

Special points of interest:

- Rather than shipping your child off to a weeklong camp over summer break, engage with them in an organic fashion as you enjoy your break together.
- Supporters of using vacations for purposes other than formal learning reason that if children are allowed to take vacation days, their performance at their "job" will improve. The key is to moderate that vacation time with some real-life, meaningful learning as well.
- Finding a balance between taking a break and preventing brain drain will require some finesse, but once you and your kids are able to find that balance, you can get the best of both worlds. A child that is relaxed and refreshed, is one that doesn't need remediation when school resumes after vacation.



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Prevent Brain Drain and the Summer Slide

By: Jean Zitter, MSW, LCSW

Keep Your Kids' Minds Sharp During Summer Vacation

Meaningful learning doesn't necessarily mean your child needs to attend summer school or spend each day of winter break hunched over a book. There are all sorts of fun and creative ways that you can keep your child's mind active. Many of these methods make learning fun so that your child won't even realize that he or she is learning!

Take Advantage of Teachable Moments

Keeping your children engaged in learning doesn't have to be forced, nor does it have to take up a lot of their time or yours. If you've got a trip to a baseball game planned, spend some time with your child calculating batting averages or slugging percentages to keep mathematics on their mind. Take a trip to the zoo and have your child read the animal descriptions aloud to you to keep their reading skills fresh. Encourage your kids to keep a journal of their summer activities so they can practice their reading and writing skills.

Also think about spending some time as a family reading a book or a story, or make a habit of doing the daily crossword together. Have your child calculate the tip when you go to dinner, or make a budget for grocery shopping. Any little bit helps, and each of these activities will do the trick for maintaining your child's current skill level in math and reading. What's more, demonstrating that the skills they learn in school have actual applicability to real life will make their learning that much more valuable and meaningful.

Fun, Easy Ways to Keep Kids' School Skills Fresh This Summer

During the school-year, critical academic skills are regularly reinforced. Summer is a completely different story as most kids hardly pick up a pencil in June, July and August. Fortunately, it's possible to keep your kids' hard-earned learning from slipping down the summer brain drain. And you don't have to use tedious workbooks to get the job done! All you need are a few household items, a dash of creativity, and the following ideas for disguising school-year-caliber academic reinforcement as summer-style fun and games.

Reinforce Math Skills Using:

- ⇒ **A Deck of Cards.** The card game "War" provides an ideal means of solidifying basic math facts. Begin by removing all face cards and placing the pile face down on the table. Players pick two cards each, then add, subtract or multiply the two numbers together (depending on the skill you're practicing). The high scorer collects all played cards.
- ⇒ **A Soccer Ball.** Use a permanent marker to randomly fill the hexagonal sections of a soccer ball with the numbers 0-10 (repeating the numbers until covered); Throw the ball to your child and have him add, subtract or multiply the numbers closest to each thumb. See how many times you can toss the ball back and forth without making a mistake.
- ⇒ **A Basketball Hoop.** Keep those basic math facts in all star shape with a slam dunk competition. Every time your child answers a math question correctly let him take a shot. Offer a small prize when he reaches a designated number of points.
- ⇒ **Beads and String.** Fractions can make a fashion statement with some string and colored beads. Challenge your child to make a necklace that is $\frac{1}{2}$ blue or $\frac{1}{4}$ red. Or have her design her own beaded jewelry and figure out its fractional composition.
- ⇒ **M&M's.** Give your child a math story problem and have her "act it out" using the colorful candies. i.e. I had six M&M's and my dad gave me eight more, how many do I have now? I had twelve M&M's and my mom ate seven, how many are left? (I have to admit to favoring subtraction story problems when M&M's are involved — for obvious reasons.)
- ⇒ **Loose change.** Challenge your kids to grab a handful of coins, estimate the value and then count out the exact amount. Offer a 10% prize for close guesses.



Reinforce Language Arts Skills Using:

