**Using the SETT Framework to Level the
Learning Field for Students with Disabilities**

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The SETT Framework is a tool that helps teams gather and organize information that can be used to guide collaborative decisions about services that foster the educational success of students with disabilities. Originally developed to support assistive technology selection and use in educational settings, the principles of the SETT Framework have been used to guide decisions about a much broader range of educational services, and also, with minor adjustments, have been successfully used in non-educational environments and service plans.

SETT is an acronym for Student, Environments, Tasks and Tools. The SETT Framework is based on the premise that in order to develop an appropriate system of Tools (supports –devices, services, strategies, accommodations, modifications, etc.) teams must first develop a shared understanding of the student, the customary environments in which the student spends time, and the tasks that are required for the student to be able to do or learn to do to be an active participant in the teaching/learning processes that lead to educational success. When the needs, abilities, and interests of the Student, the details of the Environments, and the specific Tasks required of students in those environments are fully explored, teams are able to consider what needs to be included in a system of tools that is Student-centered, Environmentally useful, and Tasks-focused.

What questions does the team ask in each section of the SETT Framework?

As playwright Eugene Ionesco said, "It's not the answer that enlightens, but the question." This is true of the questions in the SETT Framework because they are expected to guide and deepen discussion rather than be complete and comprehensive in and of themselves. As each of these questions is explored, it is likely that many other questions will arise. The team continues the exploration until there is consensus that there is enough shared knowledge to make informed, reasonable decisions that can be supported by data.

The Student

- What is(are) the functional area(s) of concern? *What does the student need to be able to do that is difficult or impossible to do independently at this time?*
- Special needs (related to area of concern)
  Current abilities (related to area of concern)

The Environments

- Arrangement (instructional, physical)
- Support (available to both the student and the staff)
- Materials and Equipment (commonly used by others in the environments)
- Access Issues (technological, physical, instructional)

- Attitudes and Expectations (staff, family, other)

The Tasks

- What SPECIFIC tasks occur in the student's natural environments that enable progress toward mastery of IEP goals and objectives?
- What SPECIFIC tasks are required for active involvement in identified environments? (related to communication, instruction, participation, productivity, environmental control)

How is the S-E-T Information used to think about Tools?

In the SETT Framework, Tools include devices, services, strategies, training, accommodations, modifications–everything that is needed to help the student succeed. Some parts of the Tool system address the specific needs of the student, while parts of the Tool system may more specifically address issues in the Environments, such as access to the classroom, accessibility of instructional materials, support for staff that helps them develop and sustain learning environments that are inviting, challenging, and productive for ALL students, including those with the full range of abilities and special needs.

When determining what the needs to be in the system of Tools to support and increase the achievement of a student, team members analyze the information gathered on the Student, the Environments, and the Tasks to address the following questions and activities.

- Is it expected that the student will *not* be able to make reasonable progress toward educational goals without assistive technology devices and services?
- If yes, *describe* what a useful system of supports, devices, and services for the student would be like if there were such a system of Tools.
- Brainstorm specific Tools that could be included in a system that addresses student needs.
- Select the most promising Tools for trials in the natural environments.
- Plan the specifics of the trial (expected changes, when/how tools will be used, cues, etc.)
- Collect data on effectiveness.

Does use of the SETT Framework require using a specific process?

No. It must have the basic elements of an effective process, like those mentioned above, but SETT is a FRAMEWORK, not a protocol requiring a specific set of implementation practices for validity. It is important, however, to keep in mind that consistent processes are required for effective implementation: therefore, people are encouraged to imbed the use of the SETT Framework into existing processes (such as referral, IEP development, implementation planning, evaluation, etc.) or include it in the development of new, more effective processes when required. More will be said about processes

Because many people have requested examples of how the SETT Framework fits into various processes, brief guides and forms are being developed to provide a place to begin. Those guides and forms are known as SETT Scaffolds. In the building trade, a scaffold is used to support the integrity of a structure and also while it is being developed and also provide access to harder to reach parts of the structure. The SETT Scaffolds have a similar purpose. They provide teams with a place to begin and support the building of strong processes that are imbedded in or aligned to other processes that suit specific environments. During the development of personalized processes, the SETT Scaffolds help teams remember and attend to issues that might be missed without guidance. SETT Scaffolds, however, may also be used more permanently if appropriate references are maintained.

