

Top ten things teachers should know about homework

1. We have a moralistic attachment to homework

“Our belief in the value of homework is akin to faith” (Kralovec and Buell, 2000)
We think we’re teaching them responsibility, but are we teaching them math?

2. Homework is overrated as an instructional strategy

- Research is inconclusive, poorly designed, cannot prove causation
- Homework’s correlation with achievement increases with grade level:
in grades 3-5 the correlation is nearly zero, in grades 5 to 9,
correlation is .07, in grades 9-12, correlation is .25 (Cooper, 1989, 2007)
- That doesn’t necessarily mean that homework can’t work, it just means there’s a lot of bad homework out there!

3. Homework should not be used for new learning

- Homework is more beneficial for rote memory, practice, or rehearsal of skill already developed than for complex tasks that require integration of knowledge and skills.
- Sometimes we think it’s practice when it’s really new learning.

4. Homework that cannot be done without help is not good homework

The primary purpose of homework should be for practice, or to check for understanding or learning progress, without penalizing the student for not understanding.

5. The “10-minute rule” is a good guideline for limiting homework.

- Maximum of 10 minutes per grade level per night (all subjects combined) recommended by the PTA and the NEA
- The 10-minute rule is consistent with the research
- Too much homework can actually cause achievement to decline.

6. Like instruction, homework should be differentiated

- For readiness, learning style, interest, LD, ELL students, gifted students
- Should be time-based, not task-based
 (“do as many problems as you can in 20 minutes”)
- Adjusted to respect family’s scheduling needs

7. Homework should not be causing students to fail

- Late policies and grading—is the climate one of learning or compliance?
- Using grades to “reward virtue” and “punish vice” is often detrimental to learning and motivation
- Giving a zero for incomplete homework is not “holding them accountable”.
Accountability is making them finish the work.

8. Homework can “entrench privilege” for upper class children and unfairly discriminate against lower class children.

- Lack of resources, parental monitoring, handicaps learning
- Grades affect retention and GPA

9. Homework should not be a source of stress for families

- Parents want to control their child’s evenings and weekends
- Parents want children to have downtime and adequate sleep

10. Homework support programs are growing in popularity

- After-school homework assistance—mandatory or voluntary
- LAW—lunch and work
- ZAP—zeros aren’t possible