

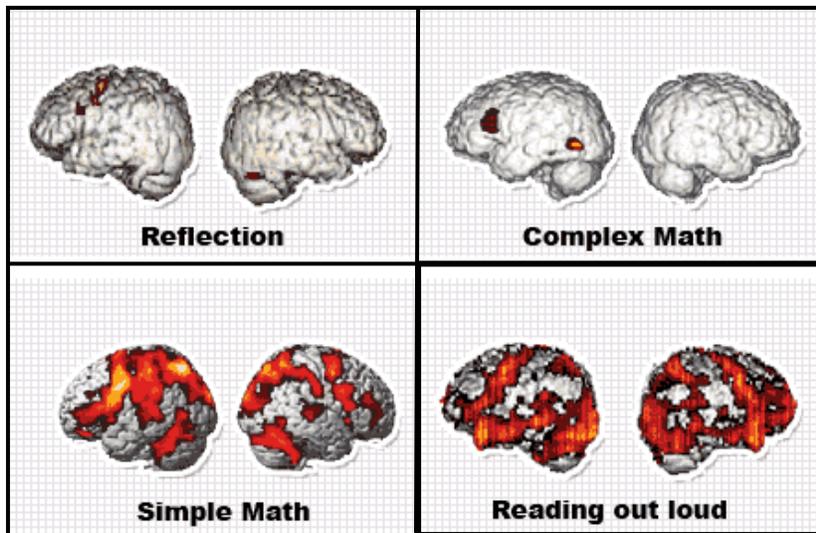
Training For Adults: Work Your Brain

This is your brain on DS. Find out how Nintendo's handheld and latest 'non-game' can make you smarter.

by [Peer Schneider](#)

July 5, 2005 - "Videogames are bad for you." If you spend a lot of time with your favorite gaming handheld in public, you've probably heard this sentence once or twice before. While most people have no problem subscribing to beliefs that attribute increased reaction times and better hand-eye coordination to regular exposure to games, "making you smarter" isn't usually a trait associated with gaming. Author Steven Johnson may have argued the opposite in his recent book "Everything Bad Is Good For You," but popular sentiment still maintains that games are pure entertainment; brainless visual stimulation and reaction tests that keep you amused when you want to sit back and escape the real world.

Enter the beautifully titled Touhoku Daigaku Mirai Kagakugijutsu Kyoudoukenkyuu Center: Nou wo Kitaeru Otona no DS Training. Got that? Okay, perhaps an English translation will help: Touhoku University Future Science Collaborative Research Center's DS Training For Adults: Work Your Brain. Released in Japan earlier this summer for the low price of Yen 2,800, Work Your Brain is a collection of simple math and reading challenges custom-designed to stimulate different areas of your brain.



To add some variety -- and brawn -- to the predominantly action-oriented lineup of DS titles, [Nintendo](#) went to Touhoku University professor Ryuuta Kawashima, who believes that regular "brain exercises" can counteract forgetfulness and help train memory and creative thinking.

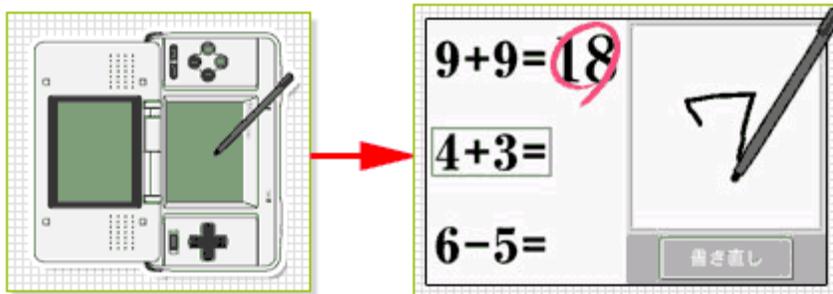
MRI (Magnetic Resonance Image) diagrams that measured brain activity of 120 test subjects between the ages of 20 and 70 at the university's Future Science

Collaborative Research Center (some of the diagrams are featured in the manual and the game itself) show the difference in brain activity in a variety of situations.

For example, passive activities like watching television stimulate mostly the occipital lobe at the back of your head while solving mathematical challenges causes the "juices" to flow in larger areas of your brain.

According to the researchers, reading out loud and doing simple calculation are especially effective for training memory.

DS Training For Adults: Work Your Brain takes this concept and runs with it. The title challenges



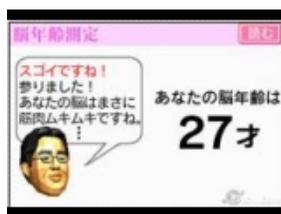
players to perform a variety of exercises every day, from solving simple math problems to reading on-screen text out loud. Players have a choice of three main modes: Trial, Daily Training, and Download Play.

