

Stay sharp this summer

Keeping your brain fit over the summer break doesn't have to be a bore or a chore, write *Olivia Hungerford* and *Eleanor Smallwood*.

The summer holidays are here – the time for your children to throw off their school uniforms and not give learning another thought until the new school year. Or is it?

The school holidays should always be fun and a way for kids to relax and refresh after a long year of studying. But, like a muscle, the more you use your brain, the stronger it gets. It needs constant exercising to stay in shape. As tutors, we often find that our students come back after the long summer holidays with flabbier brains and it can then take some time to rebuild the strength.

But, fear not: We don't need daily maths drills or to memorise the complete works of Shakespeare to stay brain-fit over the summer. Instead, there are lots of wonderful, fun ways to keep the brain active that won't even feel like work!

Activities for every brain

There are plenty of activities and exercises that we hope every child is

doing over the summer, no matter what age. Top of this list is to continue reading. Whether here or overseas, find out about your local library, if you haven't already, and make time to visit it, explore the books that are on offer and discover new genres of writing. Encourage your children to read independently, but also try to read some more advanced books together. Remember that a huge part of reading is talking about what you are discovering, enjoying or questioning in the book. Engage your children by asking questions about the characters and story, and guide them to look at the style of writing and to think about deeper meanings. We Hongkongers are so media-saturated that sitting down quietly with a book and then discussing it is a great way to unplug.

Board games are brilliant at building skills like strategising, cooperating and interpreting instructions, so bring out the Monopoly, Scrabble and Articulate! and play with your children over

the holidays. Or, for the more adventurous gamers, building your own board game as a family can be lots of fun. Get the children to work together leading the strategy for developing the rules, name and purpose of the game and designing how it is going to look and work.

Writing letters and postcards over the long holidays not only keeps your children writing and their penmanship in check, but will also be a wonderful relative-pleaser! Even if you aren't travelling abroad this summer, your children can keep in touch with their school friends and family by writing from Hong Kong and sending postcards that they can design themselves.

Remember to make the most of situations. If you are going on holiday abroad, encourage your children to research the culture, food, language and history of your destination. They can even put together a presentation to give to the family before you leave. If you are going to a museum or an exhibition, they can read a book





about the era of history or a particular artist. If you are going to see a movie, they can become a film critic, or if you are eating out, have them design their own recipes or become the family's restaurant critic.

Exercise is good for the brain as well as the body; it stimulates blood flow and encourages good sleep, so get out into the fresh air.

Hong Kong offers lots of summer camps. We run a popular workshop series for kids aged two to 13 that specialises in giving their brains a workout while they are learning and trying new skills. Consider signing up for our programme or one of the many others listed in last month's issue of this magazine.

Olivia Hungerford and Eleanor Smallwood are the founders of British Tutors, a company which brings the highest standard of academic tuition to homes in Hong Kong. The British Tutors Summer Workshop Series runs all summer long with a wide variety of programmes on offer. Learn more at www.britishtutors.com.

Smart ideas

Try one of these to get your child's summer off to a smart start.

For little learners (ages two to five years)

- Cut out pictures and words from old magazines to make a themed wall collage. It could focus on animals, food, vehicles or be an inspiration wall for all the things they'd like to do this summer – whatever inspires your little learner.
- Gather a group of friends, collect saucepans, dried pasta in jars, empty food tins and anything else you can imagine to make a junk percussion orchestra. See if you can get everyone playing together to make a recognisable tune. This seems to be a hit with boys particularly, although it makes for a noisy afternoon!
- To keep little ones thinking about their phonics and reading, make a sound shopping list. When walking around a store or



museum, find as many different objects as you can that begin with a chosen letter or sound.

- Cooking projects are always popular and are great for developing motor skills in younger children, and for understanding and following instructions with tangible (and enjoyable!) results.

For mini explorers (ages five to nine years)

- At the start of the summer, buy your mini explorer a big scrapbook. Over the course of the holidays, encourage them to document their activities with photos, ticket stubs and leaflets and to annotate it with their thoughts and illustrations. It'll make for a wonderful memento of the summer of 2014.
- Choose a theme for the summer – perhaps the country that you are visiting, a particular author that they are reading at the moment or even their favourite food. Create a project on the topic of interest, researching it online, with interviews, books and films. Keep it varied by encouraging them to include facts and figures alongside drawings, poems and photographs.
- Set up a treasure hunt, in your apartment, garden or across the whole of Hong Kong. Your mini explorer can create their own treasure map, clues and the treasure itself and ask their friends or siblings to participate.
- Head down to Pottinger Street and buy some fun costumes and props as the starting point for a home drama production, written, directed by and starring your kids.

For older kids (ages eight to 13 years)

- Encourage your kids to set up a mini enterprise at home – they could make, market and sell greeting cards or homemade ice cream to ward off the Hong Kong heat.
- Have them become a magazine editor, designing their own summer publication. They could start by choosing their topic, then designing a layout, writing articles and finding pictures to illustrate. Interested friends can be contributors.
- Encourage them to keep a holiday journal to write in every day. Have them read famous diarists like Anne Frank or Samuel Pepys and think about how to tell the story of their daily life using different writing styles.
- Have them write, produce and direct their own short film. From creating the story to finding locations, costumes and the cast, this is a great project with minimal equipment needed; they can use your iPhone or iPad as the camera and to edit. 

