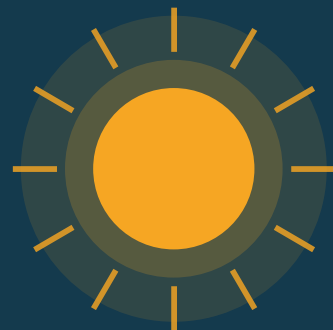


A COGNITUTOR WEBINAR • PART 2 OF THE LEARNING SERIES



Growing Brains All Summer Long

How a Few Small Summer Habits Protect the Progress Your Child Fought to Make

*the follow-up to **Trust Before Textbooks***

What You'll Walk Away With

By the end of today, you'll be able to...



Understand the "summer slide"

Why skills fade without practice — and why it's brain science, not bad behavior.



Protect progress in just minutes

Use short, everyday moments instead of worksheets and battles.



Grow reading, math & writing naturally

At the kitchen table, in the car, at the store — no flashcards required.



Take the pressure off yourself

You don't have to be the teacher to keep your child learning.



Know when extra help makes sense

Spot the signs and find support before the new school year begins.

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU

When summer starts, what worries you most?

Drop your answer in the chat — there are no wrong ones.



Falling behind



Reading



Math



Writing



Motivation



I'm not sure

The "Summer Slide" Is Real

≈ 2–3

MONTHS

of the year's learning can quietly fade over one summer — and it runs deepest in math and for kids who've had school interrupted.



Math facts fade fastest.

Skills built on memory and recall slip first when practice stops.



Reading fluency slows.

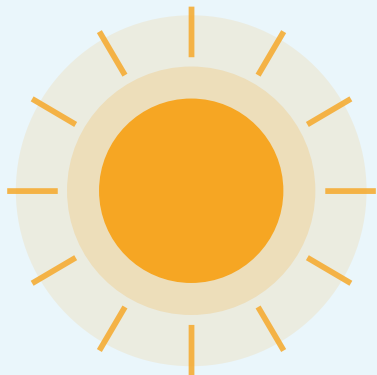
Without regular reading, words come less automatically in the fall.



The gap can widen.

Kids who were already behind don't just pause — peers keep moving.

Atteberry & McEachin (2021)



DID YOU KNOW?

**It's not that they forget —
it's that the brain trims what it stops
using.**



Use it or trim it

The brain keeps the connections a child uses and trims the ones they don't — that's neuroplasticity.



Small gaps compound

A little loss each summer can stack into more than a full year of learning across elementary school.



It bounces back

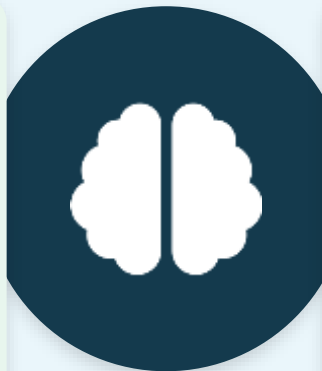
Skills that fade with rest return quickly with light, regular practice — the pathways are still there.

The Brain Is Like a Muscle



When they practice

- Connections fire and grow stronger.
- Skills become faster and automatic.
- Confidence climbs with each win.



When practice stops

- Unused connections quietly weaken.
- Skills get slower and effortful.
- "I can't" creeps back in.

Just like a muscle, learning grows with use — and these skills can be built at any age. Birtwistle et al. (2025)

What a Long Break Does to Unused Skills



Reading slows

Words that were automatic start needing effort again.



Math facts fade

Recall of facts and steps gets rusty without reps.



Writing stiffens

Putting thoughts on paper feels harder and slower.



Focus routines fade

The rhythm of sitting and sticking with a task loosens.



The good news: none of this is permanent. What fades with rest comes back fast with a little regular practice — often in days, not months.

THIS MATTERS EVEN MORE FOR OUR KIDS

Why It Hits Harder — and How Practice Closes the Gap

Classmates who keep practicing



A child who pauses over summer



Children who are already behind don't simply hit pause — because their peers keep moving in new ways, the distance between them can grow. Disrupted school histories make this even more common for children in foster, kinship, and adoptive homes.



