How the brain works to study

By Madeleine Smith

Have you ever struggled with remembering small things that your peers remembered easily? Well, you’re not alone. This means that you have a unique brain and have to study in a different way.

To thoroughly get a good grasp on your specific study methods you first need to understand the brain. Your brain is split into five key parts; cerebrum, cerebellum, brain stem, pituitary, and hypothalamus. The key one that we will be looking into is the cerebrum, the largest portion of the brain. It is split into two parts, the left, and the right side. This portion of your brain facilitates the act of thinking.

Studies have shown that each half of the brain has its own distinct functions in movement and memory. The right half helps you think about creative and abstract concepts such as music, shapes, and colors. The left half of the cerebrum is for more analytical purposes to help you with speech, math, and logic. The reason that the cerebrum is so critical for your learning is that it controls your short-term and long-term memory. We are always remembering things or creating new memories to put into the hippocampus for storage.

Everyone remembers things in their own unique way. Think about how you tend to remember things. How do you like to study: with visuals and colors or with plain text? Do you need to go over it more than once to fully understand it all?

Now that you have gotten a good understanding of the brain, see which studying strategies below would best support you on your learning journey.

*Top five ways to effectively study:*

1. The SQRRR or The SQ3R method

* This stands for skim, question, read, recite and review
* Skim – instead of trying to store all of the information in one go you should skim the notes and if needed take small annotations so that you can get a general understanding of what the content is about.
* Questions – create questions for yourself to understand what specifically you need to focus on for a specific topic. These questions can be like: What is this topic about? And what do I already know about this topic?
* Read – next you want to fully read the information and look for answers to the questions you formulated.
* Recite – after reading the information, summarize what it was talking about in writing so that you can ensure that you know the major points.
* Review – at the end of studying it is always important to review everything you have learned. This can include quizzing yourself, re-reading the points you noted down, or even creating a song or rhyme to remember it all.

2. Revisit and review

* This is based on the concept of remembering at a later time. Recalling information or an answer to a question improves your learning more than reading text. A good way to do this is by utilizing practice exams, making your questions (best in a study group), or creating flashcards.

3. Colour-coded notes

* Writing with color is a good way to organize the information. It also helps your review and prioritizes specific ideas. A recent study by Frontiers in neuroinformatics found that color can improve your memory’s functioning. That same study found warm colors in particular create a positive learning environment that helps keep you focused and motivated.
* When doing this, you may consider these tips: write down key points in red, highlight information in yellow, organize topics by color, and don’t colour everything (only the most important information).

4. Mind mapping

* This tool works best for the visual learners out there since it allows you to visually organise the information in your head. Mapping out your notes, by making visual connections between specific topics, instead of just writing them down, can improve your comprehension. It also enables you to see the big picture of what you are studying.

5. Exercise before studying

* If you struggle to find the motivation to study, try exercising before you study. Not only does it help against fatigue but it also increases your energy levels. It doesn’t have to be long or hard, it can be as simple as a 20-minute walk around your neighborhood, as long as it gets your heart rate up.
* Exercise is known to kickstart brain functioning and it can help with cognitive performance. It also releases endorphins which improve your mood and reduce stress.

Everyone’s brain is different. That is why many people use different ways to remember information for different topics. So how about trying some of these methods for yourself. You never know what might work for you, the brain is full of all different surprises.