

WAM:

Spelling Programme

Special Edition for
Stroke Survivors

By Charmaine
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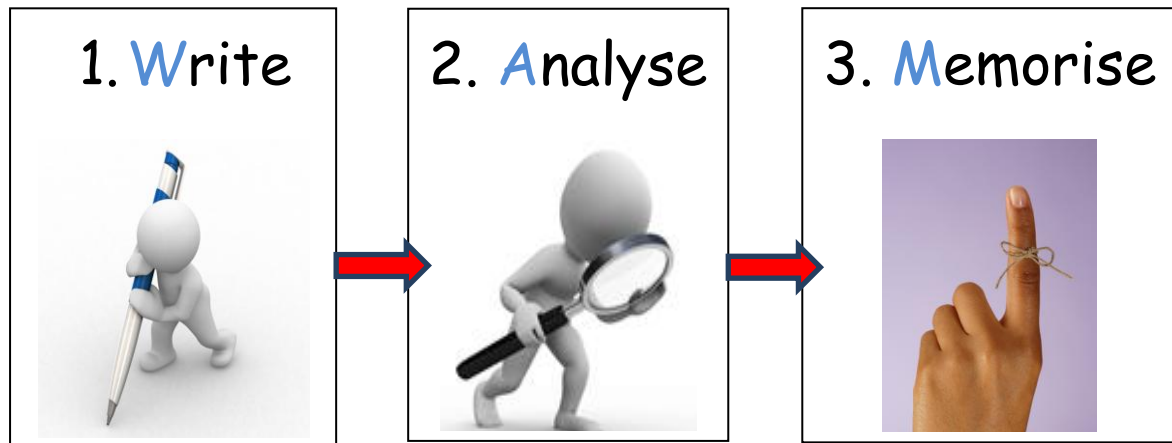
Book Review:

WAM: Spelling Method for Stroke Survivors

What is 'WAM'?

This book guides you through the 'WAM' Spelling Method, which has helped many people spell and remember the words that are important to them. WAM also helps develop confidence and self-esteem.

There are 3 main steps in WAM:



You will find a full explanation and examples in the book...

Who may find this book useful?

This essential book is a guide for helpers, rather than for learners to use independently at first. However the main aim of this programme is to get learners as independent as possible in the shortest time that is comfortable and realistic for them.

The helper is quite simply a trusted person who works through the WAM strategies with the learner in order to help him/her develop confidence, build up skills, and work towards personal goals. This approach invites all parties - medical/educational professionals, family members, friends or volunteers - to take a fresh and collaborative approach.

What does the book contain?

With the WAM method, the individual is not seen as the 'problem', but the key to the solution. Each programme is tailor-made to fit the needs, interests, abilities and precise difficulties of the individual learner. You will find many practical worksheets and ideas in this guide for your use: undoubtedly you will want to change them to suit your particular situation. WAM also takes into account how our bizarre English spelling system really works and how the brain can process and remember these spellings.

The book is beautifully produced and illustrated in full colour.

Who is the author?

Charmaine McKissock has worked for over 20 years as a specialist in Specific Learning Difficulties, assisting adult learners and their helpers to find solutions to some stubborn challenges. She believes that there are always both creative and rational ways to get round an individual's weaknesses and play to their strengths. Often the solution is very simple, and the author uses her experience to suggest ways forward, that can really work.

The tone of the book is supportive, practical, knowledgeable, and light-hearted.

How do I get a copy?

Contact: Charmaine McKissock at info@good-learning.com

A paper copy cost £10 plus £2.50 postage.

How WAM has been used with a stroke survivor: Joe's Story

When I first met Joe, he was a 51 year old construction engineer. Three months after having a stroke (a Transient Ischaemic Attack), he had returned to work for a large company, and this had become an uncontrollable 'nightmare' for him. I was contacted - as a specialist in learning and language difficulties - by Joe's employers to help him with spelling and written communication. His small quota of rehabilitation with a speech therapist had ended, and he still had significant difficulties with speech, grammar, word-finding, handwriting, working memory, and spelling. It was very hard for him to complete work reports and send emails, especially under time pressure or in front of his workmates, from whom he was determined to hide his difficulties as much as possible.

Joe could not use his computer spellchecker effectively, as he would go completely blank when trying to spell a word. He could not use voice-to-text technology, as he had spoken word-finding problems. So he had to find roundabout ways of expressing his thoughts in order to avoid spellings that he could not attempt. He was very frustrated to find that he could not remember even small or 'easy' words that he used continually, such as 'our' or 'Alicia' - his daughter's name. When he was sent out to new worksites, he panicked, as he was unable to use a map, since he could not remember how to spell place names.

Joe kept an emergency list of useful words by his computer, but was thrown into panic when he had to spell an unfamiliar word. He returned home from work exhausted each day, and then, unknown to his line manager, he sent work emails from his home computer in order to get help with spelling from his family. This situation couldn't continue much longer, as Joe was exhausted, had high blood pressure and had been advised by doctors to avoid stress: easier said than done.

When I met Joe, I asked him if he was anxious about working with me on his spelling. He confessed that he dreaded the humiliation of exposing his difficulties to me. As we had very little time together, we had to work quickly to establish mutual trust - gentle humour and plain talking helped a lot.

After only 6 weeks of supported practice, Joe was surprised and delighted at his 'breakthrough': he had built up a bank of secure spellings that he felt confident to use and his confidence to take on literacy tasks at home and work had equally progressed. More importantly, one year later, he told me 'I still use most of the methods you taught me...'

Why does the WAM method work so well?

People often ask this question - in fact there are 7 main ingredients:

1. The WAM method is **multi-sensory** (it uses a combination of sound, images, colour, touch, and movement), thus **reinforcing memory over several sites** in the brain.
2. It trains the speller to develop a state of **calm concentration** and **focus only on the 'problem' part of the word** (to 'analyse' with curiosity the bits they are having problems with).
3. The learner (supported by the helper at first) finds an **imaginative personal solution** to the target word, using their personal life experience and knowledge as an anchor.
4. The learner is **never overloaded** and does not go onto learn something new until **previous learning is solid**. Learnt words are stored in a personal 'bank' of words. The bank of words will grow slowly at first and then faster and faster, as the method rolls out.
5. The learner takes an **active** part in the programme, choosing the words that are important to them and **one of the 7 memory strategies** that work best for them.
6. The learner **practices at specific times and dates**, thus **reinforcing memory** as efficiently and effectively as possible.
7. And most importantly, WAM is enjoyable.

'I do like the approach and its focus on learning and awareness of the different ways we learn which I think can sometimes be overlooked in Therapy.' Karen – *Specialist Speech and Language Therapist.*

'How's my spelling doing? I still use most of the methods you taught me. I'll be honest I've not been following it to the letter, but I have found that I'm now looking at words and analyse them more now. I've noticed that I'm more confident when sending E-mails.' Joe – *stroke survivor, 2 years after learning the WAM method*