

Empowered learning

by Lynne Smith

or how to make the most of your learning experience, whether in primary school, secondary school, college, university or the workplace.

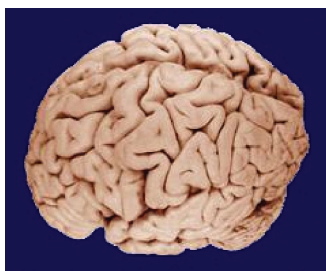
The key to successful learning is to be an active learner taking control of your learning and seeing it as an enjoyable adventure. Small children learn extraordinary amounts simply by being relaxed, observing, trying things out and experimenting and being engaged and interested in what they are doing. They see any mistakes as a necessary part of the learning process, not worrying about what others might think of them or seeing themselves as failures. Think of a child trying to ride a bike without stabilisers for the first time. Firstly the child will need to be motivated enough. They then need to get on the bike and persevere (they will not succeed by learning how to ride a bike in a book!) They will probably fall off on numerous occasions, but will get straight back on the bike and keep trying until they succeed. What a sense of achievement they then feel. Once something has been mastered in this way they will always know how to do it. All learning can be like this, whatever your age and whatever you are trying to learn!

Step One: Get Motivated

- Address blocks to learning
- Reward yourself
- Have fun
- Persevere
- Keep your curiosity
- Be confident
- Celebrate achievements
- Make learning relevant
- Identify your goals

Step Two: Understand the human body and its potential

- Look after yourself through healthy eating and exercise. Think of athletes training for a big event! Your body is a machine that will perform better for you if well looked after, whether in physical or mental activities.
- Learn about how your brain works. Imagine if you owned a Ferrari and put in water instead of oil through not knowing how the machine works and then blaming the machine for not working!
- Make a list of all the problems you have in using your brain (make sure you are honest with yourself and miss nothing out). Your list might contain words such as confidence, age, emotions, tiredness, fear, frustration, laziness, pressure, time, noise, nerves, memory etc.



Your brain is like a sleeping giant: on average, we use less than one percent of our brains

Your brain is divided into two sides: the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere.

Left brain dominant people

are sequential thinkers, learning through linear processing, logic and analysis and are very analytical and strive for structure. (Most education in western societies is suited more to left-brain dominance, for example rote and sequential learning).

Right brain dominant people are divergent thinkers who can get bored easily, experience things holistically and are visual thinkers.

The two hemispheres are linked by over 200 million nerve fibres and the body is designed to help the two hemispheres to work together. For example to remember a person, you need to link the face (right hemisphere) with the name (left hemisphere). You can encourage this process encouraging the parts of the brain to work better together and thus making learning easier. These include brain gym exercises, juggling etc.

Step Three: Understand your Individual Learning Style

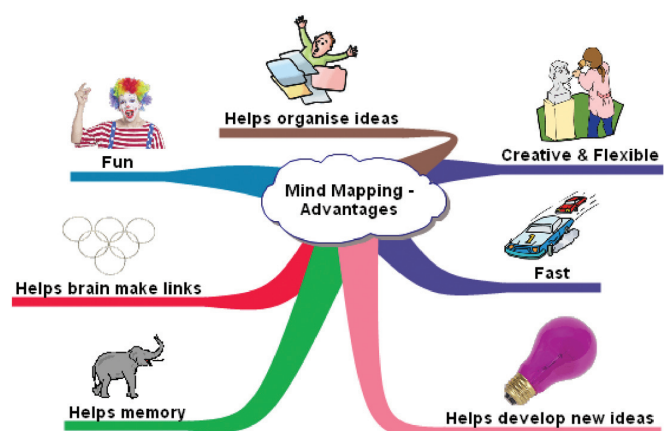
- We all experience the world around us through our senses - mainly sight, hearing and touch. Learning becomes easier if you can identify your preferred sense:

Visual people are often fast readers, daydream often, prefer to do rather than to speak, like an overview of things, like pictorial lessons, don't listen well and like to look good.

Auditory people often talk to themselves, like speeches and singing aloud, listen well, remember by listening, are good at telling jokes, spell words out loud, understand verbal instructions.

Physical people often like physical activity, remember by doing and undoing, use gestures, fidget, like action words and descriptions, are touchy/feely people liking contact.

Understanding your preference might help you see clearly why you are good or bad at particular things and use this knowledge when learning new things, adapting the preferred teaching style to suit your own style of learning. For example, if you are a visual learner, after listening to information, make it very visual, perhaps by creating mind maps:



Most people have problems with concentration. This can be caused by:

- Noise
- Distractions (visual, sound and physical)
- Boredom
- Lack of motivation
- Emotions resulting in poor self-esteem and lack of confidence.

Any of the above can result in us 'switching off'. When in this state no worthwhile learning can take place. It is important to recognize when and what makes us lose concentration and to develop techniques to stay focused, for example yoga, karate, playing chess, eating healthily and drinking plenty of water and taking frequent breaks will all help. If you notice yourself losing concentration, stop and get your focus back before continuing otherwise the muddle and confusion will escalate!

Step Five: Memory Techniques

We tend to accept these days that most of us have poor memories and that it gets worse the older we get. This isn't necessarily true! We tend to focus on what we forget rather than what we remember, and we rarely appreciate how sophisticated the memory is. For example when reading a paragraph of writing you will have to remember the complex workings of a language which took you years to learn; you call upon a memory of thousands of known words; you match the look, sound and meaning of particular written symbols to a memory store of thousands of symbols. You integrate all of this in memory and make sense of what you read. You do all of this within a fraction of a second!

Our brains take in much more information than we actually need. If we don't actively use this information then the path to it gets overgrown and we may lose our way. Memory can be divided into aspects:

Retention: the ability of the mind to take in and store information, in other words the learning process. The way we take in information also affects whether we will remember it.

Recall: the ability to select a specific piece of information we need at a given time from the vast store of information held in our memories. As we have already seen, the storage capacity of the brain is enormous. When people say that they have poor memories, what they mean is that their recall of something is temporarily weak.

Finally it's sometimes easier and more enjoyable to create new knowledge than to learn and retain existing knowledge.



identity development

- Self Development • Empowered Learning
- Dyslexia & Related Difficulties -an alternative approach

For more information on: **Talks, Workshops and Coaching**

contact: Lynne Smith

9 Bartholomews, Brighton, BN1 1HG Tel: 01273 723920

Email: lynne@identitydevelopment.org

www.identitydevelopment.org