

Maximize Your Capacities!

Upgrading & Expanding Your Informational Abilities

The central promise of the “**Information Age**” – the ability to **access information** on nearly any topic imaginable, from almost anywhere, and at any time – also presents one of our **greatest modern challenges**: how to **adapt, achieve, and thrive** within an increasingly technological and information-driven world.

Information approaches us from all angles. Computers, smart phones, e-mail, the Internet – tools invented to make our lives **easier and more productive** – can often **distract and overwhelm** us as never before. As technologies behind these tools become faster and “more capable,” even *more* information comes into play.

The problem of “**keeping up**” is not just a human one: even popular **search engines** struggle to index, at best, only a *percentage* of all the information available on the **World Wide Web**. **Librarians** strive to keep up with the lively **publishing world** and the constant surge of **new information** on and *beyond* the **Internet**.

In hopes of meeting these challenges, we might attempt to **upgrade our computers and electronic devices**, but, at some point, it becomes apparent that the answer to these technologically-induced issues is *not* simply “more technology.” **We might consider yet another option: upgrading ourselves.** How? We can attempt to **increase our awareness and informational abilities** in various ways. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

Reading & Understanding

- **Good lighting and a comfortable place free of distractions** can help you **stay focused on what you are reading**; in such an environment, you are likely to absorb, understand, and remember more of the information you encounter.
- **When reading eBooks or information online**, see if you can *minimize* or close any other programs or windows.
- **Comprehension** – our ability to **understand what we read** – can affect how well we arrange, sift through, ignore, or respond to certain kinds of information. Reading comprehension can improve as we **read more often** and when we encounter the challenges of **new words and concepts**.
- Various community **literacy programs** (such as **Literacy Orange**) can help adults **learn to read**.
- **Free language learning materials and courses** might be freely available to you. Please inquire at your local library!
- **Books and guides on grammar, vocabulary building, and reading comprehension** can help, especially ones preparing students for GED exams or college entrance tests. **Ask a librarian** to learn more about these study guides.
- Many **new words** come from **specialized terminology**, such as **computer terms** (as in *megabytes, gigabytes, upload, download, word processor, etc.*). **Specialized dictionaries or glossaries** (in print or on the Web) can help you learn what these terms mean and work with them more *intelligently*.
- Access to a **dictionary** (especially a “college level” dictionary) can help you improve comprehension as you read articles, stories, or other texts containing **unfamiliar words**. Libraries offer general and specialized dictionaries for English and other languages or topics. Online dictionaries and related websites can be found at **www.thrall.org/words**
- **Reading speed** can increase naturally as you read more frequently, vary what you read, and go through texts with greater ease. While a variety of guides on “**speed reading**” **techniques** do exist and could be helpful to you, **slower and more attentive reading** might prove to be far more enjoyable and informative, especially when you read something very well-written and worth *rereading*.
- **Think critically: carefully consider** all you read and hear. Ask questions! Are there potential issues in the information, such as bias, incompleteness, inaccuracy, or outdated facts? See both our **Critical Thinking** and **Deeper Readings** flyers (at the library or online at **www.thrall.org/docs**) for additional ideas on analyzing information!

Writing & Expressing

- A **thesaurus** can help you **find the right word to express what you really want to say and mean**. A thesaurus offers both **synonyms** (similar words) and **antonyms** (opposite words).
- Just the *idea* of **public speaking** – talking in front of *strangers* – can be challenging or stressful. Many **helpful books** exist to help you learn to become a more **effective and persuasive speaker**.
- **Poetry – reading or writing it** – can be an incredibly useful and powerful tool to help you understand and appreciate **the power and beauty of words**. Poems can help us **learn to see and describe various qualities as well as connections between different objects, persons, or ideas**. Learning to write poems can help you **express thoughts in more creative, emotional, and insightful ways!**
- **Variety! Don't just read the same old stuff: develop new interests!** Many public libraries (including Thrall) offer free **Reader's Advisory Services** to help you locate *new* authors and titles based on what *you* like to read. You can learn more about Thrall's **free services for readers** by visiting our **Reference Department** or by going to **www.thrall.org/docs** and clicking on “**Readers' Advisories**.”

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Remember...

- **Use technology as a tool!** Telephones, computers, laptops, and other consumer electronic devices can be used to store and retrieve information such as names, telephone numbers, addresses, website links (URLs), and more. Try to learn how to store (**save**) information and retrieve (**load**) it afterwards.
- **Relying completely on technology for your information needs can create problems**, particularly when the power goes out, a network goes down, or technical problems arise.
- **Taking notes** can be incredibly helpful in and beyond the classroom or office.
- **Recognizable patterns** exist in certain information you encounter, and they can make something more memorable, understandable, or interesting. These patterns might be obvious (numerical, structural, verbal, visual) or subtle (or invisible to you) until **increased awareness or imaginative thinking can reveal their presence**.
- Consider exploring books or articles on the topics of **memorization** and **mnemonics** (memorization techniques).

