



The USC Aphasias Lab Newsletter

Research and Community News for People with Aphasia, Their Families, and the Rehabilitation Professionals Who Work with Them

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USC Aphasias Lab at Soda City

BY JAMES JETT

On May 3, 2025 at Soda City Market the USC Aphasias Lab had a table in downtown Columbia, South Carolina. Aphasia Ambassador, James Jett, and The USC Aphasias Lab team members represented both CSTAR and ABC - Aging Brain Cohort at USC. We enjoyed sharing about our research on aphasia and brain health & spreading aphasia awareness in the community! During this time we asked people some questions, played spin the wheel, and gave out prizes.

For those in Columbia, Soda City Market is a great place to go. It happens every Saturday, from 9 am – 1PM. We will have another table soon...more details to follow!



Aphasia Awareness Month Infographics

Did you know that June was National Aphasia Awareness month? To celebrate, the USC Aphasia Lab shared helpful resources to raise aphasia awareness on our social media sites all month long. All of the graphics were created by graduate students in our Speech-Language Pathology Master's Program! Take a look at our [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) to find them, or check out some of our favorites here!

WHAT IS

APHASIA?

Aphasia is a language disorder caused by damage to the language-dominant hemisphere of the brain. Aphasia can affect a person's ability to communicate, including production and comprehension of speech and the ability to read or write.

QUICK FACTS

- The most common cause of aphasia is stroke, but aphasia can be caused by other injuries to the brain such as an infection, trauma, or a tumor.
- 30 - 35% of stroke survivors experience aphasia.
- Aphasia does not affect a person's intelligence.

APHASIA CAN AFFECT:

- READING
- WRITING
- SPEECH PRODUCTION
- SPOKEN LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

TYPES OF APHASIA

FLUENT	NON-FLUENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anomic Aphasia • Transcortical sensory Aphasia • Conduction Aphasia • Wernicke's Aphasia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broca's Aphasia • Transcortical motor Aphasia • Mixed Transcortical Aphasia • Global Aphasia

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS APHASIA

- REMOVE DISTRACTIONS
- CONFIRM WHAT YOU THINK THEY'VE SAID
- BE PATIENT
- USE SHORT, SIMPLE SENTENCES

COMMUNICATING WITH SOMEONE WITH

Aphasia

Use these tips when communicating with, or as, a person with aphasia.

WHAT IS APHASIA?
Difficulty reading, writing, speaking, and/or understanding language as a result of damage to language centers of the brain.

TO HELP ME UNDERSTAND DO THESE THINGS:

- Get my attention before you start speaking
- Use plain language
- Slow down
- Use pictures, gestures, writing, or facial expressions

TO HELP ME COMMUNICATE MY THOUGHTS, DO THESE THINGS:

- Give me time
- Try not to finish my sentences for me
- Get rid of distractions or background noise
- Let me make mistakes

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Aphasia. <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/aphasia/>

National Aphasia Awareness Month

DID YOU KNOW?
APPROXIMATELY 1/3 OF STROKES RESULT IN APHASIA.
(NATIONAL APHASIA ASSOCIATION)



LOSS OF LANGUAGE, NOT INTELLECT

APHASIA

Communicating through the barriers!

What is Aphasia?
Aphasia is a language disorder caused by brain damage, often from a stroke, that makes it difficult to speak, understand speech, read, or write. Aphasia does not impact intelligence!

I need to communicate with someone with Aphasia.

- Keep it simple**
Speak in short simple sentences.
- Be patient**
Allow plenty of time for a response. Talk with them, not for them.
- Be creative**
Try writing, gesturing, pictures, and communication tools!

I have Aphasia.

- Take your time**
Be patient with yourself when communicating.
- Let people know what works best for you**
- Use assistive devices**
Bring photos, diagrams, pen, or paper.
- Know that getting frustrated is okay**
Don't blame yourself if you get stuck on words or phrases. Be patient with yourself and find what works.