Every bit of practice helps close the gap.

Lynch et al. (2023); Brunner (2025)

TAKE A MOMENT

Before we get practical — picture what your child loves

Their favorite thing is the doorway. Summer learning rides on what already lights them up.



Animals



Sports



Drawing



Music



Building



Cooking

Practice Doesn't Make Perfect — It Makes Permanent



Frequent

A few times a week beats one long cram. Spacing it out is what locks it in.



Small

Five or ten focused minutes is plenty. Tiny and repeated wins the summer.

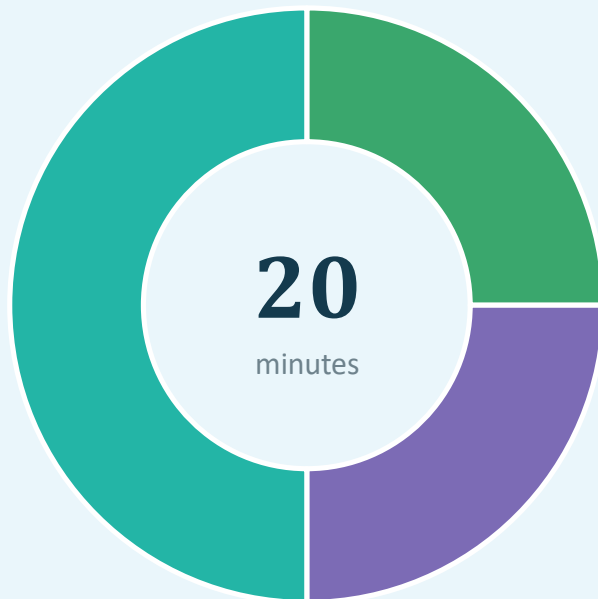


Consistent

The same light rhythm, most days, turns effort into automatic skill.

Not hours. Minutes — sprinkled across the week — are what the brain holds onto. *Murray et al. (2025)*

Just 20 Minutes a Day Makes a Difference



5 min

Read aloud together — a recipe, a comic, anything.



5 min

Write something real — a text, a list, a note.



10 min

Play one math game — cards, dice, store math.

Reading Is So Much More Than Books

If there are words on it, it counts. Meet your child where their interests already are.



Recipes



Road signs



Comics & graphic
novels



Menus



Game guides



Sports articles



Audiobooks
together



Instructions

Remember slide 9: picking their favorite thing? A dinosaur kid reads dinosaur books. A gamer reads the strategy guide. Follow the interest.

Talk About Books — Don't Quiz About Them

INSTEAD OF

"What happened in the story?"

(One right answer. Conversation over.)



TRY ASKING

- Why do you think she did that?
- What would YOU have done?
- What surprised you?
- What do you think happens next?

Open questions turn reading into a back-and-forth — and that conversation is what grows language. Frizelle et al. (2023)

Math Is Already All Around You

"You don't have to be good at math to grow a mathematician."



Cooking

Double the recipe — how much now?



Shopping

Compare prices, count the change.



Sports

Scores, averages, who's ahead?



Travel

Time, distance, "are we there yet?"



At a restaurant

Figure out the tip together.



Everyday time

"We leave in 15 minutes."

Everyday "math talk" at home predicts stronger math skills. Daucourt et al. (2021)

Writing Without the Worksheet



Postcards & cards



A summer journal



The shopping list



A bucket list



Texts to family



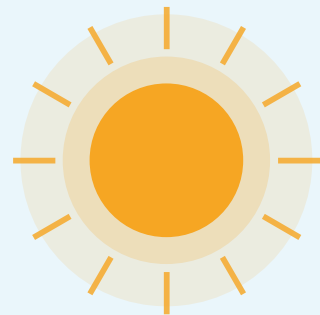
Comic captions



Writing builds thinking

- Organizes ideas
- Strengthens memory
- Expresses big feelings
- Grows vocabulary

TRY THIS WEEK



Three Tiny Wins You Can Start Tomorrow



Reading

Read a menu or recipe out loud together while you cook or order.



