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Mind is What Matters

Have you ever felt that when you go back to school from summer break, you just can't remember anything from the previous year? That is something that happens to me every single September; so I know that it can be tough to get your brain working properly for the new year.

Research over 100 years shows that kids typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of the summer than they do on the same tests at the beginning of the summer¹. I'm a pretty solid student throughout the year, but those first few weeks of school are a living nightmare for me. Can you believe that most students lose about two months of math skills over the summer? Math is probably my favorite subject in school, and even though I like it so much and am so good at it, it is probably the class that I have the most trouble with in the beginning of the year. Teachers usually spend four-to-six weeks re-teaching the material from the year before which pushes the information that is needed to be learned in the current year back.

Summer learning can be difficult, but it is possible. Research shows that only 10 percent of students nationwide participate in summer school². Experts suggest students should go to the library to promote the love of reading to get their brains clicking. Reading a few chapters of a book a day helps stimulate the mind. Another good way to keep kids' brains running smoothly is to have them keep a journal of things they do and see at museums, zoos, aquariums, and parks. It's a great way to keep improving those writing skills! Some good ways to help keep kids on track without going through the trouble of hiring a tutor is to have them do five-to-ten math problems a few days a week. Whether they are easy or hard, doing problems keeps your brain from collapsing. I know from personal experience that it can be tough to keep working over the summer. That is why some parents skip the weekly allowance and reward the kids when they complete a certain assignment. It's a very good incentive for staying on task. Just remember that parents, when the summer comes!

"I don't think that kids lose that much knowledge over the summer. I really believe that summer is an education in itself. Students need to be connected to other environments and

can learn from their connections over summer break. Many kids have summer jobs, take classes, go on family vacations, go to camps, or complete volunteer service. Each of these experiences can be filled with learning that they can connect to school knowledge. They might also visit relatives or spend more time with family. These experiences cannot be duplicated in school and make students more well-rounded. Students and teachers need the summer to recharge their batteries!” says Carol Jones, Short Pump Middle School Family and Consumer Sciences teacher.

Attending the National Leadership Conference is another great way for you to keep your mind sharp and learn new things. In addition to leadership training that is part of the meeting, there are also sessions on important youth issues and topics related to Family and Consumer Sciences.

As you can see, it is extremely important for students to keep their brains fit. Most students neglect to do work over the summer, but that can be changed with just a little work every week. Don't be a couch potato when it comes to learning because I don't want to find a “DO NOT DISTURB” sign on your brain. Keep your mind active with knowledge, creativity, and fun!

1. White, 1906; Heyns, 1978; Entwisle & Alexander 1992; Cooper, 1996; Downey et al, 2004
2. Ruth A. Peters, Ph.D. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com>, *How to Stanch Your Kid's Summer Learning Loss*