Learn more at www.aphasia.org

A Journey to Aphasia Advocacy

JOE AND CHARLENE



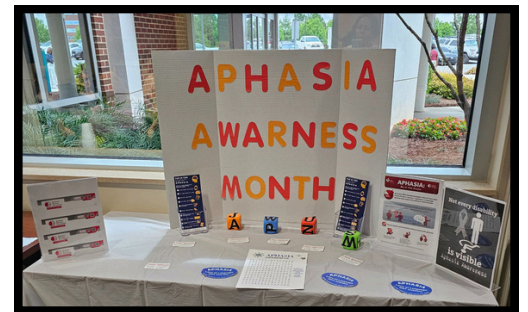
Three years ago, Joe suffered a left hemispheric stroke due to a blood clot in his brain which left him with aphasia and other impairments. Life as previously known was significantly impacted, and instead of going to the Veterans Administration as a Medical Support Assistant (MSA) Joe's new reality involved receiving much of his stroke-related care through the VA healthcare system.

Unable to return to his civilian career at the VA due to his aphasia, his focus shifted to advocacy. Joe's lifetime passion is helping underprivileged individuals, mainly the

elderly and children. From his work with YWCA, United Way, Metrolina Association for the Blind, local churches and the homeless, Joe wanted to become more involved in any way he could. His first steps began with building confidence with other stroke survivors at monthly stroke support groups in North and South Carolina. Additionally, he utilized skills and tools he learned from the University of South Carolina Aphasia Lab and subsequently the National Aphasia Association of which he is an ambassador.

Determined not to be defined by his stroke and not letting his stroke-related conditions and diagnosis of aphasia dictate the pace of his life, Joe put all his effort into his recovery. After discharge from the hospital, we embarked on what seemed to be a marathon of three to four daily sessions per week of rehabilitation for recovery. Over time as certain conditions improved, Joe wanted to do more than just survive, he wanted to embrace life to its fullest.

During his VA medical appointments and conversations with former colleagues, it became clear that there was a need to raise awareness about aphasia. As a Navy veteran and stroke survivor, Joe found the Veterans Administration to be a fitting platform for promoting aphasia awareness. As an invisible disability, aphasia was unfamiliar to many in the veteran community.



In June 2025, we garnered some assistance from the VA volunteer department and with the help from student volunteers, we raised awareness by making and distributing brochures, church fans, flyers and small giveaways and treats to engage the veteran community on ways to communicate, understand and assist people affected with aphasia. We also spread awareness at a support group in Charlotte, NC, and we hope to continue advocating for aphasia awareness in the community.



**Joe and his fiancé Charlene
advocating at the VA.**

Joe's journey is a powerful story of resilience, recovery, and purpose. From patient to advocate, Joe's unwavering commitment has raised awareness, built connections, and given voice to those with invisible disabilities like aphasia. We are incredibly proud to share Joe's journey, and we hope it reminds every reader that even in the face of loss, new purpose and leadership can emerge. Joe's advocacy lights the way for others!

- The USC Aphasia Lab



Aphasia Advocacy Spotlight: Mary Kimball Olsen

CAYLEE BRAND

Meet Mary Kimball Osborn. She is Miss Greater Carolina, the second runner-up for Miss South Carolina, an advocate for stroke awareness and cardiovascular health, and a stroke survivor herself. However, if you ask her, she would tell you that “other than that, I am a normal 24-year-old girl.”

Mary Kimball experienced bad migraines as a child, and when she was 10-years-old, she had an MRI that showed evidence of a stroke. Her doctors were unsure when it had occurred, but presumed it could have happened as young as infancy. It was scary

**“The most powerful tool you can have is your personal testimony,”
Mary Kimball Osborn**

and confusing for her to process as a child; she didn’t know how to tell people, and she was terrified it would happen again. However, she knew she had a choice. She could let her fear hold her back, or she could accept that it happened to her and push forward. She could conquer her goals and chase her dream of being Miss South Carolina.

Advocacy is a critical portion of pageantry, and Mary Kimball knew she wanted to advocate for stroke awareness and cardiovascular health. This was not only due to her own story, but also as a granddaughter to two grandmothers who survived strokes. One of her grandmothers had aphasia after her stroke, and Mary Kimball witnessed her grandmother struggle for words and her frustration at not being able to speak or understand language like she used to. She formed a community service initiative called Beat the Clock to advocate for these causes, and is now a research assistant to Dr. Sen at Prisma Health, where they evaluate oral hygiene as a risk factor for strokes or heart attacks.

