**Why it’s good to be chunky**

*Chunking* refers to the strategy of breaking down information into bite-sized pieces so the brain can more easily process new information and sustain attention. Chunking can be used as an effective learning strategy for all learners, however it is especially supportive for those who have learning difficulties such as ADD/ADHD, working memory limitations, or processing difficulties.

**Chunking: helping our Working Memory and learning brains**

Working memory is our brain’s capacity to process incoming information and to use it at the same time. The brain’s capacity depends on the type of information, the features of the information and the individual abilities of the learner. Our working memory receives information from both auditory (information from sound) and visual (information from sight) means.

**Working Memory And Learning**

Working memory is important for learning because it provides a mental workspace in which learners can hold information whilst mentally engaged in other relevant activities. Examples include, remembering the whole sentence that needs to be written while trying to spell the individual words, remembering the list of instructions given by teachers or parents while carrying out individual steps in the task, and solving individual mathematical calculations while remembering the overall steps involved.

Researchers currently say that the number of things we can hold in our working memory at once is around four, maybe five bits of information. For a student with working memory, learning or attention difficulties the number is lower than that.

Importantly for learning, researchers have found that if a learner’s working memory is full, the excess information will be lost. That creates a big challenge for being an effective learner. If something being explained is complex or lengthy, and several factors need to be kept in mind to understand it and enact on it, there is a possibility that your full message will not be understood.
Chunking helps with working memory because brain research shows that people remember more information more effectively when it is broken up into small units of meaningful information that are presented sequentially. This gives working memory time to encode each chunk of incoming information, contemplate and make sense of the information, associate it with other information, and then eventually store it in long-term memory.

**Chunking: helping to maintain and sustain attention**

Because Chunking reduces large or complex amounts of information into more manageable parts to understand, learners are more able to sustain attention and hold their interest while completing tasks that have been ‘chunked’. Being able to focus on a ‘chunk’ at a time can be a much more effective way for learners to understand content and participate in class or other tasks.

**Chunking in the classroom and at home.**

Chunking can be used to manage lesson length, content, class tasks, and assignments as well as the teaching strategies used. Chunking enables teaching and learning to be delivered and understood in a progressive way.

Initially planning longer assignments in chunks or sections with intermediate deadlines can assist in completion by being clear about requirements, student’s work progressively through the assignment, and it can avoid last minute rushes.

Reading a paragraph or a smaller section of text at a time with a review/recap/discussion afterward – even very briefly, may assist with building comprehension of what is being read. Chunking homework time or longer study periods into clear segments by either time (eg 10 or 20 minute sections) or by subject or by setting an end goal (I will have a break once I have achieved…) means that learners can plan the progression of tasks that need to happen and better manage their attention, effort, relaxation and learning.