Advancing the Field of the Cognitive Sciences

Mastering Blocking & Stuttering

The "Structure" of Blocking & Stuttering:
Looking at Blocking & Stuttering
Through the Eyes of Neuro-Semantics®

Presentation
National Stuttering Association
June 27, 2003
Nashville, Tennessee

Bobby G. Bodenhamer, D. Min.
Presenter

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"John, say you have times when you stutter?"

"Yes, there are times when I do; but; most of the time I am OK. I speak fluently at home and around my friends."

"So, John, when do you tend to block the worse?"

"I am worse at work."

"I understand. So, you block worse at work. What is there about being at work that causes you to block?"

"Well, I am not quite sure. I just know when I am at work, I am uncomfortable."

"So, you are uncomfortable at work? What is there about being at work that makes you uncomfortable?"

"I guess it is my boss primarily. He makes me uncomfortable. I suppose if I were honest about it I would say that I am really afraid of him?"

"Oh, so you are fearful of your boss man? What is there about him that causes you to choose to be fearful of him?"

"Yes, I am fearful of him. In fact, when I am around anyone who is in authority over me, I get nervous and fearful.'

"So, it is really about being fearful of authority figures in general and not just your boss man?"

"Yes, that is right."

"When you think of your boss and being fearful of him, where in your body do you feel that fear?"

"I feel it in my upper body – especially in my chest, throat and in my jaws."

"Very good. Now, when you block, where do you feel the block?"

"In the same place. It is the same feeling."

"So, when you are not at work and are speaking fluently, how do your chest, throat and jaw feel?"

"Oh, I feel fine then. I am relaxed. I don't even think about how I am speaking. I just feel relaxed and focus on what I am talking about and enjoying the conversation with the other person."

"So, if you didn't fear *people in authority*, what would happen to your blocking and stuttering?"

"Well, it would go away, wouldn't it?

John was one of the first persons who blocked and stuttered that I worked with therapeutically. We found that the origin of his *fear of authority* came from his relationship with his father when John was just a lad. We accessed some higher adult resources of John's and he applied those resources to his old childhood memories of fearing his father. The fears disappeared and with them, so did the blocking and stuttering. The most powerful learning for John was that he was bringing blocking and stuttering on himself. He determined to fix that problem which he did.

In our work in Neuro-Semantics®, we have discovered that the primary drivers of blocking and stuttering are cognitive (thinking) in nature and not physical or certainly not genetic. Now, we are not saying that genetics and psycho-motor problems early on may have played a role in the development of a stutter; but, they are not the primary cause of its continuation. It is the deeply unconscious thinking patterns that developed around the stuttering that have locked the behavior in. Successful treatment will involve addressing these thought patterns.

How do people who block and stutter lock in the childhood disfluency into an ongoing adult problem? Our work has indicated that it is the *meanings* surrounding blocking and stuttering that in fact lock it in and make it so difficult, but not impossible, to change. Indeed, I have known several people who blocked and stuttered; who, through proper therapy, gain total fluency by removing the unconscious meanings they had built around blocking and stuttering.

Some questions for your consideration:

1. How is it that many PWS can speak fluently in some contexts and not speak fluently in other contexts?
2. When a person speaks consistently fluent in one context but not others, what does this imply about the causation and continuation of blocking and stuttering?
3. How can the primary causation and continuation be physical? (We do believe that at its onset, blocking & stuttering could have physical components.)
4. How can the primary causation and continuation be genetic in nature? (We do believe that genetic predisposition could have contributed to the beginning problem but not its continuation. See Bruce Lipton's *The Biology of Belief*.)
5. If you were not *fearful* of looking like a *fool* or being *vulnerable* because of your blocking and stuttering, how would that affect your blocking and stuttering? (Other and Power Matrices)
6. If you had a healthy view of yourself as an *innate person of worth* in spite of how you speak, how would that affect your blocking and stuttering? (Self Matrix)
7. If you felt *in control* of your speech all the time as you do when you are fluent, how would that affect your blocking and stuttering? (Power Matrix)
8. If you were able to rid yourself of the belief – "I have *always* blocked and stuttered in certain context which means that I always will," what would happen to your blocking and stuttering? (Time Matrix)
9. If you were not fearful of the *judgments of other* people about how you speak, what would happen to your blocking and stuttering? (Other Matrix)
10. If you viewed the *world* you live in as a warm, inviting, friendly and supportive place rather than a place to be feared and to always be on your guard about, how would that affect your blocking and stuttering? (World Matrix)

