

Incorporating Brain Breaks Keeping Students Engaged

Brain Breaks are a quick and effective way of changing or focusing the physical and mental state of the learners in your group. They are also a useful tool for students to use to help activate, energize and stimulate their brains. Research indicates that brain breaks also improve students' concentration and relieve stress.

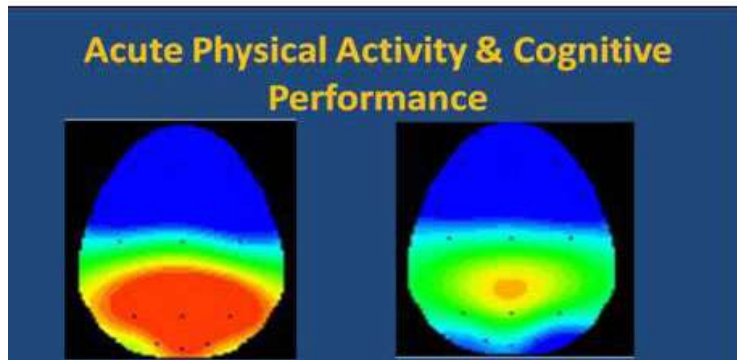


Some brain breaks focus on discussion or some specific verbal task. Others help students to clear their minds or meditate. The most effective brain breaks incorporate some level of physical movement in order to stimulate neurological pathways and help both hemispheres of the brain work together.

Students should have a kinesthetic brain break every 25-30 minutes. Brain break activities do take about 1-3 minutes of class time to complete; however, the efficiency of our students goes up when brain breaks are incorporated. Brain breaks are refreshing for both students and teachers. You should participate too!

Before implementing brain breaks in your classroom, be certain that you explain their purpose to students. Make certain that students understand that brain breaks are research-based and their efficacy has been scientifically proven. It will also be vitally important that you set behavior expectations before you begin. For example, remind students that everyone must participate and must give their best effort. Set a timer for the activity so that it doesn't exceed set time limits. If possible, project the written directions, explain them, and demonstrate the task. Finally, develop a technique for getting students to resume work immediately. You might have a 10-second count-down cue or play a short 10-second musical clip cue (like the Jeopardy song).

Any new instructional technique takes a few tries before it works effectively. Don't get discouraged or give up!



These scans of a student's brain were taken during a reading test. The picture on the left demonstrates the increased brain activity (red area) that occurred after a physical brain break. The picture on the right shows the student's brain after 30 minutes of uninterrupted testing.

- **Cross Crawl**

1. Stand up.
2. Place your right hand across the body to the left knee as you raise it.
3. Do the same thing for the left hand on the right knee just as if you were marching.
4. Do this for 2 minutes.

- **Finger Tips**

1. Stand up.
2. Make an X with your arms out in front of you with your palms facing you. Keep your fingers up in the air. Lock your thumbs together.
3. With your index finger on your right hand, try to touch each of the finger tips of your other hand, one by one.
4. Now take your middle finger on your right hand and do the same thing and touch the finger tips of your other hand one by one.
5. Do this same process for your ring finger and pinkie on your right hand.
6. Now do the process for your left hand index, middle, ring and pinkie fingers.

- **Blinky Thinky**

1. Stand up.
2. Blink your left eye while simultaneously snapping your fingers with your right hand.
3. Now blink your right eye and while snapping with your left hand.
4. Try to blink one eye while snapping on the opposite side's hand 15 times in a row alternating eyes. In other words, blink your left eye while simultaneously snapping with your right hand and then blinking your right eye while snapping with your left hand.

- **Sixes**

1. You may stand or remain seated for this activity.
2. Move your right foot in a clockwise circle,
3. Simultaneously, with your right pointer finger, write the number 6 in the air.
4. Repeat this pattern several times and then switch to the other foot and hand.
5. Try reversing the motions to counter-clockwise and the number 9.

- **The Nose Knows**

1. Stand up.
2. Grab your right ear lobe with your left hand, and your nose with your right hand.
3. Now switch. (In other words grab your left ear lobe with your right hand.)
4. Switch.
5. Repeat in rapid succession.

- **Push Your Brain Buttons**

This activity helps you increase the blood flow to your brain. It's great during testing!

1. Make a U-shape with the thumb and index finger of your right hand and place it in the center of your chest, just below your collarbone.
2. Place your other hand over your navel.
3. Gently press on these points in a pulsing manner for about 2 minutes.

- **Armed and Ready**

1. Stand up.
2. Reach up above your head with your left arm, lengthening from your rib cage.
3. Hold your arm just below the elbow with your right hand.
4. Now activate your left arm muscles isometrically for a few seconds in each of these positions: away from your head, toward your ear, forward, and backward.
5. Now switch arms and repeat.
6. Let both arms relax by your sides.

Pressure Point Massage

1. Stand up straight.
2. Gently massage the pressure point between your thumb and pointer finger for one minute.
3. Switch hands after 30 seconds.

• **Calm Down**

1. Stand or sit with the right leg crossed over the left at the ankles.
2. Take your right wrist and cross it over the left wrist.
3. Link your fingers so that the right wrist is on top.
4. Bend the elbow out and gently turn the fingers in toward the body until they rest on the center of your chest. Stay in this position.
5. Breathe slowly and deeply for 2 minutes.

• **Ear Acupressure**

Not only does this activity help with focus and short-term memory, it might actually help ease a headache.

