



Homework Survival Guide

A Place to Work:

1. Find the right place:

In most families, having a central location where all students complete their homework works best. The actual location depends on the individual student. Regardless of where homework is done, parents should be cognizant of possible distractions that need to be avoided (i.e. television, telephone, stereo, game consoles). Parents may want to experiment with their student to determine what setting works best under what circumstances. Try several options for a week and see how the student does based upon the quality of the homework completed, the time it took to finish the homework, and the student's reaction to the experience.

2. Gathering necessary materials:

Students can waste a lot of time tracking down things like pencils, paper, rulers, and etc. when beginning their homework. To avoid this, stock the central homework location with these materials. It may also be helpful to set up file folders for each subject the student is taking in school to keep track of papers, long-term assignments directions, tests, and homework that has been passed back. The folders should **not** be used for storing homework, since the student is likely to leave it at home and forget to take it to school. Completed homework should be placed immediately in the student's backpack or notebook to ensure it gets to school.

Organizing Homework/Setting Priorities:

1. List out daily assignments;
2. Make sure the student brought home the necessary books, worksheets;
3. Break each task into subtasks;
4. Check on status of long-term assignments and tests. Add these to the homework list;
5. Have the student decide in what order they will complete the work. It is best to have the student start with an assignment they consider "easy," sandwiching more difficult assignments in between;
6. Estimate how much time it will take to complete each assignment;

7. Make sure enough time has been allotted to complete the homework, allowing breaks when needed.

Sometimes it is difficult to schedule homework due to other obligations such as work, sports, doctor's appointment, and family events. It might be helpful to put together a weekly calendar to keep track of the activities. Once a week, parents should sit down with their student and plan homework time each day around the other obligations.

Getting Started:

1. Have the student specify exactly what time they will begin their homework and then reward them for getting to work within five minutes of the time specified;
2. Sit with the student for the first five minutes to make sure they are getting off to a good start;
3. Talk with your students about their assignment before beginning. Walk them through the first few problems to make sure they understand what they are supposed to do;
4. Build in a short break relatively quickly, if getting started is a problem.

Getting Through It:

Make sure adequate breaks are built into the homework schedule. Many students have a hard time working for long stretches of time on homework without a break. Better to plan for a two-hour homework session with frequent breaks built in than to try to cram homework into a one-hour, non-stop session. You can use a kitchen timer to keep breaks to a reasonable time (e.g. 5-10 minutes). Break might be used to get a snack, play a few minutes of a Nintendo game, or to exercise. Breaks should be scheduled when a task gets accomplished rather than after a set period of time, otherwise your student can daydream the time away and still gets a break.

An example of a homework program might be as follows:

3:30	Math	6:30	Social Science
4:30	Break	7:30	Break
5:00	English	8:00	Science
6:00	Dinner	9:00	Break

If your student has not finished the task he was working on when the break arrives, he misses the break.

Long Term Assignments:

1. *Know what assignments are due when.*

In addition to having weekly agenda books where daily homework is recorded, it is also helpful to have a monthly calendar on which long-term assignments can be written as soon as they are assigned. With more disorganized students, parents may want to periodically send in this calendar and ask the teacher to verify that it is up-to-date.

2. *Break long-term assignments into subtasks.*

Sit down with your student and read over directions or discuss the nature of the long-term assignment. Make out a list of the steps necessary to complete the assignment (e.g., taking notes, generating the outline, writing the introduction, the sections of the report and the summary, preparing the bibliography, proofreading, preparing the final draft, making the cover).

3. *Draw up a timeline.*

Once the steps necessary to complete the assignment are listed, each subtask should have a due date attached that is written on the monthly calendar. Care should be taken to ensure adequate time is available for each step. In the beginning, your student may need extensive help in breaking down his assignments and developing a realistic timeline. As time goes on, he can assume increasing amounts of responsibility for these. Time management is a skill of life-long importance. Developing increasing independence in planning for and executing long-term assignments is an early opportunity for a child to acquire this valuable skill.