The Daily Training mode is of course at the heart of Work Your Brain. Up to four different people can register their names (by scribbling their signature on the touch screen) and perform an initially simple daily training program that becomes more and more complex the more often you return. To start, you turn the DS sideways. The left screen shows the challenges while the right (touch) screen is used to input answers, draw pictures, or connect dots. Every time you complete a challenge, you are ranked according to speed and validity of the solutions you provided. In addition to quick competitive top 3s, the [game](#) also tracks each contestant's daily progress and provides line graphs and commentary to illustrate what's going on.

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All



16 Images

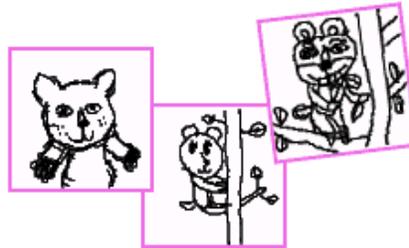
The challenges themselves are varied. One test displays the words "yellow, red, blue, and black" in random succession on the left screen. Whenever a word appears, you are required to say the color out loud -- the only catch is that it's the color of the word you're meant to recognize, not the word itself. Only if you say "red" out loud when you see the word **black** will you move on to the next one. This sounds easy, but when you're put on the spot to recognize colored words in a time challenge, you're guaranteed to stumble a few times. After a set number of words, you are ranked and able to move on to other challenges, such as arithmetic or reading.

For the math challenges ($0 \times 3 = ?$, $11 - 8 = ?$, $6 + 5 = ?$, etc.), you simply write the answers to the problems on the touch screen as quickly as you can. The beginning course has you solve 20 of these as fast as possible, but as you progress, you can test yourself for longer periods of time. A different exercise flashes single-digit numbers arranged on top of squares placed around the screen. The numbers then disappear and you have to tap the boxes in the correct numerical order to solve the puzzle. Yet another challenge has a certain number of little men walking into a house from the right side of the screen, followed by a certain number leaving the house to the left. You cannot see how many men are inside the house, only how many enter and how many leave. As the speed of the challenge increases, you have to focus on both sides of the screen to count exactly how many men remain. With all of the numerical challenges, entry is done entirely with the stylus -- and the number recognition is exceptionally good. There's just something rewarding about writing the answers down yourself versus selecting them from a multiple choice list.

Other challenges, such as reading or drawing rely on the player's honesty and self-judgment. For example, you are shown a few pages of text to read aloud. There is no voice recognition in this [case](#). You're meant to hit "stop" once you're done reading and you're rated based on how long it took you. To break up the challenges and test your memory, Work Your Brain once in awhile asks you to write down what you had for dinner the previous day or encourages you to draw pictures. These can include animals (giraffe, koala) followed by the shape of a continent (Africa, Australia). Upon completion, you are shown an ideal drawing and left to compare it on

your own. If other players in your household are using the same cartridge to train themselves, you also get to see their interpretations which can be quite amusing depending on their artistic abilities.

DS Training For Adults: Work Your Brain uses really simple graphics for a text book-like look. Distractions are kept to a minimum during the challenges. Once they're over, iconized black and white sprites coast across the screen and there's a really basic polygonal representation of Ryuuta Kawashima's head to illustrate



whether you're making progress. Remember PilotWings? If you're making great strides, Kawashima will make an amazed face, eyes and mouth wide open, just like the flight instructors from the classic Super NES [game](#).

Despite the matter-of-fact presentation, there are some spurts of on-screen creativity as well. For example, once you complete a number of challenges, you are allowed to place a stamp in a calendar. There's a default stamp, but you can design your own custom "hanko" using stylus and touch screen as well. You can also access a special "brain age check" mode that assigns you an age value based on your performance and there's even a 16-player competitive mode that pits your math skills against others, wirelessly.

As much as DS Training For Adults: Work Your Brain sounds like a chore, it's actually a lot of fun. You've got to credit [Nintendo](#) for trying to do something different and delivering it at a time when games are largely moving toward more complexity and realistic design. Sure, you could download mind exercise programs on your PC or spring for a LeapPad for your kids, but it's the concept of taking something that's not quite a game and putting it on a gaming handheld that makes titles like these so special.

Potential importers, be warned. Work Your Brain requires Japanese reading, writing, and spoken language skills to work. Here's hoping that Nintendo of America follows suit and introduces this title as an intelligent little diversion alongside its usual lineup of [games](#) -- low price and all.