



The Value of Homework

The reward of a thing well done is to have it done.
Emerson

By Dana W. Toedtman

Trying to accomplish all we need to do in a day remains a challenge for all of us, especially with busy after-school schedules. In the past few years, research on the effectiveness of homework has attempted to answer the question of whether or not homework is valuable. How is homework related to studying and how can we help students be more efficient with their “learning time?”

Research findings show that homework is related to achievement particularly in the upper grades. For every 30 minutes of homework completed daily, the GPA may increase up to a half point. Students also need time and experience to develop good, independent study habits and to learn to cope with mistakes and difficulty. Homework and practice are necessary for students to engage independently and to make connections with new knowledge.

Homework is valuable when students can focus their energy to increase their understanding and get close to mastery. Homework done well is “studying.” So, how do students do this best? Research indicates that it is important for students to have a consistent time and place at home to study. If students analyze their personal preferences, they can develop the optimum time and place for their needs.

Some students need privacy and quiet; others do not. Having the right materials, using a plan book, printing out the online syllabi and looking at class schedules to prioritize what needs to be done for the next two days (since all classes don’t meet every day) are all essential “good student” habits. Then, create a quick “to do list” and get to work!

It has proven helpful to have an “attitude of speed”; students need to work quickly and efficiently without sacrificing accuracy. If a student estimates how long a task might take, and then works in a focused manner, he or she will be working more effectively. Sometimes, 30-minute increments of practice are enough, with a short break in between.

Some study experts suggest beginning with the hardest task first; others say that it helps to settle in with an easier task. An important aspect of homework is “studying.” Again, research provides statistics about the value of “active review.” If a student reviews notes within a 24-hour period, the long term retention may be as high as 85 percent. To review, students can re-read, “boil down” or summarize their notes, highlight key points and details, study out loud and ask themselves questions for clarification. If anything is confusing, students can ask for assistance from a teacher or friend.

Clearly, students need the help of their parents to navigate the academic waters. A recent *New York Times* article, “After the Bell Curve,” reminded us once again that the home environment is a critical factor for student success. Providing encouragement, a positive attitude and appropriate conditions for homework success are all important. Parents need to help their students find a workable time and place, with the right materials, to complete homework.



Parents also need to be available to discuss a project, to help find resources and to answer questions. Parents can read and comment on a draft of a paper, advise whether the evidence supports the conclusion or whether spell checking is necessary. Research cautions that inappropriate parent involvement can actually be a detriment to student learning. Parents should not help with content; their teaching techniques often confuse children. If homework is too difficult, students need to confer with their teachers. This way, they will get the help they need, and the teachers will know when something is, perhaps, too challenging. Parents should try not to interfere with the independent completion of homework.

There is still a need for further research on the subject of homework. The application of new technology is developing rapidly, and there are new advances in understanding how the brain works in relationship to learning styles and tasks. Two websites that might help to further knowledge about learning include www.allkindsofminds.com and www.netc.orc/focus.

Fortunately, the faculty at Penn Charter is committed to keeping current with research and empowering our students to find the “study systems” that will work best for them.

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