but "cleans up" is very vague. More detail is needed to understand what Laszlo is doing to align those actions with an outcome. The team must gather more details.
Laszlo does not dress himself.	**Lacks detail** — While it can be helpful to know what a child does not do, teams must also understand what actions the child takes at a time when others expect the child to be dressing themselves or performing the skills discussed.
After washing his hands before snack, Laszlo independently pulls a paper towel from the dispenser, dries his hands until they are almost dry, and drops the towel in the trash.	**Sufficient detail and context to understand what the child does** — In this note the skills are described in sufficient detail so that teams can discuss what the child is doing and why, with a shared understanding.

KEY TAKEAWAY: If the team does not have sufficient detail to understand what the child is doing, they must gather more information.

Step 2. Convey Function

Does the detail convey the functional nature of the child's skills?

Teams must not only gather detailed information about a child's skills, but they must also gather detailed information about how the child uses those skills across the settings and situations in their day-to-day actions and interactions.

When the focus is on discrete skills or skill quality, the functional nature of a child's skills can be overlooked. If the functional nature of the child's skill is not evident, the team must gather more information to understand if the skill is used functionally.

Example: Conveying Function in Observations

Observation	Is there enough context to determine skill function?
Portia uses a left-handed three-finger grasp with her thumb pointing in an upward position.	**Detail without function** — There is not enough detail to understand the context or meaningful use of the skill. The team cannot identify the function of Portia's three-finger grasp. Is it to hold her pencil when writing her name (Outcome 2), to turn the faucet on when washing her hands (Outcome 3), or to help a friend set the timer for their turn at the computer (Outcome 1)? Without the function of the skill, it is difficult to align it with an outcome.
Portia repeated the three-digit sequence (5, 2, 8) in order and within 15 seconds of being told the number sequence to repeat.	**Detail without function** — This observation provides clear detail, but lacks the context in which Portia uses the skill. Repeating random digits in sequence is an example of a test item that assesses attention and memory, but without meaningful context is not functional.
During a modified hide and seek game, Portia took turns with her peers to select and hide three objects from the basket and then remembered what the items were to ask a peer to go and find them (for example, go find the mitten, ball and book).	**Detail with function** — This note provides sufficient detail to describe what Portia did (seek, hide, and remember the three items), as well as the context (a playful game with peers) in which she used these attention and memory skills.

KEY TAKEAWAY: If the team does not have sufficient detail to understand the function of the skill the child is demonstrating, they must gather more information.

Step 3. Unpack into Functional Skills

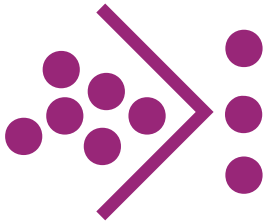
Does the observation of the child's functioning include multiple skills? Do the skills require unpacking to align with an outcome?

Observations and conversations with caregivers often provide information about multiple skills. When this occurs, teams must unpack the information by separating them into functional skills that can be effectively aligned with one of the three child outcomes.

Example: Unpacking Detailed Observations into Functional Skills

Observation	**Are multiple skills observed that require unpacking?**
Mari independently walks to the bookshelf, picks up a book, initiated contact with her dad by bringing him the book, climbs up to sit on his lap and points to the picture of the cat when her dad asks, "Where's the cat?".	**Unpacking is needed** — This observation identifies several functional skills. By unpacking this information, the team can align the different functional skills with outcomes. • *independently walks to the bookshelf* (Outcome 3). • *initiated contact with her dad by bringing him the book* (Outcome 1). • *points to the pictures of the cat when her dad asks* (Outcome 2).
Cyprus's teacher shared how Cyprus independently stood up from a squatting position, walked independently over to the water table, gave a cup to the peer playing next to him, and responded to the teacher's question "Is the water cold?" by nodding his head and signing the sign for cold.	**Unpacking is needed** — The teacher's observation needs to be unpacked to identify the functional skills. • *independently stood up from a squatting position, walked independently over to the water table* — This describes how he moves around to meet his need (Outcome 3). • *gave a cup to the peer playing next to him* — This describes how he initiated an interaction with a peer (Outcome 1). • *responded to the teacher's question "Is the water cold?" by nodding his head and signing the sign for cold* — This illustrates how he understood and responded to the question (Outcome 2).
After washing his hands before snack, Laszlo independently grasps and pulls a paper towel from the dispenser, dries his hands until they are almost dry and drops the towel in the trash.	**Sufficiently unpacked to align with Outcome 3** — The note describes how the dries his hands, illustrating both the particular skill of handwashing and their function.

