

## **Coping with College Series**

### **Leisurely Reading Proves Helpful to All Students**

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I was never much of a reader growing up.

My family had the usual array of magazines -- Family Circle, Life, Reader's Digest, with and occasional National Geographic thrown in and, of course, the daily newspaper. But I fell in to the ranks of students who thought a book report on a 150 page book was quite an accomplishment.

Don't get me wrong, I was a serious student and I did very well in high school. But after homework, it never really occurred to me to pick up a book for leisure. I wonder if any of you can relate to this?

I've since changed my behavior. I'm an avid reader now.

In fact, one day while browsing through a book store, I discovered a book about the importance of reading by Jane Healy entitled "Endangered Minds." Healy highlights the relationship between reading the development of skills in concentration, reasoning and verbal ability.

Russian neuropsychologist Alexander Luria theorized that inner speech (talking to oneself though thinking in words) can strengthen the brain's executive function. Children develop reasoning abilities as their capacity to use language expands. Inner speech requires quite, contemplated time. Reading can facilitate the development of this inner speech. Being bombarded with sights and sounds of video games or TV or blasting commercials does not facilitate inner speech, but may, in fact, drown it out.

Healy's book reviews some conclusions from research: "TV displaces leisure reading and this inhibits the growth of reading skills; requires less mental effort than reading; may shorten the time children are willing to spend on finding an answer to intellectual problems and has a particularly negative effect on heavy viewers, social advantaged children and intelligent children."

As a nation, our attention span seems to be waning.

I have heard estimates that 20 percent of the people purchase 80 percent of the books in this country. Many of us can tolerate little more than a sound byte or commercial before we become restless. We are not a nation of readers.

I think college can be a difficult time to develop the habit of pleasure reading. Classes often require copious amounts of reading and sometimes you need a break.

But what is touted in sports may also be true for the cortex - you either use it or lose it.