The Matrix Model

In explaining how we believe that blocking and stuttering are structured in the mind-body system, I will utilize the model developed by my colleague, L. Michael Hall, Ph.D. Borrowing from a term of mathematics and the title of the movie by the same name, Michael calls the model "The Matrix Model." The model provides a fantastic tool for organizing all of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Neuro-Semantics under seven simple headings. I will use it here for a brief (and over simplified) description of just how we believe blocking and stuttering are created.

How is blocking and stuttering structured in the mind? It is structured like any other thought-feeling-behavior. It all begins with the *meanings* that we give events. The word "meaning" comes from a German word "to hold in mind." What meanings do people who block and stutter typically "hold in mind"? We shall be considering those. The Matrix Model provides seven areas for us to divide the various meanings given to any behavior. The first one listed is the area of "meaning" which we list first because it is "meaning" that determines how we describe the other matrices of our experiences.

In summation, the matrices are:

1. We begin with *Meaning* which is the determinant of:

    2.   Your concept of your *Self.*
    3.   How you understand your sense of *Power* and *Resourcefulness*.
    4.   Your relationship with *Time*.
    5.   Your relationship with *Others*.
    6.   Your view of the *World* you live in.
    7.   Your understanding of your higher *Purpose* and *Intentions*.

Ask yourself:

1. What does "blocking and stuttering" *mean t*o me? (Meaning Matrix)
2. What do these meanings say *about* me as a person? (Self Matrix)
3. What do these meanings say *about* my sense of power and resourcefulness in relationship to how I speak? (Power and Resource Matrix)
4. What do these meanings say *about* how I view my relationship with time in the context of how I speak? (Time Matrix)
5. What do these meanings say *about* my relationship with others in regards to how I speak? (Others Matrix)
6. What do these meanings say about how I view the world I live in? Do I view the world as a safe or unsafe place? Do I view it as a friendly or unfriendly place? (World Matrix)
7. Because I am a person who blocks and stutters, what is my purpose/ intent/ outcome in regards to how I speak? (Purpose and Intentional Matrix)

Figure 1
The Matrix Circle
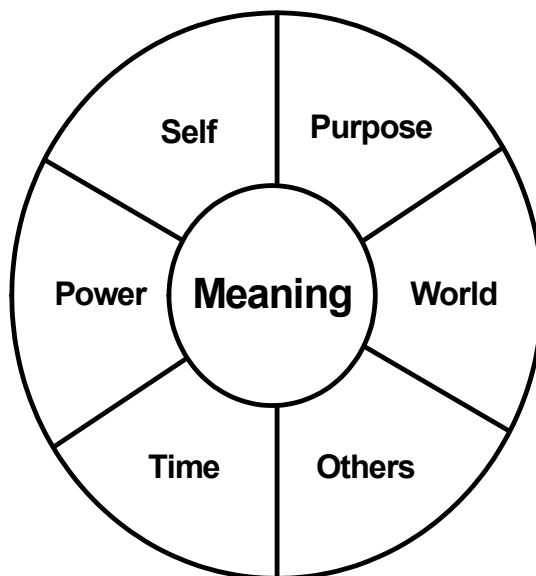
For sure, you never leave home without your "Matrix" filled with all these and many more frames of mind. Your Matrix gives you your *model of the world* through which you navigate through life. If you view yourself as a person of worth with innate powers to navigate the world in which you live, you will live your life one way. If, however, you view yourself in a negative light and with little or no power to navigate your world, you will live your life in a totally different way.

