

How To Take the WORK Out of HOMEWORK

By resident education specialist **Perk Musacchio**

There is a lot of debate about the purpose and amount of homework. Times have changed, and there are now many factors that make homework completion a challenge for some families. I'll bet many of you reading this are thinking wouldn't it be great if there was no such thing as homework! Honestly, in a perfect world, I would agree. As a teacher who has assigned homework, parental feedback ranges from there is too much homework to my child needs more challenging homework and enrichment assignments. Depending on your perspective, there is either too little or too much and too easy or too hard. Can you see how homework can be a challenge for the teacher, too?

The reality is that some children acquire most of the academic skills needed to be successful in school just by being present in class. A lot of extra practice is not necessary. However, there are students for whom the instruction and guided practice during a school day are just not enough. Research shows that the number of repetitions for mastery can vary. Quick learners need 20-30 repetitions, average learners need 35-40 repetitions, and slow learners need 45-55 repetitions. Children with ADHD and other diagnoses may need even more.

For students who need more repetitions and multi-sensory ways to practice, additional daily reinforcement at home is critical for skill acquisition and mastery. Therefore, I endorse the philosophy that quality is always preferred over quantity. For example, an assignment with 5 math problems done well is better than 20 problems done wrong.

Here are some tips for taking the work out of homework.

SETTING THE STAGE

*A general rule of thumb for an appropriate amount of time for homework is 10 minutes per grade. For example, 2nd grade = 20 minutes. If your child is spending more time than expected or is having difficulty, seek guidance from the teachers or school counselor.

*Homework should provide practice of previously learned skills. While students "should" be able to complete assignments independently, the reality is that many children require varying degrees of adult support.

*Teach your child how to study smarter and not harder. For example, when practicing spelling words, math facts, or studying for a test, use strategies that support the child's learning style (visual learner=visual strategies) to make the most efficient use of homework time. (There are online surveys that will identify your child's learning style at <http://www.educationplanner.org/students/self-assessments/learning-styles.shtml> or check with your child's school counselor.)

*Organization doesn't come naturally to everyone. Most kids have to learn organization skills, and parents are the best teachers. Research shows that children from stable, structured households do better in school than their classmates from more chaotic environments.

*Insist that your child record assignments in the assignment book completely, accurately and neatly (C.A.N.).

*Ask your child to write down a responsible classmate's name and contact information inside the assignment book just in case of a homework emergency!

*Whenever your child declares "there's no homework", have a routine already in place that requires leisure reading or review of notes, math facts or spelling words, etc. A daily, quiet time can benefit all family members. All children enjoy snuggling and reading with Mom or Dad.

*Don't put too much pressure on your child. Judge success more by effort than grades.

*At the beginning of each week, review the week's schedule with your child. Planning ahead in order to complete upcoming assignments is a lifelong skill.

*Limit screen time during the week.

THE ENVIRONMENT

*Well lit, quiet and neat! No TV or radio please, but instrumental music that has 60 beats per minute is okay (Pachelbel's Canon, etc.). It's hard to study in the middle of chaos.

*Some children like to work at a table/desk while others prefer to stand or sprawl out on the floor. Whenever your child is writing, make sure that feet and arms are

grounded on a surface (table/desk/counter for arms and the floor or rung of chair for feet).

*Consider having the following supplies on hand so as not to waste time: pencil, colored pencils, crayons, markers, eraser, pencil sharpener, calculator, paper, post its, scissors, glue, tape, index cards, folders, and a visual timer. At the beginning of the school year, purchase a few sheets of poster board.

The Routine

*Decide **when** to complete homework and make it a priority. Some children may need to get started at daycare/the babysitter's and then finish or be checked at home. Others may get busy at home after a snack or wait until after dinner or any combination that works depending on the day's schedule.

*Decide **where** to complete homework. When children sit in the same place to study, they become conditioned to study and soon can more easily concentrate and make good use of homework time. On the flip side, some kids do better alternating their space. Perhaps, they study science in one area and spelling in another. That will allow for more movement and better retention. You'll have to experiment as every child is different.

*Have a snack first or have a "working snack" while completing assignments. Crunchy foods and sipping water can help your child stay focused or be distracted. Again, experimentation is necessary.

*Unpack backpack and folders with your child. Clean out unneeded papers. Sign required papers.

*Open assignment book/planner and help your child decide what to do first and estimate how much time may be needed.

*Check assignments for completion and accuracy. If your child struggles, help and then write a note for the teacher.

DURING HOMEWORK

*Respect your child's study time. No interruptions, TV, phone calls, or visits from others.

*Work in close proximity to your child. Don't hover but be available, as needed.

*Break long-term projects into manageable chunks. Plot out on a calendar. Help your child to recognize “actual available study/work time” vs. calendar time.

*Give your child frequent and positive feedback. For example, when working on a math worksheet, get your child started on the first few problems to ensure understanding. Then check at the end of each row to eliminate inaccurate completion of the whole page and frustration when your child has to correct many errors.

*Chunk the assignments and take breaks (10 minutes of math, a 30-60 seconds break, 10 minutes of reading).

*Provide visual cues in the homework area such as: expected homework behaviors, editing checklists, model of manuscript or cursive letters, math formulas, etc.

AFTER HOMEWORK

*Check off completed assignments. If required, sign assignment book.

*Help your child put completed assignments in the proper folder/binder.

*Help your child plan for the next school day’s activities (library, PE, music lesson, etc.).

*Supervise your child packing the backpack and putting out what needs to go to school the next day.

*Identify a “launchpad” area in your home. This is a place near the door where things can be placed for easy “grab and go” in the morning.

Providing a homework routine when your kids are young is critical for developing strong work habits for the future. However, the reality is that some students will need support throughout their school careers. Fingers crossed that with your modeling, guidance and support, your child will become responsible, independent and on the road to success.

Perk Musacchio is the co-author of *A Student’s Guide to Communication and Self-Presentation* and *No Manual, No Problem: Strategies and Interventions to Help*

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