



## So You Want to Win at “Brain Game”?

Only the top 9 teams advance to the semifinals. Here are nine best practices - compiled by a championship coach - that could lead your team to victory.

### Developing Your Team

1. **Make them earn it.** Have tryouts for your Brain Game team. If your pool of players is large enough, competition will make those players better. Even if you don't have more than three players, tell them that the team is competitive and they must meet a minimum score on a qualifying quiz to compete. There's more value in earning a spot on a team than in being appointed, or even worse, asked to “fill in!” Appeal to your players' sense of pride.
2. **Pick the best, not the oldest.** Of course you're limited to freshman and sophomores, so you might think older is better. Maybe not. Pick your players to maximize your points. Go out and find good mental calculators and students who have a good physical science and biology background, as “Crunching Numbers” and “Rocket Science” are the parts of the show where leads become insurmountable. On your team, try to include a good math person, science person, and someone who knows literature (or history, depending on the available students). Why not defer to sophomores? Most sophomores are taking chemistry, but because chemistry is a year-long course, the players often haven't had enough to make it worthwhile. However, a freshman who had a good middle school physical science course might actually be better.

### Preparing Your Team

3. **Duh! Watch the show, Coach.** Coaches watch game film in athletics—why not here? It helps to watch every episode and scout the other teams. It's even easier with the shows now online at [wral.com](http://wral.com). Take notes on questions, including what the questions focus on and the style of questions. What kind of lead-ins should we expect? Sometimes question types repeat—you can practice those types. Even if they don't show up the way you expect, you're still better prepared.
4. **Put the players to work.** It's so much more worthwhile when you make the players develop their own review materials. Give them a blank handout with a series of generic questions about the locations they're supposed to study and have them complete them. They should also write a series of questions to quiz each other. Have them watch the shows and take their own notes on questions.
5. **Divide and conquer.** Especially in the study rounds, divide the areas of study among your individual players and let each one be an expert on one area. There are usually three countries, for example, so assign one each. Study a world almanac.
6. **Practice game-like conditions.** It's a big advantage to have players comfortable with a buzzer, answering questions read to them (it's even better if you can find someone to do a Mark Roberts impression!). Also, remember that a lot of important information is shown on a big monitor on the floor. You can make up PowerPoint slides of questions and have your players practice by reading those slides. Also, make sure you are running a clock so that they get used to the timing (5 seconds for most rounds, 10 for math).

## Game Strategy

7. **Study for the study rounds.** The study rounds are the last two rounds—that's 400 of the 1470 points available to a team. On average, the majority of the top nine qualify with fewer than 600 points. Many times a score of 400 is enough to get into the semifinals. A good showing in the two study rounds can make the difference. The flipside is that if you are close to one of those low placing scores, missing questions in the study rounds can drop you right out, so know your material!
8. **Encourage your players to consult their teammates.** Having your players consult all the time is great TV and it keeps a player from blurting out the wrong answer in spite of knowing the right one. It also builds team chemistry and helps players relax.
9. **Play by the rules.** Take advantage of what the game gives you. Buzz in on math questions as soon as permitted, for example. If the monitor shows an equation with an  $x$  in it, the question will probably ask for you to solve for  $x$ . There's no need to wait for the question to be finished (just started!). But be careful! In other rounds, the lead-in of the question may lead you to the wrong answer if you buzz in early. Don't squander points by taking unnecessary risks.

Most of you coaches are teachers, too, so you know something about how to monitor progress. Meet regularly with your players while they are studying, and ask them some questions. The more you put them on the spot, the better prepared they will be on that Saturday morning. Good luck!