

HOMEWORK

In Elementary Schools



A Resource Document



**Waterloo Region
District School Board**

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WCPA

WATERLOO
COUNTY
PRINCIPALS'
ASSOCIATION

This resource document was compiled by
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Introduction

Studies have shown that setting the right climate and attitude toward homework can instill positive, lifelong work habits. Establishing a routine at home, that works, is the most important factor to ensure the success of any homework program. Homework is a valuable way of supporting and extending the curriculum.

Many schools in the Waterloo Region District School Board have a homework guideline in place. The purpose of this document is to provide schools with a collection of resources from which they can create their own approach to homework. Permission is granted to cut, paste and copy as needed. Our thanks to the many schools who contributed information to this resource.

Homework also provides parents with the opportunity to take an active role in their child's education. This resource outlines many useful tips for parents regarding homework.

We hope that you find this document a valuable and useful resource.

Homework Ad Hoc Committee
W.C.P.A.
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Homework – What Is It?

Homework, broadly defined, is comprised of any learning activity either assigned or chosen to be done at home. It is an activity which expands your child's opportunity for learning. It is a chance to rehearse, practice, try again, take a second look, reinforce or review a learning experience or apply skills to real-life situations.

There are at least four different types of homework:

- a) **Practice:** Provide students with opportunities to apply new knowledge or to reinforce/review newly acquired skills. i.e. *drill sheet on new math facts.*
- b) **Preparatory:** Students obtain background information on a unit of study to be better prepared the next day. i.e. *pre-reading a short story.*
- c) **Extension:** Encourages students to pursue knowledge individually and imaginatively. i.e. *science projects, essays.*
- d) **Expanded Opportunities:** Applying learning in school to real-life situations at home. i.e. *recipe-measuring ingredients, preparing a shopping list.*

Homework can take a variety of forms both formal and informal: school work sent home by the teacher, independent work completed by the child, learning activities engaged in by the parent and the child, recreational and leisure activities. Real life homework helps students feel successful because they complete assignments of their own choosing at their own level.

The advantages of doing homework are:

- to develop good work habits at home
- to become responsible for one's own learning
- to become self-disciplined
- to develop a regular routine at home
- to provide parents with an opportunity to be involved in learning with their children
- to help increase academic achievement
- to expand the curriculum by allowing students to learn at home and in the community
- to help develop independence, risk taking and creativity
- to promote life long learning
- to raise a child's self-esteem

“Through homework, children learn skills that they must develop if they are to grow up to be independent, motivated and successful adults. They learn to follow directions, work on their own, begin and complete a task, manage their time and work to their full potential.” Homework Without Tears by Lee Cantor

Homework Expectations

Criteria

Homework expectations should be based on the following:

- age and learning style of each child
- grade level
- needs and abilities of individual students
- the classroom program
- teacher expectations
- parental expectations
- family lifestyle and commitments

Time requirements will vary but a general rule of thumb is 5-10 minutes for each grade level at least 3-4 week nights during the school year:

Examples:

Grade 2 – 10-20 minutes

Grade 8 – 40-80 minutes

Some children will require more time than others. Some teachers and/or parents expect more than others. If a child has more homework on a regular basis, as suggested above, it should be checked out quickly with the child's teacher.

Homework on the weekend will depend on whether or not there is a test/exam scheduled for the following week or a major assignment, such as an essay or a project due.

If there is no homework assigned, it is suggested that students be engaged in such things as review, research, reading, expanded opportunities (real-life situations) i.e. writing a letter, playing chess with or without parents. It is very important that parents take an active role in their child's learning. This parental interest and support helps the child to develop a positive attitude towards learning and to build a positive self image, both of which are critical factors contributing to successful learning.

"Children will remember the skills and strategies they learn in school if they are encouraged to use those skills and strategies in their everyday lives."

Real-Life Homework by David Boers and Patricia Caspary

Parent-Teacher Communication

Research shows that parental involvement in schools positively affects student achievement and creates better schools.

“Emerging from the parental involvement research is a message that’s remarkable in its consistency: the closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement.”

M. Fullan 1991

Honest two-way communication between home and school is the best way of forging this partnership.

- Homework is the key link between home and school.
- Homework is the best means parents have of maintaining a day-to-day connection with their child’s education. It can provide almost continuous contact between parent, child and teacher.

This partnership begins at the start of the year with “Curriculum Night” where parents establish their first contact with the teacher. To assist with homework, the parent needs to be aware of the subjects and how they are being taught. It is at this initial meeting that teachers will outline their expectations regarding homework and how/when they can be contacted.