Math

Hand them the bill and let them figure out the tip or the change.



Writing

Have them write one postcard or text to a relative they love.

What This Looks Like for Tweens & Teens



Hand them the wheel

Let them choose what to dig into, and when.
At this age, ownership is the fuel.



Tie it to real life

A summer job, a budget, cooking, driving, a
passion project — it all teaches.



Screens can count

Articles, audiobooks, podcasts,
documentaries, coding — meet them where
they are.



Connection still wins

Ask about their world instead of quizzing.
Trust opens the door to everything else.

You Don't Have to Be the Teacher

The pressure to "do it right" stops a lot of summer learning before it starts. So let's lift it.



Not your job

- Knowing every answer
- Grading or correcting everything
- Recreating a classroom at home



Your job

- Keep curiosity alive
- Show up and notice out loud
- Make learning feel safe and warm

Your warmth does more for learning than any worksheet ever could.

Build Learning Into the Summer You're Already Having



Library trips



Museums



Cooking together



Nature walks



Board games



Reading together



Day camps



Learning apps

A QUICK STORY

What Reading Together Every Night Did



His mom changed one small thing. Her kindergartner was headed toward repeating the grade — reading felt hard. So every night at bedtime, they read together and talked about the story as they went. It became their time together, and his confidence grew right along with his skills.

AT THE START

Below benchmark and headed toward repeating kindergarten. Reading felt hard.



ONE MONTH LATER

Exceeded the benchmark, moved up with his class — and excited to read.

Our part was small — we started with what he told us was hard. The reading you do together at home is what makes it last.

When a Little Extra Help Makes Sense



Homework has always felt like a battle



They're working below grade level



Reading is a real struggle



Math confidence is low



They're heading into a new grade



They do better with structure & routine

Noticing early is a strength, not a failure. Summer is the calmest, lowest-stress time to catch up.

Why Summer Is the Sweet Spot for Catching Up



Summer programs reliably boost achievement — and praising effort lifts the kids who need it most. Lynch et al. (2023); Burnette et al. (2023)

A Simple Week — No Pressure Required

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						
Read	Math game	Write	Read	Learning outing	Fun review	Family reading

15–20 minutes a day. Learning doesn't need to take over your summer — just visit it often.

TAKE A MOMENT

Pick ONE Thing to Try This Week

Real change is one small habit, repeated. Choose your one — and put it where you'll see it.



Read a menu or recipe
aloud together



Let them handle the tip or
the change



Write one postcard to a
relative



Ask "what surprised you?"
about a story



Play one 10-minute math
game



Plan one library or museum
trip

Five Things to Remember

1

Small adds up

A few minutes, often,
beats hours once.

2

**Learning is
everywhere**

Menus, recipes, scores,
signs — it all counts.

3

**Confidence grows
from wins**

Reachable success
builds "I can."

4

**You're not the
teacher**

Your warmth keeps
curiosity alive.

5

**Every child can
keep growing**

The brain builds new
skills at any age.



Summer isn't about creating perfect students.

It's about giving children the chance to keep growing — **one small step at a time.**

When school starts again, they'll return not just more prepared — but believing they're capable.

Where to Go From Here

Three simple moves for this week:



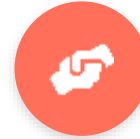
Start this week

Pick the smallest first step and just begin — today if you can.



Keep it tiny

One small habit, repeated, for one full week. That's the whole plan.



Ask for support

You don't have to figure this out alone — reach out when you need to.

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www.cognitutor.com

Your Summer Toolkit

[1. – Summer Learning Plan \(Weekly Planner\)](#)

[2. – Everyday Learning Idea Bank](#)

[3. – Pick ONE Thing Habit Tracker](#)

[4. – 20 Minutes a Day Cheat Card](#)

[5. – Summer Learning Bingo](#)

[6. – When Extra Help Makes Sense \(Self-Check\)](#)

[7. – Tweens and Teens One-Pager](#)

References & Further Reading

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Questions?

What's the ONE thing you're trying this week?

Thank you for showing up for your kids this summer.

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