Just like the roads we follow every day to work and to school, information follows a distinct path through our brain, according to brain research. Whether that path will be smooth traveling or fraught with obstacles can be influenced by us with some knowledge about how our brains work.

Information enters the brain through our senses—visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), and kinesthetic (moving, doing, and touching). It travels to a relay station called the thalamus that instantly sends it in two directions. These two pathways are called the “high road” and the “low road” by neuroscientists.

The low road leads directly to the amygdala where the information is checked to see if a fear, stress, anxiety or threat response is necessary for our protection. The high road leads to the cerebral cortex where higher order thinking occurs and where long-term memory is stored. The low road is quick and automatic, but the high road is where we can use our knowledge and skills to help with the memory process.

The Low Road
If a student feels stress, anxiety, or fear while trying to learning, they will find it difficult to concentrate on the material in front of them.

The High Road
The high road is where working memory functions. If a student stays “in the zone”—calm, but alert—they can create a clear path for learning, enhancing their ability to encode memory. They can do this by taking responsibility for managing their state of mind and using a few SuperCamp techniques. Sit up, take a deep breath, and practice a “This Is It” attitude. Focus on the present. This high road thinking will cause the low road response from the amygdala to normalize.

Here are a few tips students can use to strengthen the path of learning! These will all help to get information moving from working memory to short-term memory and then to our goal of long-term memory where the information “sticks”—we’ve “got it” and can access it whenever we need it.

- Try to let go of “distractions” or anything that might cause stress and block the path of learning.
- Sit up, take a deep breath and practice a “This Is It” attitude—focus on the present moment.
- Stay “in the zone,” that physical, mental, and emotional place where we hardly notice that we’re working, but we’re learning effectively.
- Find the WIIFM (What’s In It For Me) to help the brain recognize that the information is worth remembering.
- Use V-A-K reviews—remember that information comes into our brain through our senses (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic).
- Practice 10-24-7-10—review information after 10 minutes, 24 hours, 7 days, and every night for 10 minutes just before going to sleep.
- Use Circuit Learning—review class notes and add to mind maps every day.
- Link new learning to what you already know.