

Brain Exercise: Category Naming

Communication is important to keep relationships healthy and to express ideas, knowledge, opinions, and feelings. An important part of communication is speaking. Speaking depends on good memory of words and the ability to recall and say words that carry the message we want to express. Speaking come from words that we hear or read, receive and process in the brain (encode), store in special areas of the brain, and then recall. We recall and express the words when speaking or writing; the focus here is on speaking.

A healthy brain is important to use words and depends upon a daily healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle includes a good diet, drinking enough water, regular physical exercise, low stress, happy relationships, a sense of purpose, etc. Also important is daily brain exercise. Brain exercise to strengthen language skills includes word exercises such as doing crossword puzzles, doing word scrambles, reading and discussing the information, debating issues, and playing board games such as SCRABBLE®. A good word exercise is category naming:

Category Naming: The goal is to name as many items or objects in a category within one minute.

It should help to start with a more general category such as animal, plants, fruits & vegetables (considered as one category), transportation, colors, body parts, and tools. Later it may be useful to try sub-categories, for example in the general category of animals, a sub-category is cats (different types of cats such as lions, tigers, etc.); in the general category of plants, a sub-category is flowers (different types of flowers such as roses, tulips, etc.); in the general category of tools, a sub-category is kitchen tools (different types of kitchen tools such as knife, can opener, spatula, etc.).

If it is too frustrating to name things within one minute during the daily practice sessions, try setting a limit of two minutes at first (over a period of a week or more), then later 1 ½ minutes (over a period of a week or more). Then much later over time try the one minute goal. The point is to exercise the brain, not to increase frustration and stress.

The naming exercise should be done 2 to 4 times a day for 15 to 30 minutes at a time, again to exercise the brain not to build frustration or stress. Once frustration starts, then take a breather or do something relaxing for a few minutes and restart.

For each practice session it may be useful to record the time, category, and number of words named in order to keep track of progress in these daily exercises. By looking back after a month, you will see if there is any change in the number of words produced.