Parents may also choose to contact the teacher by phone or note. A sample is:

Date: _____

Dear _____

My son/daughter _____ is having difficulty with _____

Could you please give extra assistance in this area.

Thank you.

Remember open communication with the teacher will benefit your child.

Roles of Students, Teachers and Parents

Role of Student:

- Establish a regular routine for homework with your parents and stick to it.
- You are expected to **do** your homework and hand all assignments and projects in on time.
- Give your best effort each night. Ask for help only after you have tried your best to solve the problem first.
- Demonstrate a positive attitude towards homework. Do it at the agreed upon time.
- If there is no direct homework assigned, read for pleasure, practice spelling, play a board game or work with your parents on another learning activity.
- Homework is **your** responsibility; not your parents; not your teacher's (although they can help).

Role of the Teacher:

- Share a communication plan for the year that keeps parents informed of their child's homework expectations. A daily planner is an excellent means.
- Ensure that the students have the appropriate skills to complete the assigned homework.
- Modify homework expectations according to individual needs.
- Check homework on a regular basis and provide students with feedback.
- Inform parents when homework responsibilities have been neglected and ask the parent and student to come up with a plan to resolve the problem. Provide advice to parents when requested.
- Emphasize with students their responsibility for doing their homework. Teach students the skills to study effectively.

Role of the Parent:

- Assist your child in setting up a proper homework area in your home, equipped with the necessary materials.
- Establish a daily homework time based on school guidelines.
- Monitor your child's homework time. Check to see that your child is doing homework at the proper times.
- Give your child help only after he/she has made an effort on his/her own. Encourage your child's independence in doing his/her homework.
- Check to see that homework is completed.
- Consistently praise your child's efforts.
- Send a note to the teacher if your child does not complete the homework. Provide a brief explanation.
- Contact your child's teacher if your child cannot do the homework assignments and if you need advice.
- Respond to teacher requests for assistance, through notes, class newsletters, communication books and progress reports.

The teacher may request your assistance with some homework assignments.

Tips for Parents

A homework routine for your child can begin as early as Kindergarten. For Kindergarten and Grade 1 students, homework may involve a parent reading and discussing a story with the child, counting, playing a number or word game or drawing.

As a general rule of thumb, an increase of 5 to 10 minutes of homework per grade level is recommended (e.g. Grade 2/10-20 minutes: Grade 8/40-80 minutes). It is important, particularly for younger children, to recognize that play provides many opportunities for learning and socializing. **Appropriate time should be provided for both play and homework.**

Parents are often unsure how to help their child with homework. The following guidelines may assist you in setting a positive environment and tone for completing homework.

Setting: Make sure your child has:

- A comfortable, uncluttered place to do homework; free from distractions and properly lit.
- Table and chair should be a comfortable height for the child.

Note: Some children prefer a quiet environment while others do better with music in the background. This you should discuss and decide in consultation with your child.

Materials: Make sure your child has:

- The following basic supplies: pencils, pens, erasers, rulers, markers, calculator, dictionary, thesaurus, counters, drawing supplies and water.

Routines: Create, with input from your child:

- A regular time each day to do homework.

Note: A scheduled time to do homework needs to take into account extra-curricular activities and parent obligations, but should not be an afterthought at the end of the day. If there is no “assigned homework”, your child should be encouraged to read, be read to or enjoy a board game with the family during “homework time”.

Parental Support:

- Show a positive interest in your child's homework. Praise your child for genuine effort. A smile or pat on the back will give positive feedback and encourage the child to try.
- Be available when your child asks for help. A simple answer to a question may encourage him/her to finish independently. **Remember to be patient.**
- Serve as consultants about assignments, but do not do the assignment. Have your child tell you in his/her own words what the assignment is. Make sure he/she knows what to do and how to get started.
- Help your child look at long term assignments and plan how to chunk the work into smaller sections.
- Provide an audience for oral reading and math facts drill. Be a proofreader.
- Help your child establish a routine that includes putting finished homework into their work bag. Homework is not completed until it is returned to school and handed in.

Problem Solving:

- If there is a problem getting homework done, find out the nature of the problem. Is it that your child doesn't understand the homework? Doesn't understand the content? Doesn't want to do the homework? Once you know what the problem is, you will have a better chance of resolving it.
- Know your child's frustration level. If your child becomes too frustrated it is time to stop.
- If problems persist, encourage your child to speak to the teacher. Role playing with your child may help your child to approach the teacher. If necessary, communicate directly with the teacher to resolve homework issues.

