

What parents need to know about homework

Dr. Cathy Vatterott
Associate Professor of Education
University of Missouri-St. Louis
vatterott@umsl.edu www.homeworklady.com

Why is it important for my child to do homework?

- *What we want is to **develop and refine intellectual skills--**
but when students don't do homework, they may not perfect math skills, may not read as well, or may lack depth of knowledge for future learning.
- *What we want is to **develop independent learners—**
but when students don't do homework, they may fail to develop independent strategies and may not experience the sense of pride that comes from completing work independently.
- *What we want is to nurture within students an **identity of a successful learner—**
but when students don't do homework they may have trouble keeping up in class, may receive failing grades, and may lose confidence in their ability to learn.

What are the purposes of homework?

To check whether the student understands a concept or skill.
To practice a skill learned in class (like reading, math).
To preview something they will learn in class soon.
To review for a test or quiz.

Sometimes the teacher thinks it's practice, when it's really new learning!

What is good homework?

- Good homework has a clear academic purpose (not busy work)
- Good homework is well-organized, easy to understand, not overly tedious.

HOMEWORK THAT CANNOT BE DONE WITHOUT HELP IS NOT GOOD HOMEWORK!

Good homework makes a child feel smarter, not dumber

How much homework should my child have?

The PTA and NEA recommend "The 10-minute rule":
A maximum of 10 minutes per grade level per night (6th grade=60 minutes)
(the recommended time to be spent on all subjects combined)

How can I get my kids to do their homework?

- Explain to your child that It's not your job—
 "Mom and Dad aren't taking Algebra this year."
- Talk with your child about your expectations and why homework is important.
- Help your child with organization.
 - 13 steps to completing homework(see below)
- Empower your child to take ownership of the homework process
 - home study plan(see page 3).
 - negotiate where, when, and how.
- Rethink your child's schedule of outside activities.

How much should I help?

- Monitor, but don't hover or micromanage
- Ask to see/don't correct/send note to teacher if needed
- Jump in when frustration builds--before "meltdown" stage
- Praise the effort

The Homework Chain (Taylor, 2007)

For student self-diagnosis/Which links are weak or broken?

- [](1) Realize an assignment is being given
- [] (2) Understand the assignment
- [] (3) Record the assignment accurately
- [] (4) Understand how to perform the assignment correctly
- [] (5) Check to bring correct books home
- [] (6) Arrive home with materials and the homework assignment
- [] (7) Begin the homework time
- [] (8) Complete all homework
- [] (9) Check that it is complete, accurate, and neat
- [](10) Set completed homework in a special place
- [](11) Take completed homework to school
- [](12) Arrive at class with completed homework
- [](13) Turn completed homework in on time

Home Study Plan

We all have ways we like to work. These questions will help you figure out the best way to do homework. Circle the answer that is most like you.

1. My favorite position to do homework is
 at a desk sitting on the floor standing laying down
2. It is easiest for me to pay attention to homework
 In a quiet place
 With noise or music in the background
3. When I am working on homework
 I need to have something to eat or drink
 I don't need to have drinks or food
4. When I have more than one thing to do
 I like to do the easiest thing first
 I like to do the hardest thing first
5. After I start working, I like to
 Work for a long time before I take a break
 Work for a short time, take a break, then work more
6. WHEN is it easiest for me to do homework?
 I like to work as soon as I get home from school
 I need to play for a little while and then work
 I need a long break after school before I am ready to work
7. WHERE will I do homework?
 I can work in the same place every day and can keep my homework things there. That place is _____.
 I have to work in different places on different days so I need to keep my homework things in a box that I can move. Some of the places I will work are _____.

How do I communicate with teachers about homework?

Parents need to be LESS INVOLVED with the homework task,
 and MORE INVOLVED with communicating with the teacher.

Teachers don't set out to make parent's lives miserable,
 but they do sometimes need more information about your child.

Make an appointment to talk to the teacher if

- *homework is causing distress for your child
- *the amount of homework is crowding out sleep, play or family time
- *homework is causing your child to hate school
- *homework is causing your child to fail a subject or grade

Parents may want to ask for

- homework assignments to be modified for amount or difficulty
- a school sponsored homework support program for students who cannot complete homework at home.

Parent Feedback Checklist

Dear parent:

I estimate your child can complete this assignment in _____ minutes.

It is not necessary for your child to work longer than _____ minutes on this assignment, even if they do not finish it. They will not be penalized.

How much time did your child spend on this assignment? _____

If your child did not finish the assignment, please check the reason or reasons why below:

____ my child could no longer focus on the task

____ my child was too tired

____ my child did not understand the assignment

____ my child did not have the necessary materials to complete the assignment

____ my child did not have enough time due to other outside activities

____ other reason (please explain) _____

parent signature

HOMEWORK CARD FOR PARENTS

Child's name _____

Grade level _____

It would be helpful for your child's teacher to know how homework fits into your child's daily schedule. Please complete the homework card by writing down how your child typically spends their time in the weekday hours when they are not in school (ie: homework, sports practices, music lessons, visitation with non-custodial parents, dinner, sleep, play, tv, computer.)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
3:00-4:00 pm				
4:00-5:00 pm				
5:00-6:00 pm				
6:00-7:00 pm				
7:00-8:00 pm				
8:00-9:00 pm				
9:00-10:00 pm				

For specific advice on talking to teachers about homework , read

"The Case against Homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do about it" (2006) by Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish.

Sara and Nancy are parent advocates who successfully changed the homework policy in their school. (awesome website www.stophomework.com with news articles, forums, etc.)

Other books about homework

Kohn, A. (2006). *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press. (good website www.alfiekohn.org)

Vatterott, C. (2009). *Rethinking Homework: Best practices that support diverse needs*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. (website www.homeworklady.com)

Articles about homework

Rich, Elizabeth. (2009). "Homework in the responsive classroom". (Interview of Cathy Vatterott). *Education Week Teacher Magazine*, December 11, 2009.

Vatterott, C. (2009-2010). "Homework: Renegotiating the Parent-School Relationship", *Our Children* (PTA National Magazine). December 2009/January 2010, 35(3).

Vatterott, C. (2005). "Mom and Dad aren't taking algebra this year", *Our Children* (PTA National Magazine). October/November 2005.

Other books of interest to parents

Crain, W. (2003). *Reclaiming childhood: Letting children be children in our achievement-oriented society*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Honore, C. (2004). *In praise of slowness: Challenging the cult of speed*. New York: Harper Collins.

Louv, R. (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin.

Pope, D.C. (2001). *"Doing school": How we are creating a generation of stressed out, materialistic, and miseducated students*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rosenfeld, A. and Wise, N. (2000). *The overscheduled child: Avoiding the hyper-parenting trap*. New York: St. Martin's Press.