

DYK
DID YOU KNOW SERIES

MEMORY MATTERS

WHY YOUR BRAIN RESPONDS WELL TO READING ON PAPER

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DID YOU KNOW?

HOW COGNITIVE ABILITY IS BOOSTED THROUGH READING ON PAPER

Mobile devices and e-readers have changed the way we read. In fact, these devices have made it faster and easier to access more of the written word than ever before. But does the increase in availability and volume of written information mean we're reading better? A recent study¹ comparing reading in digital versus paper formats indicates comprehension — among other core competencies — is greater when reading on traditional paper as opposed to a screen. In fact, this same study suggests reading on paper is a better way to train your brain to process more complex information.

WHY PAPER

The human brain is a muscle like any other and exercising this muscle properly and regularly is important to keep it in shape. Studies show that reading in a paper format not only increases memory capacity but also makes us more careful, thoughtful readers that engage with information in a more substantive way. In addition, reading on paper has the capacity to increase our ability to focus more intensely for extended periods of time.

SOURCES

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1747938X18300101>

² <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=bled2014>

³ <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=bled2014>

⁴ <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.3758/BF03196979.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/16/well/family/children-reading-screens-books.html>

While it's nearly impossible to avoid reading on a screen in today's world, reading printed materials benefits your brain function in a variety of ways. Let's look at how.

GREATER RETENTION



Because so much of our digital reading takes the form of social media posts, blogs or other short-form content and requires little time or effort, our brains rapidly adapt to reading quickly — and just as quickly discarding what we've read as we scroll to the next post.² Reading in a paper format forces your brain to focus more closely and thus retain more information.

GREATER COMPREHENSION



Reading in a traditional paper context helps your brain understand, dissect and make connections with more complex information. Due in part to the lack of distraction that is part-and-parcel with digital reading — device notifications, digital ads or links to other websites — reading in a paper format allows you to focus on the information at hand and promotes a better understanding of what you're reading.³

BETTER MENTAL MAPPING



Your brain is not only constantly processing information, but it's also mapping where that information came from so it can be more easily recalled when needed. Whereas the ability to constantly scroll through a website, social media feed or e-book makes it difficult for your brain to orient where it encountered information, the more standardized nature of information on paper pages allows for easier and more reliable mental mapping to help you recall what you read faster and more accurately.⁴

EXPANDED ATTENTION SPAN



For athletes who only sprint, running a marathon is an arduous, challenging task. The same goes for readers who only read in short bursts, which is common in today's digital world. On the other hand, reading in a paper format where word counts exceed 500 words such as novels, non-fiction books and newspaper or magazine articles expands your attention span and trains your brain for longer durations of concentration and focus.⁵

RESOURCES

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