



# Verbal Skills

One of the most frustrating things for a person with Alzheimer's disease to do is engage in conversation. Normal exchange between friends and family becomes loaded with information the person should know but can no longer recall. Doing activities that stimulate verbal skills can help the person with Alzheimer's disease reconnect with people.

The activities in this section include:

- Reading stories aloud
- Finding countries on a globe
- Dictating a letter
- Talking about historical events
- Asking for advice

# Verbal Skills

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## Read stories aloud

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Reading aloud is an excellent activity to stimulate verbal and visual skills. And, when you discuss what you have just read together, the person with Alzheimer's disease can have the positive experience of engaging verbally.

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## Options for different levels of ability

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Reading newspaper or magazine articles, poems, or short stories is a good way to start. Try to make such reading exercises a routine activity that you do every morning or every other evening. People with Alzheimer's disease enjoy routine and find it comforting. It's helpful to minimize other distractions (by turning off the radio or television, for example) while you read together. If the person with Alzheimer's disease has difficulty seeing, you can check your local library for books and publications that come in large-print editions.

If the person with Alzheimer's disease has trouble reading or speaking, you can read to him/her. Look for material he/she can enjoy and understand in one sitting, such as a short story, a magazine article, or even a selection of poetry. And remember to turn off the radio, television, and even the telephone while you are reading.

**This activity** can help memory, focusing ability, and communication skills.



## Find countries on a globe

A globe or even a colorful map can spark the imagination and trigger memories. It can also help stimulate visual skills. So playing a game in which you ask a person with Alzheimer's disease to find a continent, an ocean, a country, or a town on a globe or map can be fun and rewarding.

### Options for different levels of ability

Use the map or globe as the basis for a conversation. Ask the person with Alzheimer's disease if he/she recognizes an island and who lives on that island. What kind of animals live on that continent? What language is spoken in this country? If the person has been to the place, you might ask what he/she likes about the place, or what he/she did while there. Globes and maps can be a way to tap into memories and knowledge that might otherwise not be recovered.

For some persons with Alzheimer's disease, using a globe may be too difficult and finding places on a map too demanding. You can use a map of the town in which the person with Alzheimer's disease lived when he/she was a child or a young adult. Point out places that were part of his/her life and talk about them. If he/she has trouble remembering things, you might even bring up details and stories that you remember about his/her life in this place.

**This activity** can help memory, sensory perception, focusing ability, and communication skills.

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## Dictate a letter

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Many people with Alzheimer's disease who find it difficult to write a letter may be able to dictate one. Having the person dictate a letter to a friend, spouse, or family member is a great way to help him/her improve communication skills and stay connected with loved ones.

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## Options for different levels of ability

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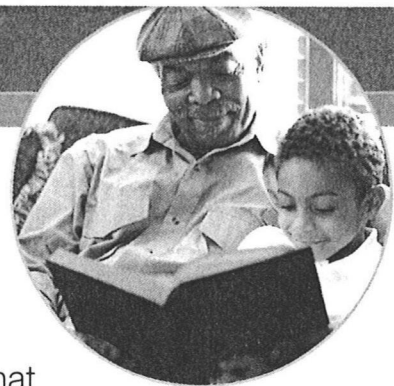
Ask the person with Alzheimer's disease whom he/she would like to write to and suggest topics for the letter. The person might want to write about what he/she has been doing around the house, his/her recent activities, or what he/she is wearing. The person taking the dictation can edit and read the letter aloud to help create it. What matters is that the person with Alzheimer's disease communicates about his/her life.

It may be difficult for some people with Alzheimer's disease to dictate a letter, so consider reading a letter to him/her. Ask family members to write letters, or write them yourself. This can help the person with Alzheimer's disease feel connected with a community of friends and involved in the lives of others.

**This activity** can help memory, focusing ability, and communication skills.

## Talk about historical events

Long-term memory may still be good for many people with Alzheimer's disease. Talking about important historical events that took place in their lifetime can be useful and enjoyable.



## Options for different levels of ability

If your area has a historical society, you may want to find out what kind of activities they have that could spur the memories of the person with Alzheimer's disease. Magazines such as *American Heritage* focus on information and photos related to United States history. You can also rent videos from your local store or library about World War II, the moon landing, The Beatles' appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and other important moments or periods in history.

You can ask the person with Alzheimer's disease what historical events he/she remembers and what they meant to him/her. Discussing historical events is a good way for people with Alzheimer's disease to use their memory skills and relive happy or memorable times.

Some people with Alzheimer's disease may not have the ability to remember the past. However, you can look through books and magazines on historical events. Share your thoughts about the events with the person, or let him/her turn the pages and look at the pictures in the books or magazines. You can also rent videos from your local store or library for him/her to watch.

**This activity** can help memory, listening skills, focusing ability, and communication skills.

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## Ask for advice

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One way to keep people with Alzheimer's disease engaged is to let them feel they can still contribute in some way. Asking their opinion or advice about a task, a person, or even a TV show can make them feel that they have something to offer. It also keeps them thinking and verbalizing.

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## Options for different levels of ability

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Topics could include what to make for lunch, how to get the car started on a cold morning, or whether they liked a movie or song, and why. Ask which food you should give the cat or how you can make a sagging plant come to life. The question really doesn't matter. What matters is that the person with Alzheimer's disease be made to feel that he/she is a valuable member of the family.

Sometimes it can be difficult for people with Alzheimer's disease to speak, but they may be able to nod, shake their heads, or give one-word answers in response to your questions. Keeping the person with Alzheimer's disease engaged can go a long way toward maintaining feelings of belonging and being loved.

**This activity** can help memory, listening skills, focusing ability, communication skills, and decision-making skills.