Your Matrix to a large degree determines how you live and experience life. We believe that these seven key matrices determine all the other matrices of our mind (beliefs, values, understandings, etc, i.e. all of our thinking patterns both conscious and unconscious).

In Figure 1 (previous page), I illustrated how *meaning* as the center of all the other matrices determines all the other matrices. In Figure 2 (below), I utilize a graphic created by Pascal Gambardella, Ph.D. that more accurately illustrates how the model works. In this graphic, Pascal shows how *Meaning* does determine all the other matrices. But, your desires, your wants, your intentions are involved in creating the other five matrices. Thus, *Intention* sends your mind or directionalizes your in creating meanings of your concepts of *Self, Power, Time, Others* and *World.* Because you don't like blocking and stuttering, you will desire to stop it and this not liking it and wanting to stop it will affect how you mentally frame the behavior. This is mostly done totally out of conscious awareness.

Figure 2
The 7 Matrices of Your Neuro-Semantics
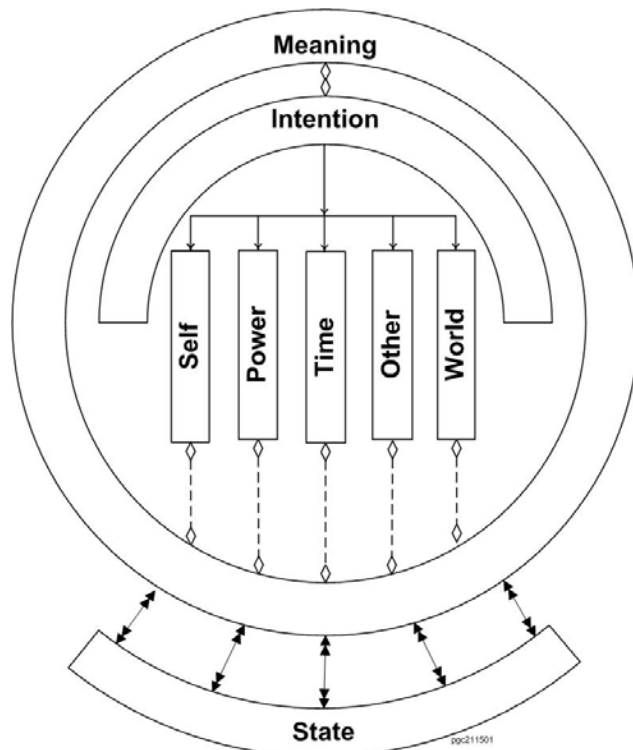
I shall illustrate. When a person who blocks and stutters anticipates an upcoming conversation, the person may fear that they will block based on past experiences (*Time* Matrix). But, the person does not want to repeat the past behavior of blocking (*Intention* Matrix) due to all the negative meanings the person has associated with blocking and stuttering (*Meaning* Matrix). These meanings find expression in the other matrices such as, "I don't want to appear like I am a weirdo because I block" (*Self* Matrix). Or, "I am powerless to overcome this" (*Power* Matrix). Etc.

So, in this illustration, note how the person's defining of self is mostly determined by the meanings associated with blocking and stuttering. And, the intent or desire of not repeating past behaviors due to the meanings associated with blocking/ stuttering drives the meanings given to the other matrices: "I don't want to appear like I am a weirdo because I block" (*Self* Matrix). Or, "I am powerless to overcome this" (*Power* Matrix). Etc.

Below, I have listed some examples from my clients. I have categorized these in the seven areas of The Matrix Model. Turn to Table 1 at the back of this handout for a more thorough listing of meanings that I have discovered from questioning and from studying a good sampling of people who block and stutter.

How do we create "Meanings":

- We create a "meaning" first by making a "thing" out of something. In the context of blocking and stuttering, we do this by first *naming* the behavior of "disfluency" as blocking and stuttering.
- We *evaluate* this "thing" called "disfluency" as something bad and to be avoided.
- Then, we *associate* fear and shame with it. The "disfluency" quickly becomes "blocking and stuttering – something "real" because it now has a label and meanings associated with it. Plus, we can "feel" it in our bodies and it is really real.

