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Quizzing Exercises the Mind

entertainment and brain stimulus in one

You might be watching a movie or a series on TV, and an actor appears who you recognise, but their name escapes you. Some might dismiss it as irrelevant; many, however, are plagued by the memory glitch and spend the next few minutes, sometimes hours trying to fathom who they are and what else they have been in. I know we do, and it eventually becomes necessary to Google whatever the show was so that we can run through the cast. Finding the person in question is usually a relief; then we can get them out of our heads in order to concentrate on more important matters.

It is, of course, irrelevant, certainly not likely to affect lifestyle because of a simple hiccup in the thought process; but as we get older, memory loss at any level is of concern. The problem stems from years of routine; performing daily and weekly tasks so often that we do them on auto pilot, generally without thinking. And there's the rub - with no new concepts and information to focus on, the mind becomes sluggish. It really does need some stimulus on a regular basis. Left too long and the dreaded Dementia and Alzheimer twins will be knocking at the door.

Quizzes are a great way to give the brain a nudge and dust off the cobwebs gathering there. They have become very popular in recent times, conducted in pubs and clubs; and are frequently used as fund-raisers. These social gatherings are a way of catching up with old acquaintances and making new friends; and for those with the competitive spirit, they are a must-do challenge. But you don't even have to leave your lounge room to participate. Some TV stations program one or two a day Monday to Friday; and they can be appreciated by individuals or family groups alike. Watch just one and you may be surprised to discover how ignorant you are about many things that were assumed to be common knowledge.

We, personally, have grown addicted to these shows which initially caused us to feel quite inadequate; especially when we thought our standard of education was pretty high. As we record them beforehand, they are there to view when convenient; and this practice comes with a bonus. We would be hopeless answering quick-fire questions in real time; but able to pause after each one with the DVD remote, we can ponder our answers prior to pressing 'Play' to find out if we are right. I know that sounds like cheating; but for us this is about refreshing existing knowledge and gaining new. Even with this advantage, it did, however, transpire that, not only were we annoyed by having to guess as the contestants on the shows frequently do; but also, even if our guesses proved correct, we weren't really benefitting mentally; nor furthering our education.

To explain what I mean, take a simple question: which future US president founded the Democratic Republican Party? We would have had no idea, were it not for our cheat book. Yes, I'm afraid we've taken it to a new level which sounds pretty awful. Ours is a folder containing printed sheets of lists and maps which we consult when needed – much of the time, usually – and that enabled us to answer the above question with reasonable confidence: Thomas Jefferson. The beauty of our method is in being able to see the answer in black and white, so we are more likely to remember it in future; plus Jefferson was just one of the names on the list that had to be scanned. Preceded as he was by John Adams, and before him George Washington, these were two more presidents who had previously only been names. So, we had actually learned something!

As for the maps, who would know that Mauritania had borders with four other African countries? And, anyway, where exactly are these countries? Does it really matter if you don't know? Well, it did to us, so we consulted our oracle. Now we know where Senegal, Mali and Western Sahara are; and that, along with Mauritania, the last two border Algeria. With luck, we won't have to consult the oracle if a similar question comes up later. That's always assuming we can keep our brains working.

Quizzes help us to do that, and provide us with fun and entertainment into the bargain. Although we tend to be couch potatoes in the process; hopefully exercising our minds on a regular basis will prevent us becoming human vegetables. Still, if that be our fate, someone may come along and find us on one of the lists in our cheat book!

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