1. Stand up straight.
2. Pinch your right ear lobe with your left hand, thumb in front.
3. Cross your right arm over your left and pinch the left ear lobe with your right hand, thumb in front.
4. Gently squeeze both ear lobes at the same time.
5. Place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth just behind your front teeth.
6. Inhale through your nose 15 times.

• **Calf Pumps**

1. Stand at arm's length away from a wall,
2. Place your hands, shoulder-width apart, against the wall with palms flat.
3. Extend your left leg straight out behind you so that the ball of your foot is on the floor and your heel is off the floor. Your body should be slanted at 45 degrees.
4. Exhale, leaning forward against the wall while also bending your right knee and pressing your left heel against the floor.
5. Inhale and raise yourself back up while relaxing and raising the left heel.
6. Do three or more times, completing a breath with each cycle.
7. Switch to the other leg and repeat.

• **Energy Yawn**

Just like any other high-powered computer, your brain can get overheated. Yawning actually helps cool your brain and it sends additional blood to re-energize the brain.

1. Massage the muscles around the junction of your jaws.
2. Let your bottom jaw drop and open your mouth to yawn.
3. Thinking about yawning and watching others yawn will help you to yawn.
4. Try to yawn deeply at least 5 or six times.

• **Rub-a-Dub**

1. Stand up.
2. Pat your head with your right hand.
3. Rub your stomach with your left hand.
4. Switch hands.



- **Finger-Thumb**

1. Stand up.
2. Put your fists together.
3. Point your index finger on one hand and stick your thumb out on the other hand
4. Now switch... and switch again...How fast can you go?

- **Friend Connect**

1. Stand up.
2. Partner up with a friend or someone you don't know.
3. Take 2 minutes to connect with a friend in class. Talk about your weekend or your day, or even how you are doing.

- **Mirror Drill**

1. Stand up.
2. Partners face one another.
3. Hold palms up in front of chest, facing partner.
4. The leader will move one hand at a time and the follower will mirror the movement.
5. Switch hands every minute.

- **Chair Action**

Teacher will need to play music for this one!

1. Sit on the edge of your chair or desk while keeping your back straight.
2. As your teacher calls out actions, do them in time to the music.
 - A. Hiking: Swing your arms and reach left and right while tapping your toes and lifting your knees.
 - B. Swimming: Students move their arms as if doing the front or back crawl and kick their legs in a flutter kick.
 - C. Cycling: Students hold on to the seat of their chairs and pedal their legs as if riding a bike.
 - D. Paddling: Students use an imaginary paddle to paddle a canoe (both sides).
 - E. Boxing: Students shadow box.

- **Chair Aerobics**

Dr. Rick Duvall has trained a number of teachers in Jacksonville how to incorporate these simple dance moves that are performed while seated. The use of music increases brain activity. A Finnish study indicates wide networks in the brain, including areas responsible for motor actions, emotions, and creativity, are activated during music listening.

- **Would You Rather...**

1. Stand up.
2. Your teacher will ask a question, and then designate a spot in the room for each option (ex. Would you rather be smart or popular? Smart stands by the door, and popular stands by the windows.)
3. Go to the spot that represents the option you chose.
4. Be prepared to tell why you made a particular choice. Your teacher will ask a few students to share.
5. Sample "would you rather" questions follow.

Brain Break “Would You Rather” Questions



1. Would you rather always take a cold shower or sleep an hour less than you need to be fully rested?
2. Would you rather always get first dibs or the last laugh?
3. Would you rather always have to say everything on your mind or never speak again?
4. Would you rather always lose or never play?
5. Would you rather always wear earmuffs or a nose plug?
6. Would you rather be 3 feet tall or 8 feet tall?
7. Would you rather be a deep sea diver or an astronaut?
8. Would you rather be able to hear any conversation or take back anything you say?
9. Would you rather be able to read everyone's mind all the time or always know their future?
10. Would you rather be able to stop time or fly?
11. Would you rather be an unknown NFL football player or a famous professional volleyball star?
12. Would you rather be forced to tell your best friend a lie or tell your parents the truth?
13. Would you rather be forgotten or hatefully remembered?
14. Would you rather be happy and poor or sad and rich?
15. Would you rather be invisible or be able to read minds?
16. Would you rather be rich and ugly, or poor and good looking?
17. Would you rather be stranded on an island alone or with someone you hate?
18. Would you rather be the most popular or the smartest person you know?
19. Would you rather be the sand castle or the wave?
20. Would you rather end hunger or hatred?
21. Would you rather find true love or 10 million dollars?
22. Would you rather get caught singing in the mirror or spying on your crush?
23. Would you rather get even or get over it?
24. Would you rather give bad advice or take bad advice?
25. Would you rather give up your computer or your pet?
26. Would you rather go to an amusement park or to a family reunion?
27. Would you rather go without television or junk food for the rest of your life?
28. Would you rather have a beautiful house and ugly car or an ugly house and beautiful car?
29. Would you rather have x-ray vision or bionic hearing?
30. Would you rather know it all or have it all?
31. Would you rather live without music or live without T.V.?
32. Would you rather love and not be loved back, or be loved but never love?
33. Would you rather make headlines for saving somebody's life or winning a Nobel prize?
34. Would you rather meet an alien visitor or travel to outer space?
35. Would you rather never use the internet again or never watch TV again?
36. Would you rather not be able to use your phone or your e-mail?
37. Would you rather only be able to whisper or only be able to shout?
38. Would you rather publish your diary or make a movie on your most embarrassing moment?
39. Would you rather spend the day surfing the internet or the ocean?
40. Would you rather have one wish granted today or three wishes granted in 10 years?