By doing this, an earlier disfluency gets called into an unwanted existence. From there we start creating more meanings around this thing called "blocking and stuttering:

Intentions/ Outcomes (What do you want in reference to this thing called blocking and stuttering? What are your outcomes/desires because you now have this thing called "blocking and stuttering?):

- "I don't want to look like a fool."
- "I am going to try to control this."
- "I am not going to repeat the past."
- "I am not going to let others see my vulnerabilities."

Self/Identity (What does blocking and stuttering mean to you as a person):

- "I am flawed."
- "I am broken."
- "I am not enough."
- "I am worthless."
- "I am insecure."
- "I can't be enough."
- "I am embarrassed."

Power/Resourcefulness (What does blocking and stuttering mean about your sense of being Resourceful or Un-resourceful, Powerful or Powerless?):

- "I am out of control."
- "I don't feel safe and protected."
- "I need to change."
- "I can't be enough."
- "I should be doing better."
- "If I hesitate in speaking, I will be perceived as weak."

Time (What does blocking and stuttering mean to you in your relationship to "Time" and how do you view blocking and stuttering in reference to Time?):

- "I am doomed to continue this behavior."
- "It has always been this way."
- "I have always blocked and stuttered and I always will."
- "I have to get it done."
- "I can't take my time to say what I want to say."

Others/ Relationship (What does blocking and stuttering mean to you in your relationship with Other people):

- "It is not OK to stutter."
- "I am fearful of being rejected."
- "I can't measure up to the expectations of other people."
- "I am less than they are."
- "I look foolish to them."
- "People determine or validate my worth."
- "What people say about me becomes truth."
- "I must protect myself from being hurt by others**."**

**World (What does blocking and stuttering mean to you in how you view the World you live in?):**

- "I should be doing better."

- "I have to do something."
- "I have to get it done." (Time Matrix also)
- "The whole issue revolves around 'caring how I talk.'" (Self & Other Matrix also)
- "I won't succeed."

Creating the "Block"

Such thinking creates a matrix of meanings that locks in the disfluency of childhood. The layering of these thoughts on top of one another creates the block. The layering multiplies the effect of all the thoughts. For instance, if you think, "I have always blocked and I always will." And from there, you think, "I am a hopeless case." "Indeed, I am hopeless. I am not normal." Etc. This layering of negative thoughts upon top of negative thoughts puts you into a total powerless state.

