

Math Is Training for Your Brain

A Math Teacher Answers the Question: What's the Point?

Sarah Lonberg-Lew

BEFORE YOU READ: What do you think is the point of learning math?

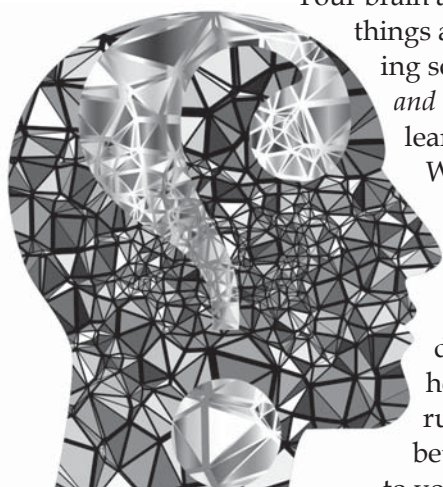
When you're sitting in a math class trying to figure out how to add $\frac{5}{7}$ and $\frac{3}{19}$, you may wonder why you're doing it. When will you ever need to add such ugly fractions, especially when there are calculators that will do it for you? The truth is that very few people ever need to add $\frac{5}{7}$ and $\frac{3}{19}$ —

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even with a calculator. Numbers like that just don't come up in our lives. So what's the point? The point is that wrestling with difficult concepts is like exercise for your brain. It makes your brain stronger, faster, and more flexible. When you take on *understanding* how to add fractions, you push your brain to create new connections.

Your brain accomplishes two things at once: learning something new *and* getting better at learning new things.

When you need to learn a new skill for a job or when you need to learn how to deal with new health insurance rules, you will be better at it, thanks to your math training.



You may think the worst thing you can encounter in a math class is a word problem. Wouldn't it be easier if the book would just tell you what math to do instead of making you figure it out *and* do the math?

There's no limit to how smart you can get.

It might be easier, but you would miss out on a chance to train your brain in something valuable. When you solve word problems, you are learning good problem-solving skills. When tackling a word problem, you ask questions like,

- What do I know? And what do I not know?
- What can I figure out? And what tools do I need to figure it out?

These are not just good questions to ask in math class, they are good questions to ask when you are faced with real problems. Becoming a better problem-solver in math class will make you a better problem-solver in life.

One of my best teachers told me, "Studying math makes you smart." It doesn't just make you smart at math, it makes you smarter in general. And there's no limit to how smart you can get.

AFTER YOU READ: What is the main point of this article? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

Sarah Lonberg-Lew has been teaching and tutoring math in one form or another for over 20 years. She teaches in an adult education program in Gloucester, MA, and works with the SABES numeracy team developing and facilitating trainings and assisting programs with curriculum development.