What are the critical elements of using the SETT Framework?

While the individual processes that a team uses to implement the SETT Framework will vary based on the particular phase of service delivery is being discussed and the particular challenges and facilitators of the environments in which it is being used, there are some critical elements that must ALWAYS be included. They are:

- *Shared Knowledge:* One of the major premises of the SETT Framework is that decisions about Tools–the devices and actions that are needed for the student and others to succeed–are most valid when they are made based not on the knowledge that one person has (or believes that they have) but based on an agreed-upon, mutually valid shared knowledge of the student, the environments, and the task.

- *Collaboration:* The SETT Framework is tool that both requires and supports the collaboration of the people who will be involved in the decision-making and those who will be impacted by the decisions. Collaboration is not only critical for the SETT Framework, it is also critical to gaining the buy-in necessary for effective implementation of any decisions.

- *Communication:* The SETT Framework requires that people communicate actively and respectfully. Shared knowledge can only be developed if the opinions, ideas, observations, and suggestions are respected and respectful.

- *Multiple Perspectives:* Everyone involved beings different knowledge, skills, experience, and ideas to the table. Although multiple perspectives can be challenging at times they are critical to the development of the accurate, complete development of shared knowledge. Not only are the multiple professional perspectives important to include, but also those of the student and the parents. This can make the difference between success and lack there-of.

- *Pertinent information:* Although there is much information that is pertinent to decision-making, there is other information that is not relevant. Knowing where to draw the line in important, but that line may well be a loving target.

- *Flexibility and Patience:* When working through the SETT Framework or using any other means of concerns-identification and solution seeking, there is a tremendous human tendency to suggest possible solutions before the concerns have been adequately identified. When a solution springs to mind, collaborators are urged NOT to voice it until it is time to talk about the Tools because when a solution is mentioned, the conversation shifts immediately from concern-identification to determining the worth or lack of worth of the suggested solution. Even when a team member thinks of the "perfect" solution, silent patience is urged. It might not look quite so perfect when all important factors are discussed.

- On-going Processes: Decision-making in educational settings involves ongoing processes. Whatever conclusions are reached at any point are only as valid as the evidence shows they have been successful in lowering barriers to student achievement. It is expected that the SETT Framework will be useful during all phases of assistive technology service delivery. With that in mind, it is important to revisit the SETT Framework information periodically to determine if the information that is guiding decision-making and implementation is accurate, up to date, and clearly reflects the shared knowledge of all involved.

Conclusion:

The SETT Framework supports a thorough yet simple approach to assistive technology assessment and intervention. When data is gathered and organized with simplicity, a team's ability to effectively generate a range of Tools that can be used to support student achievement is greatly enhanced. It is much more likely that the selected system of tools will enhance the student's abilities to address the tasks in which he/she is expected to build competency, thus making the tools more valuable. Equally, it is more likely that the people supporting the student will see the relevancy of using the Tools as the student grows in competence, confidence, and independence, and thus, be more active in encouraging and supporting the student's achievement through its use.

Using the SETT Framework as a guide, it is possible, from the start, to address and overcome many of the obstacles which lead to abandonment or "under-implementation" of Tools. When the Environment and the Tasks are fully explored and considered, the lament "Well, I tried that but it didn't work" is much less likely to be heard. Instead, students, parents, and professionals should all rejoice at the increased opportunities for success which come when Tools–devices, services, strategies, accommodations, modifications, training, etc.– are well matched to the student's needs and abilities to perform the natural tasks which are part of living and learning in this world.