Figure 3
Layering Meanings for Blocking
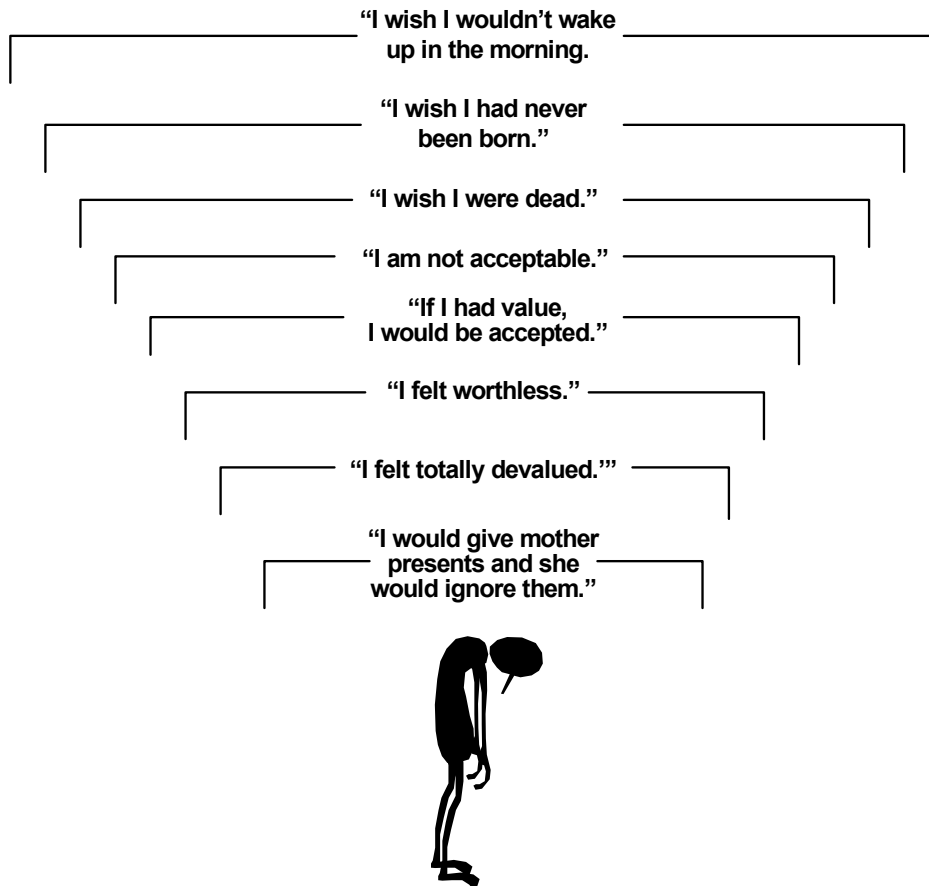
It is the feelings and emotions emanating out of all these thoughts firing at one time which are embodied in the muscles surrounding breathing and speech that produce the blocking. As with all panic attacks (Blocking functions exactly as a panic attack.), the emotions expressed in those particular muscles for breathing and speaking result in a

physiological response called blocking. Stuttering is a result of the person trying to break through the block.

Figure 3 illustrates the phenomena of layering our minds. The mental frames of mind presented here come form one of my recent clients. With such meanings embedded in her chest in her chest, throat and jaws, are you surprised that she blocked? And are you surprised that she had problems with depression as well? Again, it is the layering upon layering of deeply unconscious negative meanings that find expression in those specific muscle groups for breathing and speaking that create the blocking and stuttering.

One gains fluency by removing or changing these meanings to newer and more positive meanings. This will result in creating a newer and more powerful matrix to live in and to speak through. What meanings have you created in each matrix surrounding your blocking and stuttering? What would happen to your speech if all those meanings suddenly disappeared?

How do I change these meanings?

Basically, one changes the unwanted memories by creating new meanings in exactly the same way one created the negative memories. I shall explain. The blocking and stuttering became locked in by the child's layering on negative meaning on top of negative meaning about what he or she didn't like about the disfluency. As we mentioned earlier, this layering meaning on top of meaning acts to hold in the unwanted behavior. The layering actually multiplies the effect and creates the blocking from a simple disfluency.

So in changing those negative thoughts to positive thoughts, we want to layer on positive meanings on top of the negative meanings. For instance, say you experience fear of what others may think should you block and stutter. Instead of going the negative route, you instead go the positive route. You think, "I am a courageous person. I have lived my life blocking and stuttering. I have survived. That takes courage." Now, take that thought and state of "courage" and apply it to the thought of fearing what others may think of your speech. Layer "fear" with "courage." See Figure 4 on the next page.

The basic pattern goes like this:

1. Consider the fear-ridden thought that you will block and then stutter.
2. Now, access a thought of faith or courage. What do you have faith in? What are you courageous about? Access one of those resourceful thoughts.
3. *Apply* the thought of faith/courage to the fear of blocking. Take the thought of faith/courage and *bring it to bear* (apply to) on the fear of blocking.

How do I do that? Some people do it visually. They will have a picture of "fear" and then they will take a picture of "courage" and move "courage" on top of "fear" allowing "courage" to overwhelm "fear." Others may do it kinesthetically by moving "courage"

from wherever they feel it in their body to the place where they feel "fear" in their body. Experiment and see what works best for you.

