

## An Advanced Placement Program Student Resource

**10 Habits of Highly Effective Brains**

1. **Learn** what is the "It" in "Use It or Lose It". A basic understanding will serve you well to appreciate your brain's beauty as a living and constantly-developing dense forest with billions of neurons and synapses.
2. Take care of your **nutrition**. Did you know that the brain only weighs 2% of body mass but consumes over 20% of the oxygen and nutrients we intake? As a general rule, you don't need expensive ultra-sophisticated nutritional supplements, just make sure you don't stuff yourself with the "bad stuff".
3. Remember that the brain is part of the body. Things that **exercise your body** can also help sharpen your brain: physical exercise enhances neurogenesis, the development of new neurons.
4. Practice **positive**, future-oriented **thoughts** until they become your default mindset and you look forward to every new day in a constructive way. Stress and anxiety, no matter whether induced by external events or by your own thoughts, actually kills neurons and prevent the creation of new ones. You can think of chronic stress as the opposite of exercise: it prevents the creation of new neurons.
5. Thrive on **Learning** and **Mental Challenges**. The point of having a brain is precisely to learn and to adapt to challenging new environments. Once new neurons appear in your brain, where they stay in your brain and how long they survive depends on how you use them. "Use It or Lose It" does not mean "do crossword puzzle number 1,234,567". It means, "Challenge your brain often with fundamentally new activities".
6. We are (as far as we know) the only self-directed organisms in this planet. **Aim high**. Once you graduate from college, keep learning. The brain keeps developing, no matter your age, and it reflects what you do with it.
7. **Explore, travel**. Adapting to new locations forces you to pay more attention to your environment. Make new decisions, use your brain.
8. **Don't Outsource Your Brain**. Not to media personalities, not to politicians, not to your smart neighbor... Make your own decisions, and mistakes. And learn from them. That way, you are training your brain, not your neighbor's.
9. Develop and maintain **stimulating friendships**. We are "social animals", and need social interaction.
10. **Laugh. Often**. Especially to cognitively complex humor, full of twists and surprises.

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