Learning & Researching...

- **Formal, as well as self-directed education**, can help you reach new levels of understanding!
- Numerous **online courses** (courses on the Internet) exist, and **many are free!** Some colleges and universities provide “**OpenCourseWare**” (OCW) lectures and study materials, which you can “attend” virtually (by visiting their websites) or download to your computer. For a **list of major “OCW” providers**, go to **www.thrall.org/ocw**
- **Free workshops** on crafts and other activities might be available in your area. Consult your local newspaper as well as local publications and your local library to learn more about such creative opportunities.
- **Middletown Thrall Library provides a wealth of learning resources** at the library and online:
 - **Our nonfiction collections** contain tens of thousands of books on nearly every topic imaginable! Our collections grow constantly to meet your information needs and to offer you new learning and enrichment opportunities.
 - **Our DVD collections** contain many **documentaries** and **educational videos**.
 - **Our Reference collections** offer in-depth works and **specialized encyclopedias** on all major topics.
 - **Our website (www.thrall.org)** offers guides (**www.thrall.org/guides**) to information on the Web and in the library, free access to **article databases** and **encyclopedias (www.thrall.org/dbs)**, an always-available **Virtual Reference Library (thrall.org/vrl)**, a **Ready Reference Center (thrall.org/readyref)** for looking things up fast, **local history** information (**thrall.org/lh**), **government information (thrall.org/gov)** and so much more!
 - **Members of Thrall can sign up for free online courses (www.thrall.org/courses)** at **Tell Me More** (for learning languages) and **Universal Class** (all major subjects).
 - Thrall also maintains a directory of **free educational resources (www.thrall.org/education)** of interest to students, educators, parents and guardians, and home-schoolers.
- Try to **develop an awareness and appreciation for how different subjects work together**. The bulk of “human knowledge” is made up of various “fields of study,” but, in real life, no such divisions as Art, Music, Math, Psychology, Economics, and Philosophy exist: art and music can be beautiful, mathematical, psychological, economical, and philosophical – and often *all at once!* The same goes for poetry, geology, cosmology, and every other “ology” out there: **learning more about each of these “fields of study” can help you “see more,” understand, and find new connections between everything and everyone crossing your path**. Books and articles on “**interdisciplinarity**,” “**crossdisplnarity**,” or “**multidisciplinarity**” can open up new avenues of intellectual pursuits!
- **Use the Web effectively!** Don’t rely on just *one* search engine or stick to the same old websites. Use Thrall’s **information guides (www.thrall.org/guides)**, **databases and virtual reference library (www.thrall.org/dbs)**, and our **LightSwitch Search Tools (www.thrall.org/lightswitch)** to locate more *relevant* and *definitive* information!

Entertain Your Brain!

- **Entertainment can provide enjoyment and personal insight!** Consider **what you find entertaining** – the books, movies, music, games, or TV programs you enjoy – and try to **broaden or diversify your interests**. Explore our **Entertainment guide (thrall.org/entertainment)**, **Music guide (thrall.org/music)**, **free music services** (available to members of Thrall at **thrall.org/listen**), **Literature guide (thrall.org/literature)**, and **Booklovers guide (thrall.org/booklovers)**, and **RAVES! (thrall.org/raves)** to discover new interests!
- Developing a **sense of humor** can provide a much-needed **balance** if things should ever become difficult or too serious. This can help to diffuse tension, prevent a situation from getting worse, while possibly creating opportunities for reconsideration and insight. You can find some funny material by searching for these **subjects** in the library catalog: **humor, jokes, wit, humorous poetry**
- Crossword puzzles, sudoku, and other **word and logic games** can help keep your mind sharp and flexible!
- “**Edutainment**” is **fun and educational** activities or games on a computer. Go to **www.thrall.org/games** for a list of free online “brain games” and other “fun-while-you-learn” websites.

For further consideration...

Please take advantage of *all* your library’s free services and resources to help you “maximize your capacities!” Many “**self-help**” books and videos exist, along with **career development** and **study guides**. Other potentially helpful books can be found under these subjects: **Mental Efficiency, Thought and Thinking, Habit Breaking, Conduct of Life, Truth, Happiness, Change, Self-actualization, Success**. Libraries can help you make the most of information *and* your life! **Please ask a librarian today!**