Figure 4
Layering Fear with Courage/ Faith
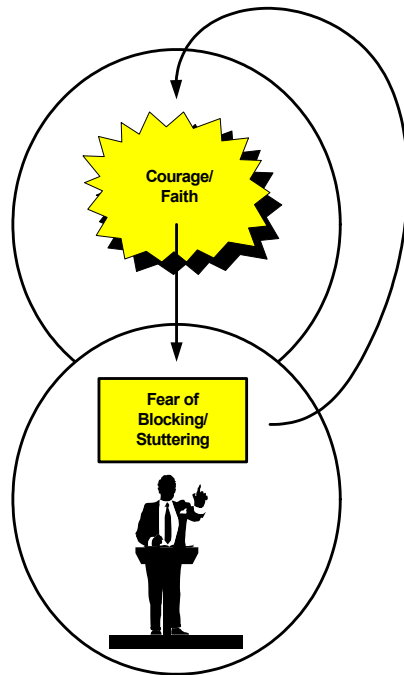
Think about it? If ever time you felt fear of what others may think of you, you gave yourself permission to pause and then you access a state of courage or faith and then you applied that state to the state of fearing what others may or may not think of how you talk, what would happen? The brain learns through repetition. So, just keep repeating this. It takes practice but it has a tendency to work. This pattern is the basic meta-stating pattern developed by L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

The Drop Down Through Pattern

At last count, we have over 140 Neuro-Semantic patterns. With that many, which is the best? That is a difficult question to answer, for some work better than others on an individual basis. And, many are especially designed for specific issues. Indeed, one of the major benefits of the 7-Matrices Model is that it provides not only a diagnostic tool but it also provides a way for us to know which techniques to use on what problem.

However, if I were to point out one pattern that works the best in most contexts it would be this pattern. Indeed, I have been using it for eight years and have had more successes

with it then any other single pattern. About three years ago, we advanced the pattern by adding some Meta-States distinctions to it which is step # 5.

The Pattern
(Go to http://www.neurosemantics.com/Stuttering/Drop_Down_Through.htm for a complete article and example for the Drop Down Through Pattern.)

1) Identify the experience and emotion you want to transform.

      What do you feel just before you block?
      What feelings/ emotions are behind your blocking/ stuttering?
      What emotions or experiences are there that undermine your success as a speaker that you would like to eliminate?

2) Step into that experience.

      Associate fully into that experience.
      If you are aware of a particular experience that you would like to work on; be there present in that memory looking through your eyes, hearing what you heard and feeling what you felt then, now

        Where do you feel this in your body?
        What does it feel like?
        How intensely are you experiencing this emotion?
        Good, just be there with it for a moment, noticing ... just noticing it fully... knowing that it is just an emotion and that you are so much more than any emotion...

3) Drop down through the experience.

      This may feel strange, but you do know what it feels like when you *drop* ... so feeling that feeling of *dropping*, just drop down through that experience until you drop down underneath that feeling...

      What thought-feeling or emotion lies underneath that emotion?
      And now just imagine dropping down through that feeling.
            [Use the language and terms that the person gives you.]
      And what thought-feeling comes to you as you imagine yourself dropping down through that one?
            [Keep repeating this dropping-down through process until the person comes to "nothing..." That is, to no feelings ... to a void or emptiness.]

4) Confirm the emptiness

Just experience that "nothingness" or "void" for a moment. Good.
Now let that nothingness open up and imagine yourself dropping through and out the other side of the nothingness.
What are you experiencing when you come out the other side of the nothingness?
What or whom do you see?
   [Repeat this several times ... to a second, third, or fourth resource state.]

Note: Sometimes people will not experience the void, the nothingness. They will drop right on down through the negative frames and right into the positive resources. At other times they may just pause briefly as they make the switch from the negative frames to the positive frames.

5) Meta-state each problem state

Use each resource state to *apply* to each problem state**.**
And when you feel X about Y, how does that transform things?
And when you even more fully feel X – what other transformations occur?
Validate and solidify: just stay right here in this X resource and as you experience it fully, what happens to the first problem state (#1)?

