



mattmcwilliams.com

# How to Retain More of What you Read

## **Thinking of sitting down with a good book that you want to learn from?**

Let me tell you why that may not be a good idea.

My trainer was running late for our first appointment.

I didn't want to just sit around and get cold, so I paced my living room and I read Proverbs. The entire book.

And I remembered much of it. I made a mental note that I unfortunately forgot about for the next six years. That mental note said:

We retain more of what we read when we are active.

## **The research**

There are countless studies that show that activity is one of the two most important keys (sleep is the other) to creativity, better decision-making, and retention of information.

In Ireland, a team of researchers discovered that our brains work better following exercise (the same is true of *during* exercise). They showed a rapid succession of headshots to a group of students. Each picture had the name of a total stranger (i.e. "John Smith"). After a quick break, they were asked to match the names to the photographs.

Next, half of the students were asked to sit quietly for 30 minutes. The other half rode a stationary bicycle. Then both groups repeated the memory test.

I'm sure at this point that you can guess the results. *The exercise group remembered names better* than they had just shortly after seeing the photographs the first time. The sitting group did not.

## **Why movement helps memory**

Movement helps memory due to a protein known as BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor).

Both groups in this experiment gave blood samples after the 30 minute sitting or exercise period. The exercise group had significantly higher levels of BDNF, which helps "to support the survival of existing neurons, and encourage the growth and differentiation of new neurons and synapses." (*From Wikipedia*) In laymen's terms, it does the body good.

### **So why walking while you read?**

I advocate walking while reading, or at least standing while moving, because it is simple to do. I'm not suggesting you go for a stroll down a busy sidewalk, head buried in your book. I'm suggesting that you simply move around an open room, do laps around the dining room table, or even just move in place. It will significantly increase your comprehension and retention of the information. It will also increase the number of ideas you get from the reading. I noticed a significant increase in the number of written notes in the books I've read while walking compared to the ones I've read while sitting.

Not to even mention...the movement is good for your whole body. Essentially, I can exercise my body while exercising my mind. Rather than sit still and feel stiff after an hour of reading, I feel energized. Even 30 minutes of light walking while reading versus sitting can be worth 5-20 pounds a year in weight loss.

### **Bonus activity**

If you want to throw in a few minutes of heart-pumping exercise before, during, and after your reading sessions, go right ahead. It will only increase your retention and creativity. I'll often set the book down for 30 seconds after each chapter and run in place or do a set of pushups, jumping jacks, or squats. It really does work!

If you want to get more out of what you're reading, get moving!

***What tips do you have to get more out of what you read?***