ANNOTATED SETT SCAFFOLD FOR AT DECISION-MAKING
Collaboratively Gathering and Analyzing Information from a Variety of Sources

Student: _____ **Date:** _____ **Perspective:** _____

EXAMINING CURRENT CONDITIONS TO ESTABLISH EDUCATIONAL NEED		
STUDENT	**ENVIRONMENTS**	**TASKS**
INFORMATION RELATED SPECIFICALLY TO THE STUDENT, INCLUDING SPECIFIC AREAS OF CONCERN, SPECIAL NEEDS, CURRENT ACHIEVEMENT, INTERESTS, GOALS, ETC.	INFORMATION RELATED TO ANYONE WHO IS AROUND THE STUDENT OR ANYTHING THAT IS PROVIDED TO THE STUDENT.	INFORMATION SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO THE DETAILS OF THE TASKS THAT ARE CURRENTLY REQUIRED OF THE STUDENT OR WILL BE REQUIRED IN THE NEAR FUTURE.
- Build shared knowledge about the student that can be used to identify need for tools, guide decisions about tools, and assist in planning implementation and evaluation of effectiveness. - Determine what still needs to be known and how it can be found out. - Add additional information as it becomes available through evaluation, implementation, or discussion	- Build shared knowledge about the environments in which the student is, or can be, expected to learn and grow. This information can be used to identify need for environmental supports and training, and assist in planning implementation and evaluation of effectiveness. - Determine what still needs to be known and how it can be found out. - Add additional information as it becomes available through evaluation, implementation or discussion	- Build shared knowledge about the tasks that the student needs to do or learn to do that are currently difficult or impossible for the student to do at the expected level of independence. - This information can be used to identifying the type of tools needed, but will also play a critical role in planning implementation and evaluation of effectiveness. - Determine what still needs to be known and how it can be found out. - Add additional information as it becomes available through evaluation, implementation, discussion.

- **CIRCLE FUNCTIONAL AREA(S) OF CONCERN**
- **UNDERLINE BARRIERS TO STUDENT PROGRESS**
- **STAR SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT PROGRESS**

SETT SCAFFOLD FOR AT DECISION-MAKING - PART I
Collaboratively Gathering and Analyzing Information from a Variety of Sources
(use as many sheets as necessary to build shared knowledge)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____ **Perspective:** _____

DESCRIBE CURRENT CONDITIONS TO ESTABLISH EDUCATIONAL NEED		
STUDENT	**ENVIRONMENTS**	**TASKS**

- ▪ **CIRCLE FUNCTIONAL AREA(S) OF CONCERN**
- ▪ **UNDERLINE BARRIERS TO STUDENT PROGRESS**
- ▪ **STAR SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT PROGRESS**

SETT SCAFFOLD FOR AT DECISION-MAKING - PART II
Develop Descriptors of an Assistive Technology Tool System that Addresses Needs and Identify Possible Tools

STUDENT: _____   **AREA OF ESTABLISHED NEED (See SETT: Part I):** _____

STEP 1: Based on S-E-T data, enter descriptors or functions needed by the student across the shaded top row - 1 descriptor per column
STEP 2: Enter promising tools in the shaded left column - 1 tool per row
STEP 3: For each tool, note matches with descriptors and functions to help guide discussion of devices and services
USE ADDITIONAL SHEETS IF NECESSARY

Descriptors ⇨ Tools ⇩									

SETT SCAFFOLD FOR AT DECISION-MAKING - PART III
Establishing Availability and Training Needs for Promising Tools

SHORT LIST OF TOOLS	TOOL AVAILABILITY			SERVICES (training, planning, coordination, etc) REQUIRED FOR EFFECTIVE USE		
JUSTIFY CHOICES WITH SETT DATA AND DESCRIPTOR MATCH	S	P	A	STUDENT	STAFF	FAMILY

KEY: S= Systemically available tools - Currently available to ALL students served by this system
       P= Programmatically available through special education services or other services for which identified student is qualified
       A= Additional tools that need to be acquired for this student.