6) Test

Let's see what now happens when you try, and I want you to really try to see if you can get back the problem state that we started with.
When you try to do that, what happens?
Do you like this?
Would you like to take this into your future – into all of your tomorrows and into all your relationships?

**The Drop-Down Through
to "Rise Up" Pattern**

1) Identify the experience and emotion you want
    to transform.
2) Step into that experience.
3) Drop-down through the experience.
4) Confirm the emptiness.
5) Meta-state each problem state.
6) Test.

*Use this pattern on any unwanted behavior that
has a negative feeling behind it.*

Table 1

#1 Meaning/Value – Meaning Determines the Matrices ─
1. Classification of non-fluent speech as blocking/stuttering **2. Associating** blocking/stuttering with fear and shame **3. Evaluating** blocking/stuttering as bad and unacceptable **4. Framing** blocking/stuttering has the following meanings in the other matrices:

#7 Intention/Self	#7 Intention/Power	#7 Intention/Time	#7 Intention/Others	#7 Intention/World
(Attempted solutions that make the problem worse)				
I don't want to look like a fool? I will not show my vulnerabilities or weaknesses. I will play it safe and create a sense of security because I am not like others. I am more sensitive. I can't handle criticism well. I've got to stop this. This shows me to be inadequate and flawed. I will "block" myself from stuttering!	I am going to try to control this? I am going to try to control every word that comes out of my mouth. I need to change. I must not stutter. I have to catch this. I will do that by becoming very self aware of my speech**.** I have to try really hard not to block and stutter or I will look foolish.	I am not going to repeat the past. I am not going to make a fool of myself with my speech anymore. If I block any emotion in this moment, it will give me more control. I'm afraid this will be permanent so I will try hard to not to continue stuttering so I will "block" more.	I am not going to attract attention. I am not going to let others see my vulnerabilities. I will not give others a chance to laugh at me. I will not let them see me struggle. I will avoid any situations around people or groups that will expose this weakness. I will try to cover the stuttering up.	I will not do anything that will draw attention to me in my work, career, etc. I will avoid speaking situations that will attract attention to me. I will try to be successful by avoiding all opportunities to speak.

#2 Self	#3 Power	#4 Time	#5 Others	#6 World

I am flawed. ("There is something wrong with me.")
I am broken.
I am not enough.
I am inadequate.
I am flawed.
I am foolish.
I am worthless.
I am insecure.
I am timid
I am shy.
I am anxious.
I am tense.
I am "shamed."
I am "possessed."
I can't be enough.
Embarrassment
I am ashamed.
I am angry.
I am abnormal.
Self-pity
My value is in my performance.
Unique (I stutter – I am special.)
	Loss of control
	Frustration
	Lack of protection
	Perceived hurt.
	I need to change.
	I can't be enough.
	I am terrified of speaking to _____.
	I need to be respected and loved in order to speak fluently. (Other)
	I should be doing better.
	I have to do something.
	I have to get it done.
	"It" (becoming fluent) works for everybody but me.
	I cannot speak─
	  In public
	  On the phone
	  On stage
	I cannot order in a restaurant.
	I cannot introduce myself.
	Hesitation is a sign of weakness.
	Hesitation is a sign of fear.
	Hesitation means you are unsure.
		Permanent
		Doomed
		It has always been this way.
		I am not making progress.
		I have to do something.
		I have to get it done.
		I can't take my time to say what I want to say (sense of being rushed).
			It is **not** OK to stutter.
			Fear (of being rejected)
			Expectations from others
			Inability to measure up to expectations
			Hurt (not being validated)
			Rejection
			Isolation
			Protection - (From getting involved in a relationship.)
			I am less than.
			I look foolish.
			Judged.
			People validate or determine my worth.
			What people say about me becomes the truth.
			People judge the content of what I am saying.
			I must protect myself from being hurt by others.
			I must conceal my emotions.
			I am doing something "bad" to them if I stutter.
				I should be doing better.
				I have to do something.
				I have to get it done.
				"The whole issue revolves around 'caring how I talk.'"
				I won't succeed.
				I am out of control.

