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**Homework: Harmful or Helpful?**



Mathematics homework (Photo credit: Wikipedia)

The homework debate has been raging for many decades, with no end in sight.  On one hand there are the proponents of homework who swear by its benefits and efficacy, and on the other hand we have the detractors who would like schools to end the practice of giving homework to students.  Among the proponents there is also the burning question of just how much homework should be given to students. Parents, educators, students and indeed the general public have all been deeply divided over the homework issue for a long time.  It seems as though the numbers of detractors are slowly growing.  Some schools in the United States and elsewhere have a no homework policy.  The French president Francois Hollande proposed a no homework policy last year in his plans for educational reform.  His rationale being that students do not have a level playing field when it comes to the matter of homework, because some have parents who can help them while others do not.

The experts also disagree over the advantages and disadvantages of homework.  Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006), for instance, concluded that there is a positive correlation between the amount of homework students do and their achievement levels.  Other researchers, such as Alfie Kohn and Timothy Naughton, state that there is little or no benefit to giving homework and that it does not really lead to improved academic performance.  Alfie Kohn, (2006), wrote “The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing.” Even the title is eloquent.

Let us consider the pros and cons of homework and then make an informed decision and recommendation about its value.

PROS

* Homework helps to  consolidate and clarify what was learned during the school day.
* It gives practice with content, concepts and skills.
* Homework improves performance in standardized tests.
* It is an extension of classwork that allows students to achieve mastery of the content or skills to be learned.
* Students do not have enough time during the day to fully understand all the information they are given.
* Homework facilitates rote learning.
* It  lets parents see what their children are doing at school.
* Homework teaches self-discipline, time management and research skills.
* It reduces time for TV and video games and promotes good study habits.
* It increases interest in schoolwork when it is corrected quickly.

CONS

* Homework must be corrected quickly or students get frustrated and lose interest.
* It can be too burdensome and stressful at times.
* Homework disturbs family life and prevents students from doing household chores.
* Parents or relatives may do the homework for the student.
* Students need time to relax, play and pursue sports and hobbies.
* Homework can make students too tired after a long day at school.
* It keeps them up too late at night.
* Homework is often meaningless busywork which does not promote real learning.
* Students from middle- and upper-class homes have better resources to help them with homework.

After examining the pros and cons where do you stand on the homework issue?  What would you add to the debate?

On the strength of 39 years of experience as an educator I firmly believe in the efficacy of homework.  I know that more homework equates to better academic performance.  I have seen it countless times.  I wish to sound a note of caution though.  Care must be taken to ensure that homework is relevant and linked to vital learning objectives at all times.  It must be designed to deepen students’ understanding, and facilitate mastery of the material to be learned.

Finally, teachers should not overburden students with homework.  There should always be reasonable homework timetables or schedules and homework should be age appropriate.  In elementary schools homework should be light.  It can be increased in secondary school on a sliding scale as the student progresses through the school.  It can range from one hour or a little less per night in the lower school, to three hours or a little more per night in the upper school.

When no written homework is given, students should be encouraged to review the important elements of the day’s work or do additional reading as self-given homework.  They need to understand that they are largely responsible for their own academic progress.  When a student is absent from school he should contact a classmate to get the homework and do it .

[.](http://www.teach-nology.com/gold/worksheets.html)

**5 Reasons Kids Need Homework and 5 Reasons They Don't**

The benefits of homework has been debated by teachers and parents for years as the very word evokes very negative connotations to every involved, students, parents and teachers. Although many people think of homework as doing more harm than good by causing copious amounts of unnecessary stress to everyone, others believe that it has great advantages for children by encouraging them to think more independently outside the classroom.

**The Benefits**

The first benefit of homework is that it allows students and teachers to work more closely together. They can discuss their assignments or any problems that they are having with parts of their textbooks, before or after classes.

The second benefit is that it can bring families closer together as students may ask their parents or siblings for help on their homework. Not only will this help the students get a better understanding of their work with any parts they are stuck on, it will also allow parents to get more involved in their child's educational life.

Thirdly, doing homework will prepare students for the big end tests. If a child does poorly on an assignment then they will learn what is necessary to do well on the next test without being punished. It also provides students with the opportunity to practice at what it takes to be successful in school. Like they say, practice makes perfect.

Doing homework is also a great way to develop responsibilities. By being assigned work one day and knowing that it has to be done by the next day, they will develop a sense of punctuality by turning their work in on time.

And finally it allows parents to see how their children are being educated and they can develop a better idea of how they can help their child. However, some parents, students and even some teachers feel that after 7-8 hours of lessons in school, it is unfair to expect students to come home and work for another three hours.

**The Potential Harm**

The first reason that children should not be given homework is that they need time to relax and take their minds off work. The pressure of having to complete homework every night is quite daunting for most children and they need time to refresh their minds and bodies.

Secondly, it reduces the amount of time that children could be spending with their families. Family time is especially important to a growing child and without it social problems can crop up and a family unit can be compromised by a lack of time being spent together.

Thirdly, homework can cause conflict between children and parents when the parent wants to the child to do their homework but meets resistance from the student to do an overwhelming task.

Too much homework can encourage cheating because children end up copying off one another in an attempt to finish all their assignments. They then end up being rewarded for cheating which doesn't benefit them at all.

And finally, a lot of teachers don't often have the time to grade papers properly as they are too busy with designing lesson plans and consulting teaching resources in order to just manage lessons. So by the time students are getting their papers back, the class has moved on to a new topic.