



created by SLT students at



Welcome to the [Aphasia Toolbox for word finding difficulties!](#)

The below document includes the following areas of information –

- 1) [What is aphasia?](#)
- 2) [Why does aphasia cause me to sometimes struggle to grasp a word \(anomia\)?](#)
- 3) [What are some methods which might help with word finding?](#)
- 4) [How can I support the communication of a loved one with aphasia?](#)
- 5) [Extra resources and useful websites](#)

1) What is aphasia?

Aphasia is a **language and communication disorder** that **can occur** after a **stroke** because of damage to the language areas of the brain. It can affect your ability to **understand speech, speak, read, write and use numbers**.



There are **2 main subtypes** of aphasia – **receptive** and **expressive**.

The information in this **toolbox** offers supporting **strategies** for **expressive aphasia difficulties**.

Expressive aphasia is defined most simply as when people find it **difficult to find the right words**, even though they probably know exactly what they want to say. This may **affect speech, writing, gestures or drawing** and can cause **problems** using the **telephone, writing an email, or speaking to family and friends**.



Symptoms can be, but are not limited to –

- **slow** and halting speech – with **difficulty constructing a sentence**
- **struggling** to **get certain words out** – such as the names of objects, places or people
- only using **basic nouns** and **verbs** – for example, "want drink" or "go town today"
- **spelling** or **grammatical errors**
- using a **wrong but related word** – such as saying "chair" instead of "table"

2) Why does aphasia cause me to sometimes struggle to grasp a word?

For people with aphasia, the most common problem is not being able to think of the word they want. They might try to solve this problem by using a filler word: *that thing, the whatsamacallit, oh you know, whatsherface.*

The technical side – an area of the brain involved with language has been associated with the selection of words in speech. Inside this area of the brain lives Broca's area, which is involved in language. As a result, those who have damage to Broca's area during their stroke may have expressive aphasia as a result and will often have word selection and finding difficulties.

3) What are some **methods** which may **help** with **word finding** difficulties?

Here is a **quick summary** of the **word finding strategies** we introduced weekly during our sessions, as well as some extra ones to try!

Remember that **different strategies** will work for **different people** and these are **suggestions**.

If a method doesn't work for you, please **do not be disheartened**, and don't be afraid to **move on** to the **next one**!

All **strategy examples** are trying to find the word **scissors**.

Delay (offer time)

Pause give it a **second or two**. With a bit of extra time, the word may **pop out** on its own. **Be patient** with yourself and **ask** your **partner** to give you **time**.

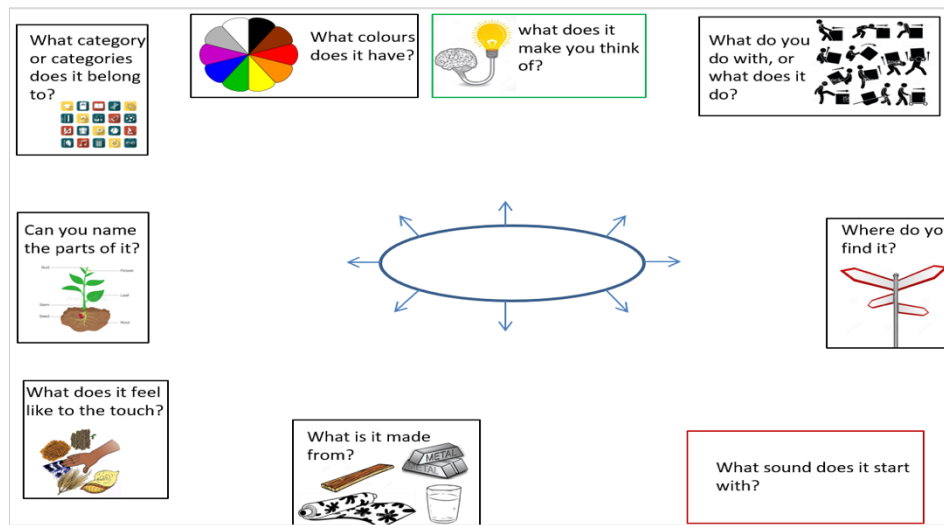
"Do you have any... um... oh... one sec... any scissors?"



- **Describe**

Give the listener **information** about what the **thing looks like or does**. Any extra information can help them know what you're talking about. It may even help you to say the word.

“Do you have any... oh dear, those things that cut? Scissors!”



- **Gesture**

Use your **hands** or body to **act out the word**, like playing a game of **charades**. Even gesturing with your hands in a non-specific way or tapping the table may help activate the brain.