KEY TAKEAWAY: If an observation includes multiple skills, unpack them into separate functional skills before aligning them to outcomes.



Step 4. Align with an Outcome

To which skill bundle and outcome does each functional skill align?

With detailed descriptions of a child's functional skills, sufficiently unpacked, teams can align those skills with the appropriate outcome and corresponding skill bundle.

Example: Aligning Functional Skills to Outcomes

Observation	Is this detailed?	Is this unpacked?	Outcome	Skill Bundle
Talon communicates in two-word sentences, but is hard to understand. When prompted by his mom and teacher to slow down, is speech is easier to understand.	Yes	Yes	2	Acquiring Language to Communicate
During diaper changes, Kailee reaches up with both arms to bat at the mobile hanging above her. When positioned in the opposite direction, she will reach up with her feet to bat at the mobile.	Yes	Yes	3	Moving Around and Manipulating Things to Meet Needs
When her mom reads *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* at bedtime, Arowana can tell what happens next before her mom turns the page.	Yes	Yes	2	Understanding Pre-Academics and Literacy

KEY TAKEAWAY: Use the skill bundles listed on *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes* to align children's functional skills with an outcome.

Further Considerations

Authentic Assessment Notes

Teams can use authentic assessment notes to align functional skills with outcomes. The way a team gathers and documents information about a child's functioning can vary greatly.

Example: An Authentic Assessment of Genevieve

Genevieve is 23 months old. She and her mom are playing with balls in the back yard. The team aligned Genevieve's actions with specific outcomes and skill bundles. However, the information they gathered does not cover the full breadth of each outcome. By considering each outcome's skill bundles, the team can determine if they need to collect more information to fully address each outcome.

Authentic Assessment Observation	Outcome	Skill Bundle
G. looked to the balls when asked "where's your ball?".	2	Understanding Questions Asked and Directions Given
G. got a ball when asked to "get the green ball" but she did not get the green ball.	2	Understanding Pre-Academics and Literacy
G. looked to something of interest, said "oh, ba", pointed at it, and looked at her mom.	1	Relating with Caregivers
G. said "cars" while looking toward the toy cars.	2	Acquiring Language to Communicate
With ball in hand, G. said "ba" looking at her mom and then gives the ball to her mom.	1	Participating in Social Games and Communicating with Others
G. runs across the grass (no tripping or falling) to the ball thrown by her mom.	3	Moving Around and Manipulating Things to Meet Needs
G. looks at the large step (6 inches) but does not go down it	3	Showing Safety Awareness
G. does not follow her mom's cue when told to "sit on your bum." She walks back and forth then follows her mom's cue to go "over there" where the step is not so high.	2	Understanding Questions Asked and Directions Given
G. steps down successfully, with steady balance, on a step that is 3 inches high.	3	Moving Around and Manipulating Things to Meet Needs

KEY TAKEAWAY: Following the four steps can help teams align a child's functional skills with an outcome.

Precursor Skills

Precursor skills underlie the development of more advanced skills that continue to be demonstrated throughout the course of a child's development. Some precursor skills are functional, aligning with one of the three child outcomes.

Depending upon their function, some precursor skills align with more than one outcome (for example, eye gaze, eye contact, or turning toward a sound). Without sufficient detail and context, some precursor skills are too general to align with just one outcome.

