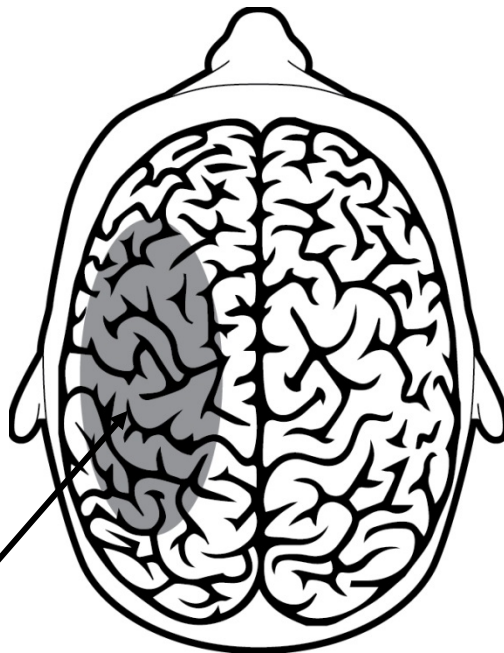


# Learning about Aphasia: Understanding Speech after Stroke

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A stroke is damage to part of the brain. It happens when a blood vessel in the brain gets blocked or when it bursts.

A stroke can cause many different problems, depending on the part and amount of the brain that is damaged.

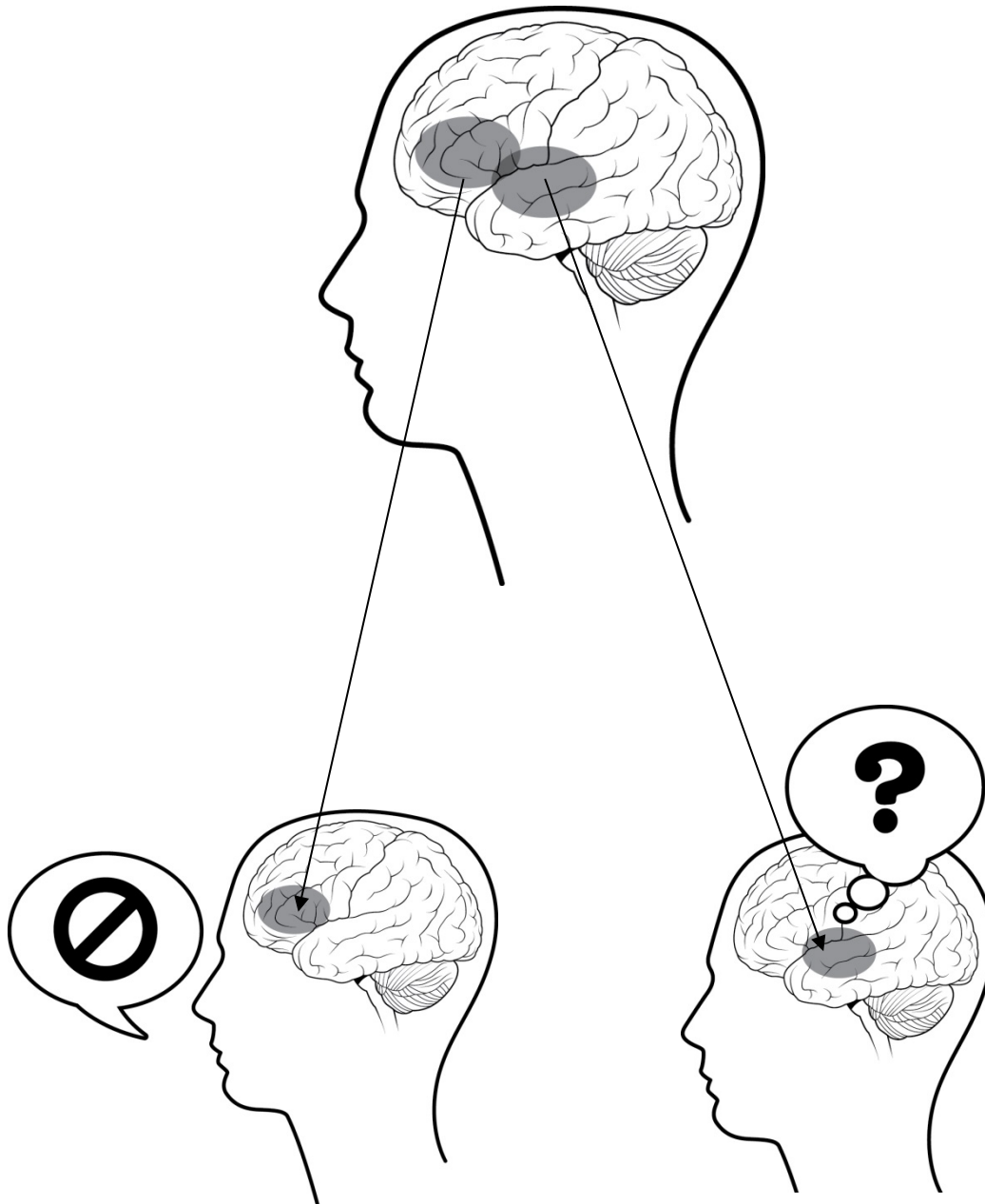


Part of the brain  
that is damaged

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One effect on speech is called aphasia. The word “aphasia” is like the word “stroke” – it can mean many different things.

Aphasia can affect a person’s speaking and understanding.



**Difficulty speaking**

**Difficulty understanding**

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Aphasia can also affect a person's reading or writing.



Reading



Writing

This handout explains a stroke's effect on understanding.

Some people have severe aphasia and can hardly understand any words or sentences. Other people have mild aphasia and may only have difficulty understanding a fast conversation with a group of people.

Aphasia affects a person's ability to understand words and sentences. It does not affect a person's intelligence. People with aphasia are competent adults who know more than they can say.

The stroke has just made it hard for his/her brain to "translate" your words and sentences into thoughts.

To help you understand what this is like, imagine yourself in a foreign country where you do not speak the language. You will have a lot of trouble understanding what people say to you. But you would not think you had suddenly lost your intelligence!

## So what can you do to help?

The best thing to do is to speak with the person who has had the stroke as well as to their Speech-Language Pathologist. They will be able to give you specific ideas about how you can help.

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind when speaking with a person with aphasia:

- ✓ Speak a little slower. Sometimes all the person needs is some extra time to figure out the meaning of your words.
- ✓ Use shorter sentences. A long, “run-on” sentence is difficult to follow at the best of times!
- ✓ If you are unsure, check with the person to make sure he/she understood what you said.

## More suggestions ...

- ✓ If you have a pen and paper handy, try writing down key words as you speak. This way, the person can always look at the words a second or third time if they have not understood.
- ✓ Drawing may also aid understanding.
- ✓ Use pictures, photos or other objects in the environment to help the person understand.
- ✓ Use gestures and facial expressions, and point to what you are talking about. This way, if the person does not understand your words, they may understand your gestures.
- ✓ Try not to shout. Aphasia does not affect a person’s hearing. In fact, shouting can make it more difficult to understand.

If you would like more information, please call the Speech-Language Pathologist below:

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