

# 11 Summer Brain Builders



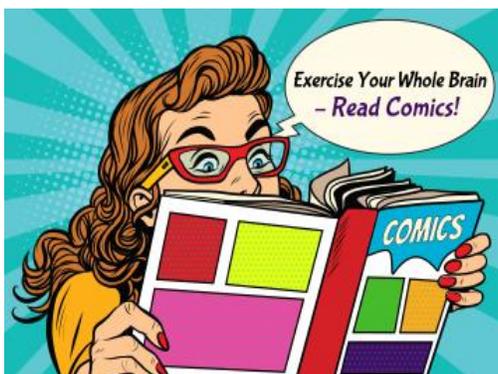
The brain is a muscle. It needs exercise to stay strong. For kids to help avoid the “summer slide,” this is particularly true. Children have to work hard to retain all those multiplication tables, punctuation rules, and history facts. Help them with these fun, friendly summer brain builders.

## #1 Stop the “Summer Slide”

While kids do need a break from school, this doesn't mean they need a break from learning. Studies show that children who don't exercise their brains during the summer can lose up to two months' worth of valuable, hard-won learning. For kids it's critical that they engage in educational activities year round to help them retain what they've worked so hard to achieve.

## #2 Read every single day

"It's very important for kids to read every day," says education specialist Sandra Rief. "Reading anything — comics, song lyrics, or magazines like *Sports Illustrated for Kids* or *National Geographic for Kids* — counts." The point is, kids will make reading a daily habit if the material taps into their interests and passions. Encourage independent reading by signing up your child for a summer book challenge at your local library or bookstore, and aim for books with no more than five foreign or frustrating words per page.



### **#3 Read together to check comprehension**

Motivate your child to engage with books by reading aloud to him and with him, taking periodic breaks to make sure he understands the material. Ask comprehension questions such as “What do you think will happen next?” or “Why do you think that character did that?” These discussions keep kids focused and help them retain what they've read.



### **#4 Build Reading Skills with Dyslexia**

Some children struggle with dyslexia — a common, language-based learning disability. If your child struggled to learn the alphabet, vowel sounds, and sight words, or stumbles slowly over words when reading, have your child evaluated right away. Children with dyslexia can benefit enormously from listening to audiobooks — a great tool to develop language skills, build comprehension, and expand vocabulary. Listen together and periodically take breaks to summarize the story and ask your child questions.

### **#5 Stress-free writing projects**

Writing can be stressful and intimidating for many kids. Children’s brains may struggle with the overlapping brain processes of planning, organizing and remembering long enough to get their thoughts on paper. Spelling and handwriting challenges only add to the anxiety, so focus on making writing fun and stress free over the summer. Encourage your child to start a multimedia blog, send emails to a friend or family member, begin a photo journal or scrapbook, write a comic book, or even draft photo captions for a summer photo album. For tech-savvy writers, consider investing in an app like Book Creator, Scribble Press, or StoryKit.



## #6 Review math skills with games

Fun, interesting math lessons lurk around every corner during the summer. Board games like Monopoly, Mastermind, and Qwirkle are terrific for practicing counting, adding, and subtracting. Money and dice games provide opportunity for math practice, too. Online interactive math games like FunBrain, Cool Math 4 Kids, and Math Cats also make practicing math skills less like work and more like play.



## #7 Presentation preparation

The new Common Core being implemented in 48 states now emphasizes oral presentation skills as a target competency. Help your child master public speaking by starting with subjects she finds personally interesting: performing a magic trick, building a go-cart, or cooking up a great meal. Together, write down key talking points on index cards, and help her rehearse. Once she's ready, she can present to you, a sibling, or a family pet. Use your smartphone to record a video.



## #8 Take reading to the stage

Amp up your child's oral reading fluency and public speaking skills by putting on a mini play together. *Readers' Theatre Scripts* are specially adapted from leveled children's books, but any book or poem your child is reading will do. Split up the parts, then have your child rehearse by reading and rereading his lines. Once he's ready, perform your scene together.



### #9 Take learning outside

Some kids just need to be outside. Turn whatever he's doing outdoors — building a fort, playing sports, climbing a tree, or swimming — into a learning experience. At the end of each day, ask your child to write a few sentences about what he did in a journal, or make a list of the things he should remember to bring to the beach tomorrow. Reading and writing can be done outside, too. Search for educational games that are of interest to your child and play them outside in the fresh air.



### #10 Build new organization systems together

Use the summer to devise new organization systems with a clean slate and fresh eyes. Redo his homework area together to make it a cooler and motivating place to work. Work together to add some new shelving, filing systems, or furniture to facilitate better work flow. And figure out what school supplies and systems he'll need to stay organized when the school year begins.

**#11 Sneak some previews of the upcoming year**

Ease your child into the academic year ahead by requesting early access to text books and reading lists for the year ahead. Begin talking about concepts casually. Before the other students return to school, arrange to walk your child through the halls and meet the new teacher in his classroom. Early meetings with the teachers are critical in making sure everyone is prepared and excited for the school year ahead.

