

FREE HOME PRACTICE GUIDE

Word-Finding Practice at Home

10 semantic therapy exercises for people
with aphasia and their families

Inside this guide

- 1 Semantic Feature Analysis
- 2 Describe the object without naming it
- 3 Category sorting
- 4 Name items within a category
- 5 Find the item that does not belong
- 6 Word associations
- 7 Finish the sentence
- 8 Practise action words
- 9 Use photographs from the person's own life
- 10 Use semantic strategies during everyday activities

Plus: helpful cues for family members · how long to practise · when to see a speech pathologist

Enable Speech Pathology Services

Ph: 0491 601 185 | lisa@enablespeechpathology.com.au

www.enablespeechpathology.com.au

Word-Finding Practice at Home

10 semantic therapy exercises for people with aphasia and their families

These activities use word **meanings** to help a person find the words they are looking for. They are designed to be done at home with a family member, friend or carer, using everyday objects, photographs and routines.



Keep it short

10–15 minutes, three or four times a week.



Keep it small

Around five useful words at a time, with regular revision.



Keep it positive

Successful communication matters more than perfect answers.

The exercises

1 Semantic Feature Analysis

Choose a photograph or real object and ask the person to name it. When the word is difficult to retrieve, work through some meaning-based questions.

Questions to ask

1. What group or category does it belong to?
2. What do you do with it?
3. Where would you normally find it?
4. What does it look like?
5. What does it feel, smell or taste like?
6. What parts does it have?
7. What does it remind you of?
8. What other words are associated with it?

Example: "Kettle"

- It is a kitchen appliance.
- It heats water.
- You find it in the kitchen.
- It may be made of metal or plastic.
- It has a handle, lid and spout.
- It is associated with tea, coffee and boiling water.

After discussing the features, ask the person to try naming the item again.



The person may retrieve the word while discussing these features. When that happens, acknowledge the success and continue naturally rather than demanding repeated production.

2 Describe the object without naming it

Place several everyday objects on a table. Take turns choosing an object and describing it without saying its name. For example:

*"You find it in the kitchen. It has a handle. You drink tea or coffee from it." → The other person guesses **cup**.*

This activity practises word meanings while also teaching a useful communication strategy. During a real conversation, the person may be able to describe a missing word even when they cannot retrieve its name.

Useful household items include:

cup

spoon

key

phone

book

toothbrush

remote control

wallet

glasses

saucepan

3 Category sorting

Collect photographs, written words or household objects and sort them into groups.

Possible categories include:

food and drinks clothing tools
bathroom items kitchen items animals
transport furniture places

For more of a challenge, use narrower categories:

- fruit versus vegetables
- hot drinks versus cold drinks
- indoor clothing versus outdoor clothing
- garden tools versus household tools
- things kept in the fridge versus things kept in the cupboard

After sorting, ask the person to name each item or explain why it belongs in that group.

4 Name items within a category

Choose a category and ask the person to name several examples. For example: “*Can you name some animals?*” Possible answers might include dog, cat, horse and kangaroo.

More functional examples include:

- things you buy at the supermarket
- things you take to a medical appointment
- items used when making tea
- things found in the garden
- people in your family
- places you visit during the week
- things needed before leaving the house

 Avoid placing pressure on the person to produce a large number of words quickly. Allow time, provide encouragement and offer clues when required.

5 Find the item that does not belong

Present four words or pictures, with three belonging to the same category. For example:

*Apple – banana – orange – **chair***

The person identifies **chair** as the item that does not belong and explains why.

Other examples include:

fork – spoon – plate – shoe

dog – horse – cat – bus

shirt – trousers – jumper – toaster

Adelaide – Sydney – Melbourne – carrot

doctor – nurse – physiotherapist – refrigerator

 Explaining the reason is an important part of the activity because it encourages deeper processing of word meaning.

6 Word associations

Say a word and ask the person to produce something associated with it. There may be more than one correct answer.

coffee → cup beach → sand rain → umbrella doctor → hospital birthday → cake garden → flowers
key → door

You can also reverse the activity by giving several clues:

*“Hot, drink, morning, mug.” → The person identifies the related word **coffee**.*

7 Finish the sentence

Provide a meaningful sentence and leave out the final word. For example:

I clean my teeth with a _____.

