

## GET SMARTER

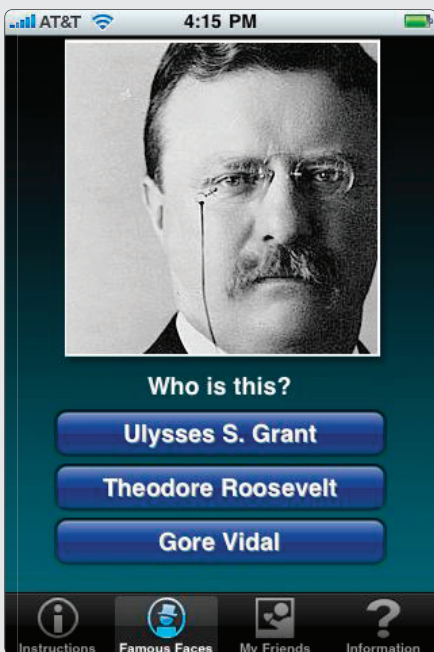
Can brain-training apps actually sharpen your wit and rejuvenate your memory?

While I prefer labels like “dreamy” and “preoccupied” to “airhead” and “ditsy,” the truth is I’ve always been a little scatterbrained. And it seems like the more information I try to pack in one ear, the more that spills out the other. With the many recent studies touting the importance of “exercising our brains” for improved mental health and overall longevity, I decided to do something to help actively preserve (and possibly improve) what I’ve got while I’ve still got it. It turns out there’s more than a few iPhone apps out there aimed at whipping our brains into tip-top shape. I test-drove a few in the hopes of becoming the proud owner of a smarter, more focused, healthier, and happier brain.

I started off with my name-recalling deficiencies and found **iKnowYou** (Posit Science, [positscience.com](http://positscience.com), free), which provides tips and tricks for matching names with faces. It also offers the option of training with historical figures or a customized set of photos. The questions seemed a little simplistic and the program doesn’t offer clever mnemonic devices or remember where you left off last, but I am now confident that I could pick Teddy Roosevelt, Amelia Earhart, and F. Scott Fitzgerald out of a crowd and introduce them to one another without fail.



AmbiScience Brain Power’s ambient music plus brain-wave synchronization equals one happy camper.



iKnowYou enables you to practice the oh-so-important art of remembering faces.

**Color Shake** (Injoit, [injoit.com/eng/color-shake](http://injoit.com/eng/color-shake), free) turned out to be one of my favorite brain games because of its peppy tunes and promised salvation for the directionally challenged. Instructions at the top of the screen tell you which way to tilt your iPhone (left or right) and which colored fingerprint (red, pink, blue, yellow, or green) to press. I did this while dancing around my kitchen in a two-for-one brain-body workout.

“Inflexibility heralds death,” warns **iStayYoung** (Armelle Productions, [armelle.com](http://armelle.com), \$0.99)—apparently, new experiences are thought to keep us one step ahead of mental decline. To help “break up my daily routine” and keep my mind limber, this app serves up a new challenge each day, like creating a unique recipe, rearranging my living room, or striking up a conversation with a stranger in my local coffee shop.

Yeah, that didn’t last long, so I tore through some other options in quick succession. In each of its sorting, memory, and calculation games, **Boost Your Brain’s** (Francis Bourre Inc., [boostyourbrain.net](http://boostyourbrain.net), \$0.99) rhythmic beats lulled me into a state of calm while a soothing voice cooed positive affirmations (yes!) to keep going. Am I smarter? Maybe. Entertained? Definitely.

“Expect to feel overwhelmed,” explains **Brain Fitness Pro** (Mind Sparke, [mindsparke.com](http://mindsparke.com), \$3.99) of its brain-training software,

which promises to be the only one “scientifically proven to make you smarter.” For the first few minutes I had no idea what was happening, but I eventually got the hang of the flashing symbols and spoken letters. It uses the intimidating-sounding “dual-n-back” training method, which means you have to remember two sequences—one visual and one aural. My head actually ached after a few sessions. It was by far the most complex and challenging brain game I played.

A bevy of binaural frequency programs abound, but **AmbiScience Brain Power** (Tesla Audio Sciences, [teslasoftware.com](http://teslasoftware.com), \$0.99) was my hands-down favorite, both for its clear how-to instructions and for its decent ambient-music selection. I listened to “Buddhist Rain” as background noise while I was writing and “entrained” my brain before nodding off in the evening and beginning my day. I definitely felt better rested and more focused each day that I used this app.

Finally, to round out my brain-fitness regimen, I downloaded the **Science Fact of the Day** (JoJo, Inc., [jojoiphoneapps.com](http://jojoiphoneapps.com), \$0.99) and **Word of the Day** (Ethan Productions, [ethanproductions.com](http://ethanproductions.com), \$0.99) apps. Even if they don’t make me technically smarter, having more dinner-party fodder at my fingertips is never a bad thing.

—Amelia Glynn



Color Shake can give your brain that 15-second workout it needs to sweep out the cobwebs and get you going.