

Building Homework & Study Skills

Skills for School Success



*Ways Families Can Help Their
Children Do Better in School*

THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®

The Benefits of Assignment

Whether your child's assignment is to read for 20 minutes or study for a math test, there are benefits to working independently outside of school. Doing homework and studying can:

- **Reinforce learning.** When students review material at home, they remember it longer and understand it better.
- **Show students that learning takes place everywhere.** Through regular homework and studying, students see that learning takes place in the home and in the community as well as in the classroom.
- **Teach self-discipline.** Let's face it—some days it's tough for a child to sit down and study. But when students get into the habit of studying regularly, they experience the rewards of self-discipline.
- **Help students learn to use time wisely.** Planning is an important skill for completing assignments—and for success in life.

This booklet suggests practical ways you can help your child build strong homework and study skills—and do better in school.

Get to Know the Teacher

It's easier to support your child when you know what the teacher expects. Meet with your child's teacher and ask what kinds of assignments are given. Ask how long it should take your child to complete assignments. Ask how you can help at home.



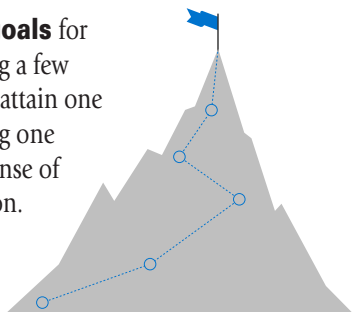
Parents Are Teachers, Too

Although the teacher is responsible for teaching the subject matter, sometimes students have trouble remembering what they learned in class. Here are two simple ways you can help:

- 1. Provide support at home.** You can help your child review, listen to your child read or go over spelling words.
- 2. Ask for suggestions** on how to work with your child. Most teachers are glad to suggest methods and activities to use. Find out how to email your child's teacher. Search online for homework help sites and video tutorials on specific concepts.

Try Proven Ways to Help Your Child

- **Help your child develop goals** for completing assignments. Setting a few small goals that your child can attain one by one works better than having one large goal. This will lead to a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.
- **Be available.** Younger children need the most help. But all children benefit from having someone they can ask to simplify directions or answer questions.
- **Don't be too helpful.** Remember, it's not *your* assignment. Don't do it for your child. Just advise and give your support.
- **Foster an "I can do it" attitude.** Offer praise for effort and when you spot persistence. Say things like: "I like the way you organized that paper," or "You really stuck with those math problems. Great job!"



- **Help your child visualize success.** For example, say, "Imagine your teacher saying it's time for the spelling test. See yourself feeling confident because you've studied all the words. Hear the teacher pronouncing each word, and see yourself writing each one correctly. Then see the A on your paper."



- **Take the fear out.** Say, "I like the fact that you don't fall apart when you make a mistake. There are so many things to learn. If we always worried about mistakes, we'd never accomplish much." When your child makes a mistake, focus ways to learn from it.
- **Help your child see progress.** Talk about what your child has learned. You might get out an old book and say, "Remember when you had trouble reading this book?" If your child is struggling with math, say, "Remember when you couldn't add $6 + 9$?" Share your own excitement about your student's growth.

- **Be sure your child gets plenty of sleep,** well-balanced meals and lots of physical exercise. Adopting healthy habits will help your child learn.



Help Your Child Get Organized

Encouraging your child to get organized is another effective way to help with assignments. Here are three suggestions:

- 1. Use sticky notes.** Give your child self-stick notes to take to class. If the teacher assigns homework, have your child stick one on the book, folder or notebook needed to complete it. At the end of each day, your child will know what to take home.
- 2. Make a calendar.** A monthly calendar with large, empty squares will help your child keep track of due dates, tests and quizzes. A big calendar is also especially helpful for keeping track of all the steps for a long-term assignment.
- 3. Use a planner.** Many schools provide planners for their students to write down assignments.



When Is the Best Time for Studying?

Like adults, some kids are night owls. Others are up before the sun rises. Finding your child's "prime time" for studying is one key to supporting success in school.

Experiment to see what works for your child. Does your child accomplish more and study more effectively right after school, or after dinner?

Also remember that students need short, regular breaks to do their best thinking. Encourage your child to schedule a 10-minute break after every hour of working.

Set a Timer

Does your child dawdle while doing homework? A kitchen timer can be a nag-free reminder to stay on task.

Together, look over your child's assignments to figure out how long they should take to complete. Then divide homework time into blocks. Your child can set a timer for one block and work steadily until it goes off, then take a short break before beginning the next block. This should help your child stay on task and learn to work independently.

Where's the Best Place to Study?

Deciding *where* to study is as important as deciding *when* to study. Start with a simple, quiet place. If your child is young, or needs supervision to stay on task, choose a place where you can be nearby. Add a table or desk, good lighting and a comfortable chair. Include supplies such as paper, pencils and pens, erasers, a calculator, a ruler, a pencil sharpener and a dictionary.

Manage Distractions

Experts agree that screen time and studying do not mix. Have your child silence or put away devices. If your child needs a device to work, suggest closing windows and apps that aren't school-related.

Some children work better with soft music in the background while others need complete silence. Have your child experiment to see what's most effective.

'Can I Study With a Buddy?'

Study buddies may be able to help each other when they get stuck. They may motivate each other. And students often learn more when they can talk about their answers and the reasons for them. Having someone to study with may motivate students who must study when their parents aren't around.

But studying together may not always work for a child who's easily distracted. And, if both students want to talk about something other than the assignment—it won't work.