Incentive System:

For many students, homework is an exceedingly difficult task representing an ordeal they perceive at times to be insurmountable. For these students, all the organization and planning in the world may not be enough to get them through the daily grind of homework. In this case, an incentive system may need to be put in place to make homework completion a more attractive task for them.

If an incentive system is the right approach for your student, you should use a system whereby your student can earn points for completing tasks or for demonstrating other appropriate behaviors required for successful homework completion. The points can then be traded-in for daily, weekly, or long-term reinforcers. Steps involved in setting up a point system include:

1. With your student, write a list of privileges or rewards your child would like to earn. Rewards should be divided into daily, weekly, and long-term.
2. Again, with your student, write a list of jobs related to homework for which they can earn points such as:
 - Writing down homework assignments in agenda;
 - Bringing home necessary homework materials;
 - Getting homework started on time;
 - Completing homework within the specified homework time;
 - Finishing homework without reminders from parents;
 - Finishing homework without constant supervision;
 - Completing work with an acceptable standard of accuracy;
 - Proofreading written work/checking math problems;
 - Handing in homework completed on time;
 - Successfully solving homework problems (i.e. calling friends, checking with the teacher, attending tutor center).
3. Decide how many points each of the homework jobs can earn and how much each of the privileges or rewards will cost. To determine how much the rewards should cost, add up the number of points you feel your student will earn each day. Be sure that your student has about one third of her points free to save up for special privileges.
4. Make a chart with five columns: date, item, deposits, withdrawals, and running balance.
5. Once a month or so review the list of jobs and privileges and revise as necessary.

With some students, the use of natural or logical consequences alone may be sufficient. Not being able to watch a TV program or play a Nintendo game because homework was not done in time is a logical consequence that arises from procrastination. For some students, a failing grade is a natural consequence for not completing homework, and this alone will be sufficient to induce them to work. However, parents should not assume that fear of a failing grade will be sufficient to induce their student to do their homework, and may need to use an incentive system.

Parents should resist the temptation simply to punish their student for their failure to do homework. While it may make sense to cut down the number of outside activities in order to allow for sufficient time to do homework, a system in which incentives are built in for homework completion will likely be more effective than a system of negative consequences along. Most students who have problems doing homework are not happy about their situation or the fights they draw their parents into. Rather, it seems to take these students considerably more effort to get down to work and to sustain

attention to homework than it does the average student. For this reason, it makes sense to reward them for the extra effort it takes.

Parent Role: Help or Supervise?

Many parents, particularly those whose student may be struggling in school, wrestle with the question of how much help they should give their student on homework. The following suggestions are offered:

1. It is good for parents to discuss with their student the nature of the assignment, to make sure they understand what they are supposed to do, and to guide them as they do the first one or two items of the assignment. Parents should not have to remain by their student's side throughout the entire session. If your student seems to require this, then you should probably build in an incentive for working independently to wean your student of reliance on you for support or assistance. Setting the kitchen timer and telling your student to wait until it rings to show you his work or to ask questions is one way to gradually increase independence.
2. Parents may want to review homework assignments to check or neatness and accuracy. If the handwriting is illegible and your student is capable of writing more neatly without an inordinate amount of effort, it is acceptable to ask him to rewrite the assignment. If your student is ready to learn to proofread or to check for mistakes himself, you may want to hand a paper back with a comment such as, "I found three mistakes on your math page," or "Please look for spelling errors." If he is not ready for this, point to the specific mistake and ask him to correct them (without giving them the correct answer).
3. Parents should keep in mind the overall purpose of homework is to give students independent practice with a skill they have already been taught. Parents should not have to teach the skills necessary for their student to complete the homework successfully. A good rule of thumb is that students should be able to get at least 70 percent of a homework assignment correct working on their own for it to be within an appropriate instructional range. If your student cannot achieve that level of success without a great deal of support from you, then that homework being assigned may be too difficult, or the student may not be attending during classroom lecture time. It is best to make an appointment with the student's teacher to discuss why your student is struggling with the homework assigned.