- ⇒ **A Wooden Block.** Write the words who, what, where, when, why and how on each face of a block. After reading a book or chapter with your child, take turns rolling the block and asking and answering story-related question beginning with the word on top. i.e. Who are the characters in the story? Where do they live?
- ⇒ **Magazines and Comic Books.** Even kids who cringe at the thought of reading a book cover to cover jump at the chance to flip through comics and magazines. Sneak in extra reading practice by stocking up on kid-friendly periodicals.
- ⇒ **Shaving Cream.** Cover a tabletop with plastic wrap and make a gooey shaving cream palette where little fingers can practice letters, spelling words and handwriting.
- ⇒ **Mad Libs.** These wacky fill-in the blank activities provide a fun and effective way to reinforce parts of speech. (And remember booger is a nouns).
- ⇒ **A Timer.** Designate a few times a week as Family D.E.A.R. time (Drop Everything and Read). Set the timer for 20 or 30 minutes of silent literary bliss.
- ⇒ **Index Cards.** Write the letters of a mystery word on blank index cards; scramble them up and have kids try to decode the secret word.
- ⇒ **Blank Paper.** Let kids create their own unique stationery using stickers, stamps and colorful markers, then put it to good use by writing letters to grandparents and friends.
- ⇒ **Sidewalk Chalk.** Writing your spelling words on plain old paper may be snooze city, but the scrawling them across the driveway is a totally different story. Chalk up the mess to academic advancement and let the rain take care of the clean up.

5 Ways to Help your Child Retain Academic Skills Over the Summer

As we quickly approach summer vacation, here are some other ways to help children practice academic skills throughout the summer and keep their young minds in working shape!

- ⇒ **Tip #1: Limit Screen Time**—The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends “Children and teens should engage with entertainment media for no more than one or two hours per day, and that should be high-quality content. It is important for kids to spend time on outdoor play, reading, hobbies, and using their imaginations in free play.”
- ⇒ **Tip #2: Play educational games**—Here is a list of easily made games your child can play at home that will help them with academic skills. They can easily be adapted to fit your child’s age and ability level.
 - * **Throw the Ball at the Letter**—Tape letters (or sight words) to a wall and call out a letter for your child to throw the ball at. Your child gets a point for every letter he successfully hits. Bonus: your child will work on their gross motor skills too!
 - * **Sight Word Hop Scotch**—This can easily be adapted to letters, skip counting, multiplication facts, etc. depending on your child’s level. Draw a basic hop scotch outline and fill it in with words your child has to hope to and call out loud.
 - * **Water Balloon Math**—Draw math facts on water balloons. When your child solves the problem, they get to throw the water balloon!
 - * **Sight Word Dive**—Write sight words on dive sticks if your child has access to the pool and can swim and have them dive for a specific word. Or, once they get the dive stick, they have to correctly read the word or throw it back!
 - * **Rhyming Bean Bag Toss**—Attach three different words, with three different endings, to three different buckets (ex: cat, man, rug). On bean bags, have words with similar endings taped or written on the bean bag. The child has to toss the bean bag in the correct bucket to make rhyming pairs (ex: they would toss the bean bag that says “fat” into the bucket that says “cat”).
 - * **ABC Twister**—Just like regular twister but instead of putting their arm on “red” they need to put their arm on the letter “b.” (again, adapt to math or sight words. I.e. Put your arm on the math fact that equals 15).
- ⇒ **Tip #3: Encourage exploration and adventure**—A child exploring their own backyard is a great catalyst for a growing imagination. Remember all the time you spent outdoors as a child before the invention of iPad, smart phones, and 100 tv channels? Create scavenger hunts for your child or let them make those mud pies and dirt cake. Let them enjoy the beauty of the garden (even if it means 1 or 2 flowers get stomped on) or play with those critters
- ⇒ **Tip #4: Allow your child to be bored**—My friend and previous co-worker who is now raising a toddler believes in the power of allowing your child to be bored. She writes “boredom often sparks the best ideas and adventures through creativity.” Be weary, if your child gets too bored that’s often when behaviors occur. But – if your child feels like they should be entertained every moment of every day, they will have difficulty at school when they are asked to attend to instruction or independently work. Such strong learning can happen when your child is required to be creative and explore naturally on their own.
- ⇒ **Tip #5: Practical application of academic skills**—Some practical ways you can put your child’s skills to work.
 - * **Lemonade sale:** Helps your child practice social skills and money management.
 - * **Baking:** Helps your child review baking and hygiene skills.
 - * **Grocery store/shopping:** Helps your child with math, social and life skills.



Use Technology to Facilitate Learning

Chances are your child has access to a mobile phone, tablet, or laptop, and putting those tools to good use is a logical step in fighting the vacation brain drain. A quick search of the app store reveals a host of great apps that incorporate fun and games with learning actual skills. Some excellent math websites and apps include:

- ⇒ [Quick Math Jr.](#) – Geared towards beginning mathematicians, this app improves number recognition and counting through game-play.
- ⇒ [NRICH](#) – This website keeps kids interested in math by presenting fun problems for them to solve. Games are available for kids of all ages.
- ⇒ [Numbers League](#) – This fun iPad app places users in a superhero role that must use math to save the city. Kids can play alone or against one another. For ages five and up.
- ⇒ [Math Shack](#) – This website offers activities that are aligned to the Common Core Math Standards. Kids can track their progress, and if they need help, an integrated help station will move things along. For middle and high school students.
- ⇒ [Brilliant](#) – This Google app challenges advanced learners in math and physics with advanced problems. Problems include explanations and examples to increase understanding. Also available as a [website](#).

