
Ville Ojanen

Shaking up the brain

Instructions and Exercises for Improved Brain Skills

Shaking up the brain – Instructions and Exercises for Improved Brain Skills

"Zeal for doing, lust for action, leaves many a person, especially in this hurried and impatient human environment in which we live, with experience of an almost incredible paucity, all on the surface. No one experience has a chance to complete itself because something else is entered upon so speedily." John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934

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PART 1: WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR BRAIN?

Your brain is constantly changing. The connections between neurons change, cells become active or inactive, and they regenerate, die, are born, and generate new networks of connections. Your brain is in constant motion. This is why what you are, what you feel, and what you do are also constantly changing: your world is an experience produced by your brain. The question is whether you wish to influence the direction into which and the speed at which your brain – and your world – are changing.

If you wish, you can use this guidebook to study the basics of how to develop your brain using skills. However, the key objective of this guidebook is to motivate and assist you in engaging in high-quality concentrated repetition that will gradually change your brain. Did you know that your brain has an astonishing ability to learn, regenerate, and adapt itself?

With your brain, in the same package, you get your mind – your subjective experiences about yourself and your environment. Unlike, for instance, the computer I'm using to write this book, a human being has an experience of his or her existence. The brain and the mind are two sides of the same coin: they influence each other and are much more flexible than you'd think. The mind is a user interface that you can use to directly influence the way your brain works. The exercises described in this book will change your brain, which you can feel in your mind.

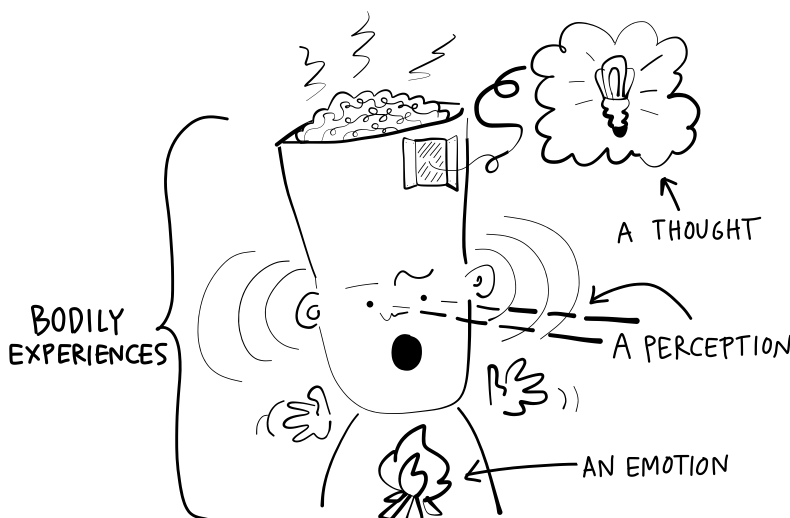
How does your mind actually work, then? What do you experience? Your experiences are made up of the four parts listed below.

Perceptions: what you can see, hear, smell, or taste with your senses.

Thoughts: the words, sentences, images, and ideas you turn over in your mind.

Emotions: what you feel, such as happy, sad, timid, angry, or astonished.

Your bodily experiences: whether you are refreshed and relaxed or tired and nervous, for example.



Take a pause and focus on your experiences. It might seem like a waste of time, but I can assure you – it definitely is not! If you take a look at your experiences to answer the question of what's going on right now in my mind, you will learn a lot about yourself and your brain. In the long term, your way of experiencing things determines how you use your brain and what you can achieve with it. Your brain has a unique ability to generate experiences – perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. We have experiences of ourselves and the world around us – just because we have a brain. The subjective and ever-changing *experiences* generated in your brain determine who you are and what you do. This is why you should stop and pay attention to your experiences. And not just stop but take action to influence them.

Take a pause to look at your current *experience*. What is the primary thing you are experiencing right now (such as "Excellent – I feel like singing out

loud" or "Half-hearted – I couldn't be less interested in what I'm doing")? Sharpen your focus – drill deeper and go wider; study everything about your experience: what are your perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and feelings? What do you feel deep down?

You can influence your experiences – and thus your brain – but only if you know what is your current *primary* experience and possibly also your *secondary* experiences. An experience consists of several simultaneously occurring and sometimes even contradictory levels that are changing. This does not have to be the case, but it often is.

Now, concentrate on thinking about what you should be doing. Are you in the right state of mind? Does your experience correspond to what you should be doing? If the answer is yes, it's the optimal time to get to work. If the answer is no, however, think about how you could flip your 'brain switch'.

So, how can you change the mode of your brain? Examples of good basic means include mental imagery, going to a new location, music, humor, discussions, coffee, and moving about, but basically only your self-knowledge and imagination limit how you can influence the mode of your brain – and the experiences it generates.

If you feel that studying your experiences is trivial, weird, or a manifestation of modern narcissism and people's tendency to be overly wrapped up in themselves, try to rise above these prejudices! The key to developing your brain lies in your own mind, and that is also where you can find the opportunity to get a happier, healthier, and more balanced life.

The starting point of this guidebook is studying your own experiences and molding them. The method is simple:

1. What am I thinking right now? Identify what your current experience is.
2. What am I supposed to do? How can I influence my brain function right now?

Now that we have reached the right dimension – experiences – and have warmed up a bit, we can start thinking about why shaking up the brain of a person of the information age is a good idea.

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Ville Ojanen is a psychologist with Phd in cognitive neuroscience. Ojanen is actively following the latest research and applying it in his work. He has extensive experience as a coach and trainer as well as first hand experience in knowledge intensive brain work as a researcher, HR professional, entrepreneur and consultant.



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