Example: Precursor Skill Alignment

Precursor Skill	Outcomes
Standing	Standing is a precursor skill to walking, and aligns with Outcome 3.
Turning toward a sound	Turning toward a sound is a precursor to more than one functional behavior, including: • turning to a peer to participate in a conversation (Outcome 1); • turning to the sound of a teacher's question about a book (Outcome 2); and • alerting to the sound of the fire alarm (Outcome 3).

KEY TAKEAWAY: Accurately aligning precursor skills requires teams to understand how the child functionally uses the skill.

Broad Skills

Broad skills (for example, self-concept, problem-solving, and communication) can align with each of the three child outcomes.

Example: Aligning Broad Skills with the Three Child Outcomes

Broad Skills	Outcomes
Sense of self or self-concept	• **Outcome 1** — Self-awareness with others, including playing with mirror image and responding when another individual calls their name to engage them. • **Outcome 2** — Knowledge of self and distinctions from others, such as identifying self and others in pictures or a mirror, referring to self by name or telling first and last name, and age. • **Outcome 3** — Asserting oneself, conveying personal needs and desires to accomplish goals, making choices between possibilities, saying no or resisting others' attempts to feed, and asking for snacks.
Problem-solving	• **Outcome 1** — Problem-solving related to interactions with others (for example, negotiating turn-taking in a game, or resolving conflicts around sharing toys). • **Outcome 2** — Problem-solving related to academic concepts (for example, figuring out how to put the shapes in a shape sorter, or mixing paints to make different colors). • **Outcome 3** — Problem-solving related to getting needs met (for example, experimenting with a brush to keep paint from dripping, figuring out how to hold and use a pair of scissors, placing and climbing onto a chair to reach cookies).
Language and communication	• **Outcome 1** — Language used to maintain conversation in social games, turn taking, or interactive play. • **Outcome 2** — Mechanics of language (for example, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, listening, or speaking). • **Outcome 3** — Communicating needs, wants, and safety.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Broad skills can be aligned with more than one outcome (for example self-concept, problem solving, or language and communication).

Summary

- The *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes* includes six skill bundles for each outcome that describe the breadth of the outcome's functional skills.
- Developmental domains and curricular areas contain functional skills that can be associated with any of the three child outcomes.
- Teams should consider all the skill bundles in the *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes* to align functional skills with outcomes and to determine consistent COS ratings.
- Following these four steps can help teams align a child's functional skills with an outcome:
  1. **Provide Detail** — If the team does not have sufficient detail to understand what the child is doing, they must gather more information.
  2. **Convey Function** — If the team does not have sufficient detail to understand the function of the skill the child is demonstrating, they must gather more information.
  3. **Unpack into Functional Skills** — If an observation includes multiple skills, unpack them into separate functional skills before aligning them to outcomes.
  4. **Align with an Outcome** — Use the skill bundles listed on *Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes* to align children's functional skills with an outcome.
- Accurately aligning precursor skills requires teams to understand how the child functionally uses the skill.
- Broad skills can be aligned with more than one outcome (for example self-concept, problem solving, or language and communication).

Child Outcomes Summary Process Resources

For further information and practice opportunities, refer to the following resources:

- Understanding Functional Skills: Background for the COS Process — This resource helps teams think about measuring a child's use and integration of functional skills to participate in their everyday routines.
- Child Outcomes Practice Scenarios (COS-PS) — The COS-PS is a collection of scenarios of children, ages 6 months to 5 years, that allow you to practice aligning information about each child with the three child outcomes and anchoring the information by age.
- Instrument Crosswalks — *Crosswalks* cross-reference the functional skills assessed by various published instruments with the three child outcomes required by OSEP for Part C and Part B, Section 619 programs to assess the degree to which these instruments measure the required outcomes.
- Topical COS Professional Development Activities — These activities focus on aspects of the COS Process providers frequently need additional training and support *(see Assessing Functional Skills)*.
- Developing High-Quality, Functional IFSP Outcomes and IEP Goals Training Package — This training package was developed collaboratively with staff from the ECTA Center and the Western Regional Resource Center (WRRC) in response to the need expressed from state and local providers to have specific information and resources about developing Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) outcomes and Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals.