

1. **Mark your confusion.**
2. **Show evidence of a close reading.**
3. **Write a 1+ page reflection.**

The Reading Brain: Why Your Brain Needs You To Read Every Day

Source: Thomas Oppong, medium.com

Reading puts your brain to work. Reading is to the mind what exercise is to your body. It gives us freedom to roam the expanse of space, time, history, and offer a deeper view of ideas, concepts, emotions, and body of knowledge. Roberto Bolaño says, “Reading is like thinking, like praying, like talking to a friend, like expressing your ideas, like listening to other people’s ideas, like listening to music, like looking at the view, like taking a walk on the beach.” Your brain on books is active—growing, changing and making new connections and different patterns, depending on the type of material you’re reading.

Reading heightens brain connectivity

Our brains change and develop in some fascinating ways when we read. As you read these words, your brain is decoding a series of abstract symbols and synthesizing the results into complex ideas. It’s an amazing process. The reading brain can be likened to the real-time collaborative effort of a symphony orchestra, with various parts of the brain working together, like sections of instruments, to maximize our ability to decode the written text in front of us.

Reading rewires parts of your brain. Maryanne Wolf explains in her book, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*: “Human beings invented reading only a few thousand years ago. And with this invention, we rearranged the very organization of our brain, which in turn expanded the ways we were able to think, which altered the intellectual evolution of our species. . . . Our ancestors’ invention could come about only because of the human brain’s extraordinary ability to make new connections among its existing structures, a process made possible by the brain’s ability to be reshaped by experience.”

Reading involves several brain functions, including visual and auditory processes, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and more. The same neurological regions of the brain are stimulated by reading about something as by experiencing it. According to the ongoing research at Haskins Laboratories for the Science of the Spoken and Written Word, reading, unlike watching or listening to media, gives the brain more time to stop, think, process, and imagine the narrative in from of us. Reading every day can slow down late-life cognitive decline and keeps the brains healthier.

It enhances fluid reasoning

Research shows that reading not only helps with fluid intelligence, but with reading comprehension and emotional intelligence as well. “Fluid intelligence” is that ability to solve problems, understand things and detect meaningful patterns. Reading can increase fluid intelligence, and increased fluid intelligence also improves reading comprehension. Research at Stanford showed a neurological difference between reading for pleasure and focused reading, as if for a test. Blood flows to different neural areas depending on how reading is conducted. A 2011 study published in the *Annual Review of Psychology* found overlap in brain regions used to comprehend stories and networks dedicated to interactions with

others.

Reading makes you emotionally intelligent

Fiction is a social experience. The reading process plays an important social function. While reading fiction, you mentally imagine the event, the situation, the characters, and the details described by the author. It's a total immersion process. In her book, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, Anne Lamott writes, "For some of us, books are as important as almost anything else on earth. What a miracle it is that out of these small, flat, rigid squares of paper unfolds world after world after world, worlds that sing to you, comfort and quiet or excite you. Books help us understand who we are and how we are to behave. They show us what community and friendship mean; they show us how to live and die."

Psychologists David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, at the New School for Social Research in New York, have proved that reading literary fiction enhances the ability to detect and understand other people's emotions, a crucial skill in navigating complex social relationships. "What great writers do is to turn you into the writer. In literary fiction, the incompleteness of the characters turns your mind to trying to understand the minds of others," said Kidd. Researchers at Emory University found that reading a novel heightens connections in the parts of the brain that deal with language reception. The study's lead author, neuroscientist Gregory Berns, says it also taps into a process known as grounded cognition. "The neural changes that we found associated with physical sensation and movement systems suggest that reading a novel can transport you into the body of the protagonist. . . . We already knew that good stories can put you in someone else's shoes in a figurative sense. Now we're seeing that something may also be happening biologically."

It improves concentration

In a single 30 minutes span, the average person will divide their time between working on a task, checking email, talking to colleagues, keeping an eye on social media, and constantly reacting to notifications. Reading not only improves your brain's connectivity, it also increases attention spans, focus and concentration. If you struggle to focus, reading can improve your attention span.

When you read a book, all of your attention is focused on the story or gaining a better understanding of a particular topic— the rest of the world just falls away, and you can immerse yourself in every fine detail you're absorbing. Books with better structures encourage us to think in sequence—the more we read, the more our brains are able to link cause and effect. Try reading for 15–20 minutes in the morning before work (i.e. on your morning commute, if you take public transit). You'll be surprised at how much more focused you are once you get to the office. Losing yourself in a book is the ultimate relaxation!

Embrace the reading habit

In a world where information is the new currency, reading is the best source of continuous learning, knowledge and acquiring more of that currency. Reading requires patience, diligence, and determination. Reading is like any skill. You have to practice it, regularly and constantly. Where you prefer the alluring glow and convenience of a smartphone or the sense of control of a paper book, by all means make time to read. Next time you choose a book from the shelf, or download a new title on your Kindle, stop and think about what you're reading—it could impact you more than you realise!

Possible Response Questions:

- What are your thoughts on reading for pleasure?

- What do you think has caused a decline in reading among the American population? How do we fix it?
- Pick a quote or passage from the text and respond to it.