

Introduction

Everyone has some degree of word-finding difficulty (often called *anomia* or *dysnomia*). For most of us, it is infrequent. We usually laugh it off and then later recall the word. For a person who has a brain dysfunction, the frequency of anomic difficulties is increased and the recall of the word is often non-existent. This experience can be highly frustrating, embarrassing, and can cause this person to feel like he is losing his speaking abilities.

WALC 8: Word Finding was written to stimulate the processes and strategies needed for reestablishing word-finding abilities in clients who are neurologically impaired. The tasks in this book, developed while working with a wide variety of clients, have evolved and have been perfected over the years. The tasks are written at a mid- to high-level of complexity.

The following main skill areas provide the basis for *WALC 8*.

- **Answering Questions**

Questions requiring short-answer responses improve word recall by stimulating convergent deduction. The responses require specific retrieval of content stored in your client's remote memory. The use of close-ended questions aids in retraining the skills needed for recalling specific information.

- **Building Categorizing Skills**

Information is stored in the brain in a highly organized, logical manner. One of the storage and retrieval processes we use is categorization. Improving your client's ability to categorize will stimulate more effective coding and retrieval of words.

- **Using Word Relationships**

Word recall can be triggered by use of the relationships between words. As your client names, unscrambles, and lists opposites and synonyms, he will increase his base vocabulary which will improve his overall word recall skills. Often, use of opposites can improve the recall of words (e.g., an opposite can be retrieved to convey a thought).

- **Using Word Strategies**

Various strategies (e.g., describing an object, giving clues) can be utilized to stimulate the recall of words. Often, a word's definition can be just as effective as the specific word. Being able to mentally manipulate letters and content can improve coding and retrieval. Using a variety of approaches to stimulate word finding will increase your client's repertoire of processes he can use to code words effectively and to trigger the recall of critical words and information.

- **Naming and Selecting Pictures**

Confrontational naming is difficult because no other information is provided to give retrieval cues. Naming pictures or selecting pictures by the letter they begin with will improve your client's confrontational naming skills.

Most of the tasks in this book involve organization of thought (e.g., unscrambling letters to form words, moving letters from the end of one word to the beginning of another). Being able to think logically will improve your client's ability to take in information and comprehend it in a hierarchical manner. It will also help your client think more convergently and make him less likely to stray off the topic. The tasks in this book are designed to give your client insight into why a response may be wrong and to use that insight to try again and/or understand the correct answer.

For most of us, when we have difficulty recalling a word, we frequently think things such as, "I know it begins with the letter S," or "I know it is a short word, about 5 letters," or maybe "It's an animal; it has 2 legs . . . what is it called?" The format of the tasks in this book provides the lines of logic for using these kinds of strategies to recall a word. It is the intent that, with repeated practice, the lines of logic will become reestablished in your client's foundational skills.

Frequently, when we experience difficulty recalling a word, we can compensate by substituting another word that means about the same thing or by using a strategy (e.g., opposites) to stimulate recall. The tasks in this book are designed to broaden your client's base vocabulary to give him a larger repertoire to draw from when orally expressing himself.

To improve your client's word-finding abilities, it is highly important that processes become embedded into his memory and cognitive foundations. The tasks in this book provide repetition of content, format, and strategies which will help the processes become embedded, thus decreasing the occurrence of word-finding difficulties.

The tasks may be read to your client, but for the majority, having him read the tasks will lead to improved reading comprehension.

Suggestions for Use

1. To improve cueing effectiveness, become familiar with the tasks before presenting them.
2. For tasks requiring formulation of an entire response (e.g., Listing Opposites), provide an example at the beginning of the activity.
3. Keep track of which items the client misses and ask the items again at the end of the activity to stimulate coding of the information and the processing pattern used. If necessary, help the client develop processing strategies.
4. Encourage the client to work through each exercise by answering the questions he can. Then have him go back and attempt the items he found more difficult. This procedure will help keep him from getting stuck or fixated on a specific item.

5. Questions are worded in a variety of ways to encourage flexible thinking skills, to look at content from different directions, and to stimulate creativity.
6. As needed, work with the client to solve items. This will help him feel comfortable with teamwork. It is okay to let him know that there may be times when it will be necessary to use the answer key.
7. Encourage the client to use deductions or “best guesses” as needed. It may help to have the client verbalize the processes he is using so you can help shape his thinking.
8. Use the tasks in their entirety or choose pertinent questions to meet individual needs. Note that the tasks within themselves do not progress in difficulty nor do the tasks get more difficult as you progress through the book. What one client may find easy, another client may find very difficult. Reassure the client that no one is expected to get all of the items correct.
9. Determine the appropriateness of responses based on the client’s current level of cognitive functioning. Sample answers are provided in the Answer Key for tasks with specific answers. There are times when items have multiple answers even if only one is listed. Accept any reasonable answer as correct. Emphasize enjoyment rather than accuracy.
10. The tasks can be used in individual or group situations. In group situations, clients can take turns or work together to solve the problems, thus giving each other valuable feedback.
11. The tasks can be used effectively for independent work or for homework assignments that can get the entire family involved.
12. Always emphasize the line of reasoning or the strategies necessary to do the tasks as opposed to simply monitoring the accuracy of the answers. The tasks are designed to work on the processing involved rather than scoring content accuracy.

WALC 8 provides a wide variety of tasks for word finding. Share *WALC 8* with the client’s family to establish the importance of improving communication outside the therapy setting. As you use these tasks, it’s my hope that you’ll discover their unending uses and versatility.

May you enjoy the adventure of working with language and cognitive communication skills as much as I do.

Kathy