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Dr. Bodenhamer first trained for the ministry, earned a doctorate in Ministry, and served several churches as pastor. He began NLP training in 1990, studying with Dr. Gene Rooney, Dr. Tad James and Dr. Wyatt Woodsmall and receiving Master Practitioner and Trainer Certifications. Since then, he has taught and certified NLP trainings at Gaston College in Dallas, NC.

Beginning in 1996, Dr. Bodenhamer began studying the Meta-States model and then teamed up with L. Michael Hall, Ph.D. to begin co-authoring several books. Since that he has turned out many works as he and Michael have applied the NLP and Meta-States Models to various facets of human experience.

In 1996 also, Dr. Bodenhamer with Michael co-founded the Society of Neuro-Semantics. This has taken his work to a new level, taken him into International Trainings, and set in motion many Institutes of Neuro-Semantics around the world. Dr. Bodenhamer authored the training manual, *Mastering Blocking and Stuttering: A Handbook for Gaining Fluency*. He is presently working on this manual for it to be published in book form.

Books Co-Authored by Dr. Bodenhamer:

Patterns For "Renewing the Mind" (w. Hall, 1997)
Time-Lining: Advance Time-Line Processes (w. Hall, 1997)
Figuring Out People: Design Engineering With Meta-Programs (w. Hall, 1997)
Mind Lines: Lines For Changing Minds (w. Hall, 1997, 2000 3rd edition)
The Structure of Excellence: Unmasking the Meta-Levels of Submodalities (w. Hall, 1999)
*The User's Manual of the Brain, Volume I (*1999, w. Hall)
Hypnotic Language (2000, w. Burton)
The Structure of Personality: Modeling "Personality" Using NLP and Neuro-Semantics. (Hall , Bodenhamer, Bolstad, Harmblett, 2001)
Games for Mastering Fears (2001, with Hall)
*The User's Manual of the Brain, Volume II (*2003, w. Hall)

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Tim Mackesey, PC
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For a detailed description of the course content go to:

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More Information →

Do you sometimes identify yourself with such statements as:

- "I am flawed."
- "I am broken."
- "I am not enough."
- "I can't be enough."
- "I am timid."
- "I am shy."
- "I am 'shamed.'"
- "I am 'possessed.'"

Do you at times believe about yourself:

- Other people validate or determine my worth - what they say about me becomes my truth.
- People judge the content of what I am saying.
- People in authority are only interested in their own viewpoint; therefore, what I say will always be wrong to them.
- I must protect myself from being hurt by others.
- I must conceal my emotions.
- I need to change.
- I should be doing better.
- I can't be enough.
- I got to do something.
- I got to fix this problem.
- I am worthless as a human being when I do not perform up to others expectations (perfectionism).
- My total value as a person is how I perform and especially "how" I speak.
- I need to be respected and loved in order to speak fluently.
- I am doing something "bad" to other people when I stutter.
- "It" (becoming fluent) works for everybody but me.

What would changing such beliefs mean to you in gaining fluency? If your answer is "a great deal," then this "Mastering Stuttering Workshop" has much to offer you in your journey towards fluency.

Writing an evaluation of this training for the *British Stammering Association Magazine*, Nigel Wilson of the UK says:

> "The Neuro-Semantics approach has helped improve my fluency and given me hope in the potential for significant change, time will tell how effective and permanent this is. My stammer has had 30 plus years to embed itself in my mind-body-belief system it is going to take time and commitment to kick it out. What is great is that now, on occasions, I find myself having come to the end of a conversation and thinking Wow, I've just been talking fluently to this person(s) and have not had any thoughts/fears about stammering either before or during the conversation. I was purely thinking about what was been said. I assume this is how non-stammerers converse – it's a new experience for me!"

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