

Word-Finding Strategies

Word-finding delays are normal and happen more when we're tired, stressed out, in pain or distracted. Communication is a two-way street so we help each other out with these glitches all the time without even thinking about it. You likely notice every time it happens to you, but other people probably only notice when it happens to them.

Usually it's more important to **keep communication flowing** and make your point than to think of exactly the right word while your listener waits.

Speaking a little slower can sometimes help, because even a few extra milliseconds can allow word retrieval to happen in time. If it doesn't, let it go and express yourself another way:

- **Use a synonym.** You'll know it's not the word you're looking for, but your listener won't
- **Talk around it (circumlocution):**
 - What does it look like?
 - What is it made of?
 - What is it used for?
 - Associations
 - Opposites
 - Location

"British jam, made from oranges" or "the tool you use to tighten bolts" or "famous singer, Put a Ring On It"

Talking around it or looking it up won't make the problem worse. There is also some evidence that circumlocution will activate the word anyway (maybe after a delay)

If you really want to come up with the word on your own, and time isn't an issue, sometimes going through the alphabet and thinking about initial sounds will bring it forward. You may also have a sense of how many syllables it has.

Names are a special case, because they usually don't connect easily to other words and meanings. It can help to take time to learn names in a way that includes hints for later. You can use some of the memory strategies for new learning.

- Get the person to repeat their name, and say it out loud yourself
- Write it down as soon as you can, along with a couple of memory cues – curly hair, loves trains, has a sister in kindergarten
- Relate a new name to something you do know (Gareth: like Uncle Gary plus neighbour Seth) and include this in your cheat sheet
- Test yourself often after you first learn the name, checking that you're correct so you don't learn the error