If your child needs to brush up on their English language arts skills, there are an abundance of great websites and apps.

- ⇒ [The Joy of Reading](#) – Available on the iTunes store, this app promotes basic reading skills such as phonemic awareness and phonics. For ages 5 and under.
- ⇒ [Studycat](#) – Available for Android and iOS devices, Studycat's apps get kids involved in reading through entertaining and engaging games. Perfect for children 3-10 years of age.
- ⇒ [Mindsnacks](#) – This app tests kids' understanding of vocabulary and helps sharpen their reading and writing skills. For children in 2nd through 7th grade. Available for iOS devices
- ⇒ [YALSA](#) – The Young Adult Library Services Association offers a list of the best books of the year for young adults. Most books are available in paperback and digital formats.

There are hundreds of math and language arts-related apps on the iTunes and Google Play stores, many of which are free to download. Browsing the selection with your child will allow you to find something that is of interest to them, and which also meets your criteria for being something with educational value.

An excellent website that provides learning opportunities for kids of all ages is [Khan Academy](#). Their Common Core-aligned exercises are interactive and focus on real-world application of knowledge and skills. Lessons are personalized, and the site's software helps students identify where their gaps in learning and understanding exist. Complete curricula are available in math, science, economics, the arts, and the humanities. Various test prep courses are also available. The site is completely free as well.



Summer Learning During Travel

Travel with your child this summer! This does NOT mean I'm suggesting you need to take your child on an African Safari or a European tour in order to be prepared for their upcoming school year (although I imagine those trips would be filled with worldly educational experiences – I myself have never been to either Africa or Europe!).

Travel with your child to the local park, library, or museum. Visit Grandma or Grandpa out of town (and on the car ride play the license plate or alphabet game!). As your child is given the opportunity to experience the world around them, they will naturally take in information from environmental stimuli. They will see, discover, and learn things they wouldn't have had the opportunity to do just sitting at home.

Be present as you travel with your child. It is not enough to take your child to a museum and let them explore while you are on your own phone or iPad. Ask them inquisitive questions about what they see and what they like. Read books together at the library and help your child pick out books that are appropriate and interesting for their independent reading level.

Criticisms of Learning During Vacations

Although the body of research demonstrates that extended periods away from school and learning have deleterious effects on students' academic retention and performance, some critics argue that kids still need time away from school. Vacations are built into the schedule to allow students (and teachers) some time to recharge, have fun with family and friends, and get out into the world. If kids are forced to take part in academic activities during break periods, critics worry that kids will become overwhelmed.

Research seems to support this point of view, as workers that take more time off demonstrate better effectiveness at work, higher job satisfaction, and improved performance reviews. Supporters of using vacations for purposes other than formal learning reason that if children are allowed to take vacation days, their performance at their "job" will improve. The key is to moderate that vacation time with some real-life, meaningful learning as well.

To prevent overloading your child with academics and preserve their time to regain their energy, learning during vacations might best be done organically. Rather than shipping your child off to a weeklong camp over summer break, engage with them in an organic fashion as you enjoy your break together. Take advantage of the teachable moments discussed earlier to help create that strong connection between academics and real life. Take vacations that promote inquiry, exploration, and learning, such as visiting historical sites and museums.

Whether you prefer to have your child's vacation days full to the brim with organized learning or take a more laid-back approach, what's most important is that your child keeps their brain engaged when they aren't in school. Engagement doesn't necessarily mean sending your child to his or her room to read for hours on end on a nice summer day. Getting out with your child and being active can provide just as many chances for them to exercise their brains as it does for them to exercise their bodies.

As with all things, moderation is generally the way to go. Finding a balance between taking a break and preventing brain drain will require some finesse, but once you and your kids are able to find that balance, you can get the best of both worlds. A child that is relaxed and refreshed, is one that doesn't need remediation when school resumes after vacation. Enjoy all the fun and sunshine that your summer will bring.



Upcoming Events:

June 18, 2019:

Last day of school

July 4, 2019:

4th of July

September 2, 2019

Labor Day

September 5, 2019

First day of school

Next Issue:

September 9, 2019