

Homework - The Great Debate

Students tend to think that teachers enjoy assigning homework, ruining their afternoons and weekends with tedious assignments. Of course, this is not really the case. Many teachers dread grading homework as much as students hate doing it! So, why assign homework? Is it beneficial or harmful? Homework has both benefits and drawbacks. When considering assigning homework, teachers should carefully reflect on the purpose of the assignment. The list of pros and cons below can help guide the teacher's reflection.

Pros

Time

There seems like there is never enough time to cover all the material in class and especially not enough time for special assignments. Independent work, like reading a book, or special projects, like completing a science fair project, do not always get accomplished in class. These assignments can be given as homework to allow for more time in class for other activities.

Extra Independent Practice

Everyone knows that in order to learn, students must practice. Homework allows students to practice the information they learned in class. Many classes require skill-based repetition such as memorizing times tables in math or reading practice in English. Homework is a great way to emphasize such skills.

Individualized Remediation

Homework can be individualized so that students get extra practice on the skills they struggle with. This allows teachers to provide remediation without using class time. Doing the assignment at home can also help the student avoid the stigma that can come with doing something different in class.

Pre-teach Vocab

Learning new vocabulary is essential to many classes. Some studies say that students need to be exposed to a new word at least 17 times before they learn the word. Homework can be used to expose students to new vocabulary terms before they are used in class to help pre-teach the words. This could be done through a reading assignment or by a looking up definitions and writing them in their own words.

Life Skills

Assigning homework and deadlines helps students learn to manage their time, keep a schedule, and stay organized. For some students, even taking something home and bringing it back the next day is a challenging, though essential, skill to learn.

Cons

Relaxation

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.

Family Time

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.

Conflict

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.

Thesis:

Grading

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.

Research

- **The link between homework and student achievement is far from clear.** There is no conclusive evidence that homework increases student achievement across the board. Some studies show positive effects of homework under certain conditions and for certain students, some show no effects, and some suggest negative effects (Kohn 2006; Trautwein and Koller 2003).
- **Homework appears to have more positive effects for certain groups of students:**
 - **Older students benefit more from homework than younger students.** Some studies have shown that older students gain more academic benefits from homework than do younger students, perhaps because younger students have less-effective study habits and are more easily distracted (Cooper 1989; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2001; Leone and Richards 1989; Muhlenbruck et al. 2000).
 - **Students from low-income homes may not benefit as much from homework as those from higher-income homes.** Some researchers believe that students from higher-income homes have more resources (such as computers) and receive more assistance with homework, while low-income students may have fewer resources and less assistance and are therefore less likely to complete the homework and reap any related benefits (McDermott, Goldmen and Varenne 1984; Scott-Jones 1984).
 - **Students with learning disabilities benefit from homework under certain conditions.** Students with learning disabilities can benefit from homework if appropriate supervision and monitoring are provided (Cooper and Nye 1994; Rosenberg 1989).
 - **Asian American students may benefit more from homework than do students from other ethnic groups.** A national study of the influence of homework on student grades across five ethnic groups found that homework had a stronger impact on Asian American students than on students of other ethnicities (Keith and Benson, 1992).
- **Homework may have nonacademic benefits.** Certain nonacademic benefits of homework have been shown, especially for younger students. Indeed, some primary-level teachers may assign homework for such benefits, which include learning the importance of responsibility, managing time, developing study habits, and staying with a task until it is completed (Cooper, Robinson and Patall 2006; Corno and Xu 2004; Johnson and Pontius 1989; Warton 2001).
- **Too much homework may diminish its effectiveness.** While research on the optimum amount of time students should spend on homework is limited, there are indications that for high school students, 1½ to 2½ hours per night is optimum. Middle school students appear to benefit from smaller amounts (less than 1 hour per night). When students spend more time than this on homework, the positive relationship with student achievement diminishes (Cooper, Robinson, and Patall 2006).
- **The amount of homework *completed* by students seems to be more positively associated with student achievement than the amount of homework *assigned* by teachers.** Some research has shown that students who spend more time on homework score higher on measures of achievement and attitude. Studies that have delved more deeply into this topic suggest, however, that the amount of homework assigned by teachers is unrelated to student achievement, while the amount of homework actually completed by students is associated with higher achievement (Cooper 2001; Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, and Greathouse 1998).

Thesis:

- **The effect of parent involvement in homework is unclear.** Studies of parent involvement in homework have produced mixed results. Homework assignments that require interaction between students and parents result in higher levels of parent involvement and are more likely to be turned in than noninteractive assignments. Some studies have shown, however, that parent involvement in homework has no impact on student achievement. Other studies indicate that students whose parents are more involved in their homework have lower test scores and class grades—but this may be because the students were already lower performing and needed more help from their parents than did higher-performing students. (Balli, Wedman, and Demo 1997; Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye 2000; Epstein 1988; Van Voorhis 2003).