



# How To Tackle Large Assignments



**Y**our science project is due tomorrow. You're supposed to be growing bean plants to see how they respond to different growing conditions. But so far, your project consists of five paper cups, some seeds and a pile of dirt.

You're probably out of luck for the science project. (Those beans just aren't going to grow overnight.) But you could be ready to tackle the *next* big assignment—and, as you've probably noticed, assignments *do* get larger as you move up in school.

Kids who have learned how to break a big assignment down into smaller steps are easy to recognize—on the day a big assignment is due, they're the ones who *didn't* stay up all night the night before.

But those kids don't know anything you can't learn. Here's how to complete large assignments on schedule.

## Divide the project into smaller parts

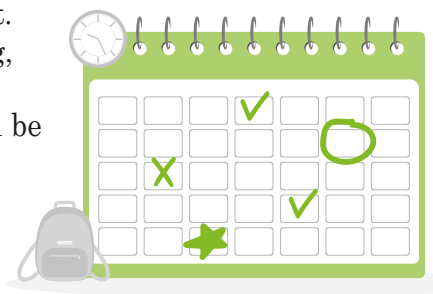
**A**s soon as possible, list all the things you need to do to complete the project. For a science project, steps might include choosing a topic, designing a method to test your hypothesis, conducting the experiment, recording data, writing up results and preparing a display to illustrate findings.

Each of these steps will take some time to complete (like growing plants). Decide about how long each step should take. A parent or teacher can help you make sure you've allowed enough time. Build in a little time for unexpected events or emergencies—an extra athletic practice or a printer that needs a new ink cartridge.



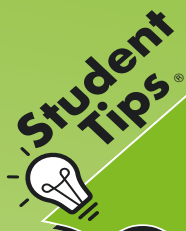
## Set deadlines

**N**ow get out your calendar. Work backward from your due date to see when each step of the project needs to be completed so you can finish on time. Share this timeline with anyone who may need to help you with any part of the project. For instance, if you need a ride to the library to do your research, check the date with an adult. If necessary, make changes to your schedule. Write the deadlines for each part of the project on your calendar. Check off each deadline as you meet it. Before long, your big project will be complete.



## Make a list of the supplies you'll need—and make arrangements to get them

**D**id you ever discover you needed a piece of poster board after the last store in your neighborhood had closed? Ever need an adult to take you to the store to buy index cards on a night when everyone is busy? Getting the supplies you need is an important step in finishing a large project. Make a complete list of what you'll need and then figure out when you can get these supplies.



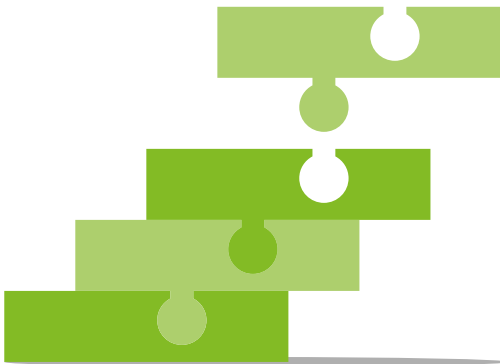
## How To Tackle Large Assignments

### Step by step

The key to tackling a big project is to break it down into logical parts that can be tackled step by step.

This process starts on the day the teacher gives the assignment. Take clear, specific notes about what's expected. Many teachers hand out an assignment sheet for big projects. If your teacher has prepared one, *don't lose it*. Put it in your notebook right away.

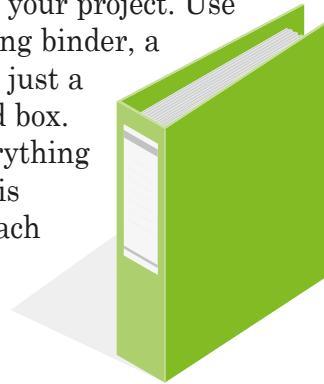
Ask questions: If your project is a research paper, does it need to be double-spaced? Should it have footnotes? A title page? Write all this information down. When it's time to turn in your project, you'll be glad to have this list to check.



### Get organized

Whether you're recording data for a science project or preparing a bibliography for a research paper, a large assignment usually requires you to handle a lot of information. If you're disorganized, this part of the project can be a nightmare.

Create a place to keep all the information for your project. Use a large three-ring binder, a file box or even just a large cardboard box. Make sure everything goes back in this storage place each time you work on the project.



### Pay attention to the details

Often, it's the details that make the difference between an outstanding project and one that's just so-so. Give yourself enough time to take care of those all-important details. If your assignment requires illustrations, allow time to draw them or create them on the computer. If you're turning in a written assignment, leave time to proofread carefully. (There are some mistakes that a spell-checker won't catch.)

## PREVENT Procrastination

Because you have so much time to complete a large project, you may put it off—and put it off. Here are some ways to prevent procrastination:

- **Do it first.** As you sit down to do your homework, start by working on your large project.
- **Tell yourself, “Just 10 minutes.”** Sometimes, you just don't feel like working on a particular project. So tell yourself you'll do it for just 10 minutes. By then, you'll probably be into it and won't want to stop.
- **Give yourself rewards.** If you meet your first deadline on time, give yourself a small reward. Call a friend and talk for a while. Watch a favorite TV show. Ride your bike or shoot baskets.

*Tackling a large project teaches you a lot about time management, responsibility, organizational skills and persistence. Once you've successfully completed a large project, you will have developed skills that will not only help you on your next big project—they'll help you for the rest of your life.*

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