Her favorite part of her advocacy is at local schools, where she teaches young children about heart and brain health. She teaches them about the FAST acronym and also educates them about aphasia, explaining that it can make it hard for people to talk. Mary Kimball has been pleased by how receptive the students are to the information - she hopes that one day she can write a children’s book about strokes for stroke survivors to read to their children and/or grandchildren.

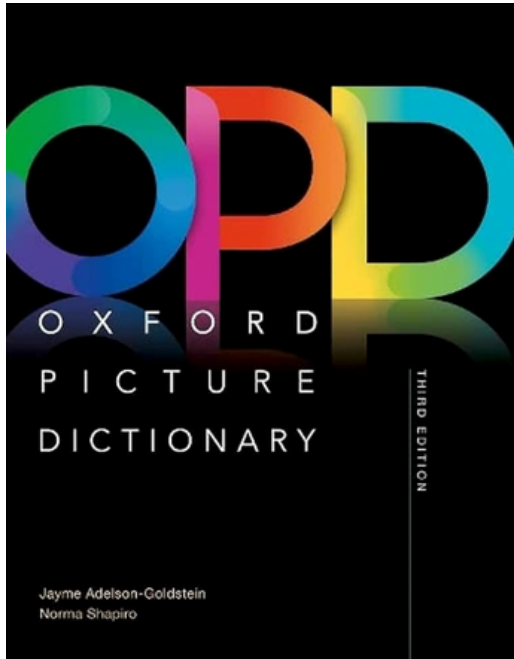
Mary Kimball’s advice to stroke survivors of all ages is to build a support system, talk about your experiences with others, and not let your stroke define who you are. Yes, Mary Kimball is a stroke survivor. And she is second runner up for Miss South Carolina, a researcher, an advocate, a daughter and granddaughter, a dog mom, and “just a normal 24-year-old girl.”



Mary Kimball at a local elementary school teaching children about heart and brain health.

Visual Supports for People with Aphasia & Tips for Aphasia Friendly Visuals

HEATHER CENTELLA AND CAYLEE BRAND



Oxford Picture Dictionary



Boogie Board

Aphasia affects language; some people have a hard time **speaking**, some people struggle with **understanding others**, and some struggle with **reading** and/or **writing**. Finding strategies to support communication can be helpful to fill in the gaps. One strategy is using **visual supports**!

The **Oxford Picture Dictionary** includes 4,000 English words and phrases represented by images. Organized by broad categories like everyday language and describing things, as well as specific categories like health insurance and public transportation, it is full of words/images to support communication in many different contexts.

If you would prefer something more simple and have strengths in drawing or writing, a **white board** or **Boogie Board** can be a great tool.

An important note: make a habit of carrying around the visual support of your choosing so you always have it when you need it!

The Oxford Picture Dictionary, portable white boards, and Boogie Boards can all be found on Amazon!

SLP Research in Action: SLPs Making a Difference



We're excited to share the work of our PhD students & collaborators. Their projects focus on helping people with communication challenges in aphasia recovery. In this issue, you'll meet the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) researchers, learn about their studies, and find out how you can get involved or show your support.




Meet Lauren!

Lauren Hammond is a fourth-year PhD Candidate and Speech-Language Pathologist in the Aphasia Lab at the University of South Carolina. This Fall (2025), she is launching her dissertation study focused on developing a new assessment tool called the Computerized Adaptive Scenario Test (CAST). CAST is designed to evaluate how people with aphasia communicate in everyday life situations using not only speech, but also gestures, writing, pictures, and devices. This project builds on her recently published scoping review of functional communication assessments for people with aphasia, which **emphasizes the need for tools that reflect real-life communication demands.**

CONTACT:  LMH17@email.sc.edu  (949) 680-5021

FLYER: <https://tinyurl.com/CASTflyer>



Aphasia Research Opportunity

Functional Assessment of Aphasia

What is the study for?

- To develop a new and adaptive assessment called "CAST"
- Computerized Adaptive Scenario Test

Why is this important?

- Communication is more than just talking.
- People with aphasia may use **words, writing, gestures, pictures, or devices** to get their message across.
- We look at all the ways you communicate, not just speaking.

Can I participate?

- If you had a stroke on the left side of your brain
- English is your primary language
- You are able to provide written or verbal consent

How long does it take?

- One visit, in person
- It will take about two (2) hours

Where is the study?