“Do you have any... (makes cutting gesture with fingers)?”



- **Association**

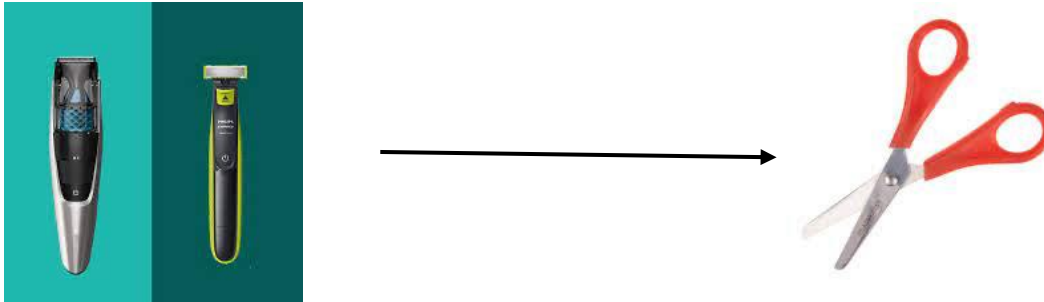
See if you can think of **something related**. Even if it's not quite right, it may prompt the word or convey the meaning.

“Do you have any... ah my... they're not trimmers, but like that?”

- Synonyms

Think of a **word** that **means the same** or something similar.

“Do you have any...trimmers?”



- First Letter

Try to write or **think** of the **first letter of the word**. **Scan the alphabet** to see if each letter triggers anything for you.

“Do you have any... (traces an S in the air) ... scissors?”



- **Draw**

Sketch out a quick picture of what you're trying to say.

"Do you have any... (draws scissors on a notepad)?"



- **Narrow it Down**

Give the general topic or category. Is it a person, place, or thing? A family member or a friend? Stating the topic can help your listener predict what you might be trying to say by providing some context.

"Do you have any...oh...they're office supplies."



- **Come Back Later**

If you can't think of the word and your partner can't guess, it's okay to give up for now. Our brains work out problems while we do other things, so it's possible the word will pop out later.

"Do you have any... [tries every other strategy]... oh, never mind... I'll ask you later."

- Word vomit (aka Circumlocution)

Say as **much as you can** about the word and sometimes you will **land on it**.
“it’s those things I used last week to wrap the presents They’re shiny
They’re in the drawer ... ahh, scissors!”



4) How can I support the communication of a loved one with aphasia?

If you **live with or care for** a person with **aphasia**, you may be unsure about the **best way to communicate** with them.

You **may find** the following advice **helpful**:

- After speaking, allow the **person plenty of time to respond**. If a person with aphasia feels **rushed** or pressured to speak, they may become anxious, which can **affect their ability to communicate**.
- Avoid asking open-ended questions. Closed questions that have a yes or no answer can be better.
- **Avoid finishing a person's sentences** or correcting any errors in their language. This may cause **frustration** for the person with aphasia.
- Keep **distractions to a minimum**, such as background radio or TV noise.
- Use paper and a pen to **write down key words**, or draw diagrams or pictures, to help reinforce your message and **support their understanding**.
- Use **visual references**, such as pointing, gesturing and objects, to support their understanding.
- If they're having difficulty finding the right word, **prompt them** to use one of the above **word finding strategies** – ask them to describe the word, think of a similar word, try to visualise it, think of the sound the word starts with, try to write the word, use gestures, or point to an object.

5) Useful links

- The NHS resources on aphasia

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/aphasia/symptoms/>

- Some evidence base for the success of word finding strategies

<https://tactustherapy.com/word-finding-strategies-aphasia/>

- WEBMD's resources on aphasia

<https://www.webmd.com/brain/aphasia-causes-symptoms-types-treatments>

- This link takes you to the Stroke Association's store. Resources such as medical passports and stroke recovery information documents etc are available if these are of interest.

<https://www.stroke.org.uk/what-is-aphasia/communication-tools>

- Link to the 'Say Aphasia' [support card](#) which some individuals may find useful.

I have Aphasia

This means I have difficulty:

- Speaking
- Understanding speech
- Reading
- Writing

Especially when I am under pressure

(You can help. See back.)

How You Can Help

- Speak clearly.
- Take things slowly.
- Write things down.
- Give me extra time.

<https://www.sayaphasia.org/shop/support-card>

Link to the [Aphasia iCafe Twitter](#) page

- <https://twitter.com/Aphasialcafe>