

Hippopotomonstro- sesquipedalianism as a Brain Exercise

Derek Pugh



BCEI Booklet #12

Hippopotomonstrosesquipedalianism as a Brain Exercise

Hippopotomonstrosesquipedalian is a wonderful word. Its definition is shorter than it is. It simply means 'using long words'.

Long words for the sake of long words can obfuscate and intimidate receivers of your communicated lexicon. See what I mean? I meant using long words can hide your meaning and leave your listeners or readers confused. So why would anyone want to be hippopotomonstrosesquipedalianistic? The answer is that it is fun. You can continue to explore our language and find words that few people understand. You can use them for comic effect or to impress others with your erudition, err, how much you know, or perhaps bore them silly. For me the best reason is it is good brain exercise.

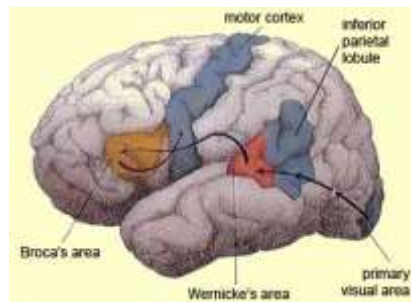
The Science behind the Exercise:

Learning words and language in general means a physical change in your brain. New learning is the result of neurones making new connections with other neurones, which creates new electro-chemical circuits in our brains. When there are enough of them and they're strengthened by use this becomes a memory. Language learning involves several parts of your brain worth noting. Broca's area, in the frontal lobe, stores words, grammar and syntax and Wernicke's area in the temporal lobe, which is where spoken language is deciphered and given meaning. These two are connected, and of course it doesn't

Hippopotomonstrosesquipedalianism as a Brain Exercise

work as simply as I can describe in one sentence. Both Broca and Wernicke's areas are most often found in the left hemisphere of the brain, though for some people they are on the right.

A third language area of note, which is late to mature and might explain why it takes several years before we start learning how to read and write, is the inferior parietal lobule, found just behind Wernicke's area. These three parts of the brain are linked by thick nerve bundles so clearly are in full communication with each other all the time. The looping nerve bundle from Wernicke's area to Broca's is called the *arcuate fasciculu* – but there is no reason to know that unless you want to awe your friends with comments like “just one moment, I need my arcuate fasciculu to deliver that message in order to formulate and articulate my reply”.



From McGill, *The Brain from Top to Bottom*.

The Exercise

Anything that is novel is a brain exercise. Neurobiologist Lawrence Katz and author Manning Rubin combined their

www.derekpugh.com.au

Hippopotomonstrosesquipedalianism as a Brain Exercise

talents and invented the term neurobics. Neurobics, they suggest, keep your brain alive and hold back the effects of aging. Exercising your brain is as important for health as exercising your muscles. Using multiple senses in new and unusual ways stimulates nerve cells and productions of nerve chemicals (neurotrophins) resulting in brain growth. Continued use of new circuits strengthens them and allows for continued strengthening. When you break routines in unexpected ways, engage in novel fun activities or use new senses for old tasks (try learning Braille to read) you are doing neurobics. Learning new words for any reason that motivates you, for example, comic effect, is also neurobic. Try these sentences out on your friends:

“You are phenomenally pulchritudinous!” (Extremely beautiful)

“He’s a steatopygous blatherskite!” (Fat arsed gossip).

You see? The English language is the biggest language in the world so we might as well use it. Increasing your vocabulary can be as much a game as anything else and it has the advantage of making your speech more interesting by giving you more options. It is also neurobic which leads to improved brain health.

References

Katz, L and Rubin, M (1999) *Keep Your Brain Alive, 83 Neurobic Exercises*, Workman.

McGill, *The Brain From Top to Bottom*, <http://thebrain.mcgill.ca>

Visit www.braincompatibleeducation.com for more free information booklets about brain compatible education.

Hippopotomonstrosesquipedalianism as a Brain Exercise



Derek Pugh is an experienced Principal and teacher in both Australian and International Schools. He now runs workshops in Brain Compatible Education for students, teachers, parents and corporate groups worldwide. Workshop participants discover the

latest in neuroscience and why knowledge of the brain is a powerful tool in education; the 'SEWBaD model' of preparation for learning; what brain 'plasticity' means to education; individual learning profiles and how to use them for effective learning and teaching; how to teach or learn efficiently; and models of brain operation and function.

He is the author of "The Owner's Guide to the Teenage Brain"

www.derekpugh.com.au