

HOMework & STUDY TIPS

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS



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Homework & Study Tips for Parents & Teachers

Homework can be a valuable tool to support learning. It can help students learn important information and master essential skills and processes. Well-designed homework allows students to develop valuable study skills and teach them the importance of practice and perseverance. Homework can also foster traits such as responsibility, independence, and time management.

Successful homework practices rely on effective communication between students, parents, and school personnel. For example, it is important for teachers to set clear guidelines and expectations for homework. Similarly, it is vital for parents to help their children develop sound homework and study habits at home. This often means providing guidance and support as well as communicating with a child's teacher when necessary, especially when warning signs appear that may jeopardize learning. Finally, middle and high school students need to take greater control over their homework and study habits as they progress through school.

Below is a list of ten ways teachers and parents can help students develop effective homework and study practices.

1. Make the Purpose of Homework Assignments Clear

In general, a homework assignment will serve one of four functions. Each is listed below. It is important for teachers to make this purpose clear and for parents to ensure that their child understands it as well.

Purposes for Homework

- To **Prepare for Learning**: These assignments provide students with experiences that will prepare them for future learning.
- To **Practice Learning**: These assignments ask students to practice skills and processes they have already learned.
- To **Extend Learning**: These assignments ask students to apply skills and information they have already learned to new situations.
- To **Integrate Learning**: These assignments ask students to apply many different skills and kinds of knowledge to larger tasks.

2. Help With Time Management

Many adolescents struggle to use their time wisely when working or studying at home. It is important for teachers to provide clear guidelines that state the following:

- What materials students need to complete a task
- What procedures students should use to complete a task
- How long it should take to complete a task

It is important for parents to help each child by:

- Making sure that he or she gets in the habit of gathering all materials before starting
- Developing consistent habits or routines of when and where homework takes place
- Fostering a work environment that is not distracting.

3. Give Choices

Students are more likely to be motivated when they feel as if they have ownership of their work. Parents and teachers can foster ownership by giving students increasing amounts of decision-making. For example, teachers can give students choices about the tasks they complete. Parents can allow students to decide when and where they work. It is also important to allow students to make mistakes and to help them avoid repeating their mistakes in the future.

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4. Focus! - Encourage Students to Avoid Multitasking

Increasingly, research is indicating that productivity and achievement decrease when individuals multitask. Therefore, it is important for teachers to give students very clear directions about how to accomplish homework tasks and for parents to help their children stay focused when working and studying at home.

Many students like to listen to music when they study. Research suggests that this can work for some students. However, a good rule-of-thumb is that listening to music is appropriate if it helps eliminate distractions. It should not be permitted during homework and studying if it provides its own distraction. In short, parents and teachers should watch to see if music is a help or hindrance when a student is working or studying and act accordingly.

5. Provide Models for Students to Imitate

Imitation is a powerful way to teach and learn. On many occasions, teachers should demonstrate how to accomplish a task before they assign the task as homework. In addition, teachers should provide examples of the kind of work they expect students to produce.

Parents can support a child by demonstrating how to do a task and by providing guidance on where to find resources and answers. In addition, parents should use models and examples that teachers send home to gauge their child's progress. If a parent sees his or her child struggling and does not know how to help, he or she should encourage the student to state in writing what he or she is struggling with and communicate this to the teacher. Another way parents can support their children is by setting aside a specific time every night where everyone in the family reads and works.

6. Give Guidance, Not Answers

Many homework assignments do not expect or require correct answers. However, sometimes correct answers are expected. Teachers can help students do homework correctly by giving a few minutes at the end of class to begin homework. This allows students to make sure they know what they are expected to do. Parents can support their children by providing guidance and by resisting the temptation to do the work when their child is struggling. If they see their child struggling, they should encourage him or her to communicate with their teacher in writing.

7. Monitor Progress

Most adolescents are not born with effective homework and study habits. Therefore it is helpful to monitor their progress so that students can see their growth and improvement. Parents can do this by helping students set goals and to monitor their use of time. Parents can also use checklists and charts as tools to monitor and track their child's progress and learning. Teachers can also help students set goals and milestones for extended projects.