I put my groceries in the _____.

I unlock the door with a _____.

I wear glasses so I can _____.

I drink tea from a _____.

When it rains, I use an _____.

Use sentences that are familiar and relevant to the person's life.



The person may find it easier to retrieve a word when it appears within a meaningful sentence than when naming a picture in isolation.

8 Practise action words

Word-finding difficulties can affect verbs as well as object names. Choose a photograph, video or real activity and discuss the action taking place.

For example, for the word *cutting*, ask:

- Who is doing it?
- What are they cutting?
- What are they using?
- Where are they?
- Why are they cutting it?
- What might happen next?

Other action words to practise include:

cooking

washing

driving

reading

planting

opening

carrying

shopping

pouring

writing

Action words can then be placed into short sentences, such as: *"The man is cutting the bread."*

9 Use photographs from the person's own life

Personal photographs can provide meaningful opportunities to practise names, places, actions and events. Choose one photograph and discuss:

- who is in it
- where they are
- what they are doing
- what objects are visible
- how the people may be feeling
- what happened before the photograph
- what may have happened afterwards



Do not correct every error. The goal is successful and enjoyable communication, not perfect performance.

10 Use semantic strategies during everyday activities

Semantic practice does not always need to take place at a table. You can include it naturally while:

putting groceries away

preparing a meal

folding clothes

gardening

looking through photographs

watching television

walking around the neighbourhood

planning the week

For example, while preparing lunch, you might discuss the category, purpose, appearance and location of the ingredients and utensils being used. This allows the person to practise words in the same context in which they may later need them.

How can family members provide helpful cues?

When someone cannot find a word, avoid immediately supplying it unless they appear distressed or ask for help. Try a gradual sequence of cues:

- 1 **Allow time.** Pause and give the person an opportunity to retrieve the word.
- 2 **Ask for a description.** "What do you do with it?"
- 3 **Provide a semantic clue.** "It is something you drink from."
- 4 **Offer a sentence starter.** "I drink my coffee from a..."
- 5 **Provide the first sound.** "It starts with /k/."
- 6 **Offer two choices.** "Is it a cup or a plate?"
- 7 **Say the word** when further searching is becoming frustrating.

A cue should help the person — not make them feel tested.

How long should home practice last?

Short, regular practice is usually more manageable than a long and tiring session. A starting point may be:

- 10 to 15 minutes
- three or four times per week
- approximately five useful words at a time
- regular revision of previously practised words

Some people will manage more and others will require shorter sessions. Stop or change the activity when the person becomes tired, upset or increasingly frustrated. Fatigue can significantly affect communication after stroke or brain injury.

Keep communication successful!

The purpose of semantic therapy is not simply to produce correct answers during an exercise. The broader goal is to help the person communicate more effectively and confidently. Accept other ways of communicating, including:

- gestures
- pointing
- drawing
- writing
- showing an object
- using photographs
- describing the word
- using a communication device

Successfully conveying the message is more important than retrieving one particular word.

When should you see a speech pathologist?

Home activities are most useful when they complement an individualised speech pathology program. A speech pathologist can assess:

- the nature and severity of the aphasia
- whether the primary difficulty involves word meaning, speech sounds or both
- comprehension
- reading and writing
- sentence formation
- functional communication
- the most appropriate cues and therapy approaches

Semantic therapy may be highly useful for one person but less suitable as the main treatment for another. Therapy may also need to incorporate phonological cueing, script training, sentence-level treatment, reading and writing therapy, supported conversation strategies or augmentative and alternative communication.

At Enable Speech Pathology, therapy is personalised around the person's communication needs, daily routines, interests and goals.

 0491 601 185  lisa@enablespeechpathology.com.au  www.enablespeechpathology.com.au

This resource is for general information only and does not replace individual medical or therapeutic advice. © Enable Speech Pathology Services 2026.