- Columbia, South Carolina

Want to Join?
Reach out to **Lauren Hammond**
(949) 680 - 5021
lmh17@email.sc.edu



Meet Zeinab!

My name is Zeinab Khoshhal Mollasaraei, and I'm originally from Iran, where I earned my master's degree in speech therapy. I'm currently pursuing my PhD, and for my dissertation, I'm developing a new sentence production test for people with aphasia. Because everyday communication relies heavily on sentences, it's important to assess how well people with aphasia can put sentences together. This helps us understand their strengths and challenges. I hope this new test will help support that goal and **guide us in planning better, more personalized treatments based on the results.**

CONTACT:  ZEINABK@email.sc.edu  (839)-399-0666

FLYER: <https://tinyurl.com/ZeinabStudy>



Volunteers wanted for The Animated Sentence Production Test for Aphasia Study!

Eligibility:

- ✓ Primary language is English
- ✓ Ages 18-95
- ✓ Have been diagnosed with aphasia resulting from a left-hemisphere stroke that occurred more than 6 months ago

60-75 minutes

Participants will receive \$25

Help us develop a test to assess sentence production skills, contributing to better treatment for individuals with aphasia!

Who to contact?
Zeinab Khoshhal Mollasaraei
Email: ZeinabK@email.sc.edu
Phone: 839-399-0666

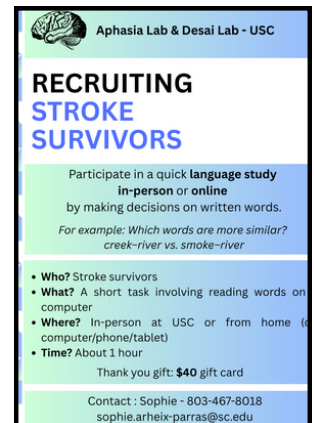
Scan here to learn more about the study





Meet Sophie!

My name is Sophie Arheix-Parras, I am a Speech-Language Pathologist from France, and I have a PhD in cognitive science. My research focuses on how we can use brain stimulation to help people recover from aphasia after a stroke. In our recent study working with Dr. Rutvik Desai, we are exploring how the brain processes words. We want to understand which parts of the brain are more important for word processing, and what happens when a stroke damages those areas. By learning how strokes affect language in the brain, **our goal is to develop new therapies, such as stimulating specific brain areas with non-invasive brain stimulation.**



CONTACT:  sophie.arheix-parras@sc.edu  803-467-8018

FLYER: <https://tinyurl.com/DesaiLab>

What's Cooking at the USC Aphasia Lab?



Chicken Thighs with Lemon



Ingredients

Directions



- 1 tablespoon of olive oil



- 8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs



- Salt and freshly ground black pepper



- Rind from half of a preserved lemon



- Lemon wedges, for serving

- Put the **olive oil** into a large, heavy skillet over medium heat.
- Season the **chicken thighs** with **salt and pepper** and add them to the skillet, skin side down.
- Cook them without moving until fat has rendered out and skin is deep golden brown and crisp (**15 to 30 minutes**).
- Turn thighs over and stir the **preserved lemon rind** into the fat in the skillet.
- Continue cooking until the meat closest to the bone is cooked through - **about 15 minutes more!**
- Serve with **lemon wedges** and enjoy!

***Recipe shared by a community member with aphasia. His grandson loves it!**



The USC Aphasia Lab

Communication Sciences and Disorders
Arnold School of Public Health
Columbia, SC 29208



The Carolina Agency at USC has

collaborated with CSTAR on several video projects over the years, including their latest—an engaging overview of the USC Aphasia Lab.





The students consistently take on new projects with professionalism, patience, and creativity.

WATCH NOW



<https://tinyurl.com/Aphasia-Lab-Video-Overview>

CONNECT WITH US

-  Instagram: @uofscaphasialab
-  YouTube: tinyurl.com/Aphasia-Lab-YouTube
-  Facebook: Aphasia Lab – USC
-  tinyurl.com/Awareness-Video-Series

STAY TUNED!



Stay on the look out for updates on groups!



Monthly LUNCH BUNCH!
email Lauren Hammond at LMH17@email.sc.edu to be added to our email list



Visit us at Soda City next time we get a table there!