Suggest the 'SQ3R' Study Method

Teach your child to use the SQ3R study formula. SQ3R is a proven five-step process that makes studying more effective—Survey, Question, Read, Restate and Review.

1. **Survey.** Have your child quickly look over the material to see what it's about. Skim the headings. Look at photos. Read the bold type.
2. **Question.** Once your child knows the main idea, it's time to think of questions the assignment might answer. What are the parts of a plant called? How are new cells produced?
3. **Read.** Now your child should read the assignment. While reading, have your student look for answers to the questions from step 2.
4. **Restate.** Next, have your child tell you the important parts of the chapter. What are the most significant ideas covered?
5. **Review.** What were the main ideas? Did your child find answers to all the questions? What else did your student learn? What was surprising? This step can be done right away as well as days later.

Taking Notes Can Help

Sometimes students need help to remember reading material. Taking notes can reinforce it in their minds. Here's a method you can suggest:

1. **Draw a line, top to bottom**, down the left side of a sheet of note paper to make two columns.
2. **Write each major text heading** from the assignment in the left column.
3. **Summarize the text** under that heading by writing a brief note in the right column.
4. **Do this for key words** and phrases as well.
5. **Try to recall the information** in the right column from the headings and cues in the left column.



Here's How to 'Ace' the Test

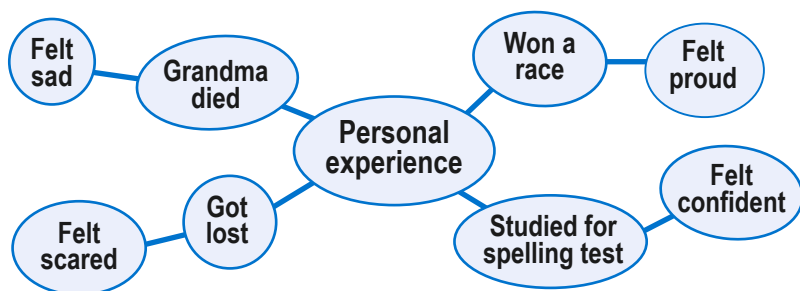
One of the best ways for children to study for a test is to make up their own practice questions. Have your child imagine what the teacher will ask. It's helpful to keep in mind anything the teacher has said about the test. Will it include essay questions? Multiple choice? Will anything be emphasized?

Once your child can answer the practice questions, the real thing will seem much easier.

Tame Those Writing Assignments

Writing assignments are often part of a student's workload. Here are some ways you can help:

1. **Have your child "talk through"** ideas on the topic before starting. Clear writing starts with clear thinking. Talking with a family member or friend can help clarify thoughts.
2. **Encourage your child to make notes** before writing. An outline or a web, like the one shown, are useful ways to get organized.



3. **Offer specific praise.** Say things like "I really like the way you've described how you felt when you were lost."
4. **Don't over-criticize.** Focus first on what your child is trying to say. It's helpful to point out errors now and then, of course. But if you are always looking for what's wrong, your child may hesitate to share writing with you.
5. **Encourage your child to revise and rewrite.** Experts often say, "There's no such thing as good writing. There's only good *rewriting*." Your child might add, delete or rearrange parts to make the writing stronger. Your student should also correct errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalization.

Help Your Child Remember Facts

For some children, memorizing things is easy. But many others need a little help. Here are some techniques that may help:

Use Mnemonics

Mnemonics (ne-MOHN-iks) are memory aids. If you remember the poem, "Thirty days hath September," that's a mnemonic. If you know the names of the Great Lakes by spelling HOMES (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior), that's another.

When your child has to memorize a list, suggest writing the words in a vertical column down the left side of a sheet of paper. Then your child can try using the first letter of each word to compose a new word, phrase or sentence that ties all the items together.

If your child needs to learn the planets in order of their distance from the sun, share this one: My Very Excellent Mother Just Served Us Noodles. (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune.)



Have Your Child Teach You

When students have opportunities to share what they are learning, their comprehension and retention improve. The next time your student is learning something new, see if your child can teach it to you.

Effective Ways to Use Flash Cards

Using flash cards is one way to memorize a large number of facts. Whether your child is learning dates, names, new words or math facts, flash cards can help. Try these strategies:

- **Question-and-answer.** Write a potential test question on the front of each card and the answer on the back. You can make up questions based on notes or the textbook chapter. Or take questions from a study guide or find them at the end of a chapter.
- **Memory.** You'll need two sets of cards. Write a math problem or vocabulary word on each card in one set and the answer or definition on each card in the other. Mix up the cards face down and take turns flipping two cards over. Keep the pair if they match, and put them back if they don't. The player with the most matches wins.

Note: The best way to study is to use a variety of methods. Flash cards are useful, but think of them as just one tool in your "study toolbox"!

And Finally, Make Sure Assignments Get Turned In!

Once the studying and assignments are completed, many children still need help getting the work to school. If your child's assignments often get lost or left behind, suggest this:

1. **Put each assignment** in a special folder as it is completed.
2. **Put the folder** in a notebook or schoolbag.
3. **Put the schoolbag** by the door before going to bed.

Have More Questions?

Do you still have questions about homework or studying? Do you think your child spends too much, or too little, time doing homework or studying? Do you have more questions about just what you should be doing to help your child? Make an appointment to talk with your child's teacher.

You, your child's teacher, the principal and other staff are all part of the team that helps your child learn. And your child will learn more when the team works together.



With your support, homework can be the important teaching tool it is meant to be. Although students should always do their own work, families' support in building practical homework and studying skills can make a big difference!

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