

[解答例 1]

I have for the most part always agreed with people such as the scientists in the article, who state that most brain training programs are a waste of time. Rather than suggest that anyone waste his time on any of the unrewarding brain training methods referred to in the article, I would recommend that a student of my age, or any person for that matter, study foreign languages as an ongoing activity, as a way to improve cognitive function.

First of all, throughout my life I have often encountered people who were using some kind of book full of puzzles to solve or some other waste of time activities, and the books in question typically made the claim that the activities within could improve one's cognitive and reasoning powers. Whether I have known any of these people for one year or twenty years, I have never once noticed any of them becoming intellectually sharper after using the activities in these books. The problem with most training activities for the brain that are promoted is that they are analogous to training a mouse to run through a maze; the mouse gets better at running the maze, but he does not improve his ability to deal with anything new that he meets in life, such as a new situation or a new environment.

Studying foreign languages, on the other hand, is essentially guaranteed to lead to beneficial results. By necessity, one who studies languages will always be thinking on the abstract level, the highest level of cognitive processing that can be done. If one wants to improve his high level cognitive abilities, one must do activities that require high level cognition.

Furthermore, it is proven that those who study language have an increased number of synapse connections in their brains, leading to better communication between brain cells and areas of the brain, something that is desirable for all people, and as an aside, something that is helpful in warding off the devastating effects of dementia. Also, when one studies languages, he expands his world and his entire world view. He is constantly called upon both to absorb new ideas and connect them to what he already knows, building an ever-growing web of abstracts within his mind.

In a nutshell, the person who studies languages creates a denser and more complex neural network in his brain, and at the same time creates a denser web of knowledge, knowledge that will thereafter be of further use when he is putting his neural network to use in the future to process and reason out whatever comes his way.

(433 words)

[解答例 2]

Ever since I was a child, I have always been amazed by people who can make lightning-quick calculations in their heads. If I were asked to name someone who possessed superior mental capacities, it would definitely be one of these human calculators. The interesting thing is that the majority of people who can perform such calculations have been trained in using the abacus. Hence, I'm inclined to believe that the best way to train your brain is to master the use of this ancient instrument.

It is clear that since the invention of the calculator, the popularity of the abacus has notably declined. However, if a student my age wanted to improve his or her mental ability, I would incorporate this device in my brain training program without a doubt. My program would begin with learning how to use the abacus, and once the student becomes familiar with how to use it, I would set weekly goals to keep him or her motivated to make improvements.

There is evidence that proves that the abacus dramatically improves one's ability to think. A while back in Japan, 'Flash Anzan' became a buzzword that brought the abacus back into the limelight. 'Flash Anzan' competitions involve the mental calculation of a series of numbers that flash onto a screen for about 0.5 seconds each. Sometimes the numbers would be three digit numbers, and contestants would have to calculate as many as 10 numbers that appear one after another on the screen.

What all these 'super humans' had in common was that they had all trained for these competitions by first mastering the abacus. What is more, training with an abacus seems to develop a person's ability to think logically and search for short cuts; both of which can be considered as highly desirable thinking skills. Simply by speaking to these 'Flash Anzan' competitors, it is clear that they possess these skills in high degrees.

Hence, there is living proof that mental training using an abacus will improve one's ability to think, and that is why I would make good use of this tool in my brain training program.

(362 words)

【傾向分析】

2010 年度の「デジタル世代の漢字離れ」(約 800 字)、2011 年度の「異文化の理解」(約 1300 字)、2012 年度の「睡眠の取り方」(約 1500 語) に対して 2013 年度は「脳トレは思考能力を高めない」(約 1000 語) がテーマで、長文 1 題に対して設問 1 題の形式は同じでしたが、昨年度の 250 語以上に対し今年度は 300 語以上の自由英作文と 50 語ほど語数が増えました。

【解答のポイント】

2013 年度秋田国際教養大学 A 日程の課題文の主題は昨今話題となっているいわゆる「脳トレ」(brain training)についてでした。全体の要旨は以下の通りとなります。

イギリスの Nature 誌の研究チームが 1 万人以上もの被験者に対し、6 週間にわたり、コンピュータ上で様々な「脳トレ」を行った結果、与えられた課題をこなす能力は向上しても、知力全体はほとんど向上しないということがわかった。当該研究結果に対し、脳トレによって学習等にかかわる脳内の化学物質が変化を起こすとか、実験方法や結論の導き出し方に問題があるといった反論もあり、また神経可塑性(neuroplasticity)の過程をコントロールできれば、知力が増大し、それは私たちの社会に大きな影響を与える可能性も示唆された。しかし、現時点で、知力を大いに向上させるコンピュータゲームがないことも事実である。そもそも「知的能力」という言葉自体が何を指すのか専門家の意見は異なっており、いずれにせよ、知力を伸ばすための近道はないと言えよう。

課題文は難解な単語がほとんどなく読みやすいものでした。しかし、この課題文を踏まえたエッセイのテーマ「自分の同じ年齢の学生たちに、知力を向上させるために勧めたい脳のトレーニング方法と、その方法が奏功すると考える理由を説明する」はやや難しいものと言えます。一般的な受験生である 10 代後半から 20 代前半という年齢層にとって「知力」とは何かについてのヴィジョンをある程度持たずには、エッセイがまとまらなくなってしまう可能性があるからです。内容としては例えば、例文にあるように知力を新しいことに対処できる力と考えて、外国語を学習するといった方法を提案するのもよいでしょう。また、論理的に推論する能力を知力と考えますと、計算能力は左脳を使いますので、論理的思考力を高められることでしょうし、講義を聞いたり、読書やインターネット検索によって情報を増やし、その情報を利用して人とディベートをするといった方法は、蓄積した情報を論理的につなげていくという作業を必要としますので、まさに論理的思考力を養うことになることでしょう。

最後に、秋田国際大学で出題されるエッセイに取り組むために一番重要なことは、平日頃から身の回りで起こることだけでなく、世界で起こっている出来事に対しても問題意識を持って触れ、時間の許す限り疑問に思うことを調べ、その上で自らの意見を形成していくことであると思います。これも今回の課題文にある知力を向上させるための方法なのではないでしょうか。

トフルゼミナール