

WHAT'S UP

OUR AMAZING BRAINS IN ACTION

It also helps to be aware of how your brain works as you study.

You are not a teapot – Your brain is not like an empty teapot for teachers to pour knowledge into so that you can pour it all out during exams. Far from it. Instead, you perceive information. That means you take in information by using your eyes to see, your ears to hear and your other sense organs to touch, feel and taste what you want to learn more about.

Taking in information - Your body is taking in information all the time. What goes in depends on many factors. Let's say your favourite subject is mathematics. You are eager to learn something new today. But, you are also very hungry. You find that you can't concentrate because of the smell of *wanton mee* and *mee siam* wafting up from the canteen. Or you may be sleepy because you stayed up late watching TV last night. Your brain has to struggle to stay focused on math because math has to compete with strong I-need-food and I-need-sleep messages.

Sorting the information - Not everything that reaches your brain is stored. Your brain does some sorting and decides what to keep. And, what not to keep. Sometimes such decisions are not important. For example, you may concentrate very well and take in every details of your favourite TV show. Everything goes in but your brain may decide to store only the funny parts that you want to share with your friends the next day. That sorting work is not as critical as facts you will need for your exams or for life.

The job of sorting becomes very hard if there is too much information going in all at the same time. It's as if there's a traffic jam. Your brain has to overwork when deciding what to throw out and what to keep while the information is rushing in. That can happen when you watch TV while you do your homework. Or with last minute cramming the night before an exam. If you lead too hectic a lifestyle, dashing from one place to another all day long and taking in important information at every stage, that's overload, too. So slow down if you have to. And, do one thing at a time.

Storing the information – Your brain is not a dumping ground. The stuff that your brain decides to keep isn't just chucked carelessly into a corner somewhere in your head. That would be like a school that has only one big storeroom. And every one throws in whatever needs storing. Report books, exam papers, hockey sticks, basketballs, fire extinguishers, gardening tools, mops, buckets, spare chairs, tables and photo albums of important school events – all thrown in together. Regardless of whether the things would be needed the next day, in a month or in a year.

Imagine how much time it would take to pull out what a class needed for P.E.? Or how students would feel if the wet mop dripped onto the report books? Worse still, what if there were a fire and everything had to be dragged out of the storeroom before the fire extinguishers could be found?

And so, it makes good sense to organise what we store. That's what your brain tries to do with information it keeps. Your brain tries to store it in ways that will make it easy for you to pull out (or retrieve) what you need when you need it.

Helping Your Brain – All this sorting, organising and storing of information is going on while you are studying. It helps if you understand the stuff you are taking in. For many of us, the brain finds it easier if we draw diagrams, make summaries of key points and discuss them with friends.

Your brain continues to sort, organise and store what you've studied even when you are doing something else that's relaxing. That's why breaks help. While you play, the brain continues to work. And the most amazing part is that the brain continues to organise and reorganise the stored information while you sleep. In fact, brain experts say that deep sleep is extremely important for the brain to be able to do its work well. Yes, the right amount of sleep is a must!

Retrieving the information – Whether it's for daily life or for your exams, your brain will retrieve the information that is stored as and when you need it. Good sorting, organising and storing leads to easy retrieval. So give your brain time to do its work well by spreading out your study times, taking care of your health and making time to rest and play.