8. Watch for Signs of Frustration and Boredom

Students are often motivated when they have a moderate level of challenge. However, it is very difficult for teachers to always provide an optimal amount of challenge to every child on every assignment. Therefore, it is important for teachers to find ways to adjust assignments to the needs of students. It is also important for parents to watch for signs of frustration (when assignments are too hard) or boredom (when assignments are too easy) and communicate this information to the teacher.

9. Encourage Talk about Learning

The more that students discuss what they are learning with teachers and parents the better. Parents can encourage students to discuss what they have learned during dinner or after their child has finished his or her homework. Teachers can encourage this by including a section in assignments where students write about what they learned and/or struggled with during an assignment.

10. Praise Effort and Progress

Many studies have shown that praise can have a positive influence on student achievement. However, parents and teachers should praise students on their effort and for their choices, rather than the outcomes of their work. The reason for this is that many teenagers will blame themselves for their failures and credit luck for their successes. Praising their effort ("You worked really hard on this!") and their choices ("Some of your choices on this assignment really paid off!") shows them that they have control over their learning.

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| Tips | What Teachers Can Do | What Parents Can Do | Before | During | After |
|---|---|--|--------|--------|-------|
| #1 Make Purpose Clear | Clearly state the purpose of an assignment in the directions. | Make sure your child knows the purpose of assignments so that he or she sets up reasonable expectations. If you are unclear about the purpose of an assignment, contact your child's teacher. | | | |
| #2 Manage Time | Put in writing what materials students will need for homework assignments. Put in writing what procedures and steps a student should take to complete an assignment. Put in writing how much time it should take to complete assignments. | Make sure your child has everything prepared before starting to work and study. Help your child establish a homework and study routine. This is often a consistent place and time to do homework. Communicate with the teacher if your child takes too long to complete assignments. | | | |
| #3 Give Choices | Give students opportunities to make even simple choices during assignments. | Allow your child to make decisions and mistakes. Help him or her prevent repeating their mistakes. | | | |
| #4 Focus! | Make the directions for homework as explicit as possible to discourage confusion and distractions. | Encourage your child to focus on one task at a time. Help your child establish a distraction-free place for doing homework and studying on a regular basis. | | | |
| #5 Show Me! | Demonstrate how to complete homework assignments. Give students examples of proficient and exemplary work. | When your child is struggling, model how to do the work. Look at examples of good work that teachers have sent home. Use these to help you give your child feedback. If you do not have examples of work from your child's teacher, ask for some. | | | |
| #6 Advise; Don't Enable | Give students a few minutes in class to begin homework. | Help your child find resources and model how to solve or accomplish a task. Avoid doing the work yourself. If your child significantly struggles with an assignment, encourage him or her to write down what is difficult so that it can be shared with his or her teacher. | | | |
| #7 Chart progress | Give students examples of proficient work so that they have a concrete understanding of what they are being asked to do. Make sure large tasks have clear benchmarks. | Encourage your child to set goals, track progress, and monitor his or her time. | | | |
| #8 Watch for Warning Signs | If you notice a student struggling with a particular skill or strategy, communicate with the parents so support can be provided at home. | If you notice your child significantly struggling with a particular skill, strategy, or assignment communicate with his or her teacher. | | | |
| #9 Talk About It | Make it a part of homework assignments for students to record and reflect how well the homework went. Encourage students to describe what was confusing and difficult. | Encourage your child to discuss what he or she is doing on his or her homework and what is being learned in school. Regularly ask your child what he or she has for homework, what the plan is, and how it went afterwards. | | | |
| #10 Praise effort & progress | When praising students, emphasize that it is their choices, effort, perseverance, and routines that lead to their success. Avoid praising ability and performance and rewarding / punishing for grades. | When praising your child, emphasize that it is his or her choices, effort, perseverance, and routines that lead to success. Avoid praising ability and performance. Do not connect rewards or punishments to grades. | | | |

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