My Homework Routine Checklist

- I work in a quiet place – **Personal Study Area.**
- My personal study area has good lighting.
- My personal study area is comfortable. I sit at a table or desk.
- I work where there are few distractions (phone, T.V., CD, radio, walkman).
- My personal study area has all supplies readily available i.e. paper, pens, pencils, markers, eraser, rule, calculator – **Homework Survival Kit.**
- I use a schedule to plan my **Daily Homework Time.**
- I put completed homework in the same place each night – **Homework Drop Spot.**

Practice Makes Perfect!

Study Skills

- Do some studying EVERY NIGHT.
- Make a plan or schedule. Stick to your plan.
- Work carefully. Finish your work. Hand in work on time.
- Keep notes neat and accurate.
- Catch up on your work if you have been away.
- At the end of the week, review what you have learned that week.
- Find a way to study that works for you. Here are some ways to try:

Read out loud. Close the book and write the important ideas of what you read. Check your book to see if you remembered all the important points. Repeat if you need to. Do the same with maps or diagrams.

Read. Close the book. Try to remember the important things you were studying. Check your book for things you forgot. Write down the important points. Ask someone to ask you questions.

Alphabet Studying:

P – PREVIEW	get the main idea/look at the headings
Q – QUESTION	ask yourself questions as you preview
R – READ	say the main ideas in your own words
T – TEST	write down the main ideas

Tips:

- make a list of review questions
- ask for review questions from your teacher
- redo old tests
- work with a partner to test each other
- ask for help in areas where you are weak
- listen carefully when instructions are given
- relate what you are studying to everyday life
- look for patterns – ways that information fits together
- take part in discussions
- if you are not sure, ASK

It's Test Time

- read the whole test over
- stay calm
- watch the clock – divide your time wisely
- do the easiest questions first
- think carefully about the hardest questions/draw a diagram or sketch to shape your thinking
- don't give up – do as much of each question as you can
- make an outline or “map” for essay questions, to show the main parts of your answer and how they fit together
- re-read your test to find any errors
- check that all questions have been answered
- check that you have answered the question that was asked
- do not hand in your paper quickly, just to be first

Research Findings and Quotes About Homework

It is very difficult to get any two people to agree on the homework issue. Student needs are diverse, classroom programs vary and parent expectations and life styles are quite different. Most of the following research findings and quotes support homework.

“Parents may be seeing regularly assigned homework or more than they’ve seen in the past. This is a time of great learning. Teachers want to ensure all materials are covered – whether it’s in the classroom or at home.”

Alexious, author of Starting Small, Thinking Big, Practical Strategies for School Success

“Students should be able to finish their work in the course of a day.” After-school hours are most effectively spent “making connections with family and friends, developing positive social behaviours....Homework for homework’s sake doesn’t work for me.”

Linda Miller, University of Ottawa’s faculty of education

“Kids will remember the skills and strategies they learn in school if they are encouraged to use those skills and strategies in their everyday lives...Obviously, real-life homework is most effective when the significant adults in a child’s life become involved.

...We want children to love learning, appreciate their own growth, and be motivated to become lifelong learners. Real-life homework helps kids feel successful because they complete assignments of their own choosing at their own level.”

David Boers and Patricia Caspary, Real-Life Homework, The Executive Educator

“Studies show that carefully assigned and graded homework has a greater influence on your child’s academic success than any other factor, including family income, or socioeconomic or educational background.”

Elinor Florence, Give Your Child an Edge, Reader’s Digest

“Daily homework offers a potent tool for improving educational performance.”

Richard P. McAdams, professor of education at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa.

“Homework is not given enough importance in many schools although it’s been demonstrated that kids will meet higher expectations on demand.”

Larry Sackney, University of Saskatchewan

Homework is “what we call the informal curriculum. Homework teaches kids to focus on the problem, get themselves organized and get it done. These are important life skills.”

Garth Holmes, Helping Parents Help

“Homework can create enormous stress in families...A regular routine with clear-cut rules can work wonders...when parent and child follow the same routine every night, the homework wars will end.”

Henry Janzen, University of Alberta

“Homework can be a valid component of the learning process to stimulate recall, provide feedback, assess performance, and enhance retention and transfer.”

Rodney S. Earle, Homework as an Instructional Event, Educational technology

“Parents should spend more time teaching students to organize, budget time, plan ahead, concentrate, handle responsibility, and solve problems.”

Linda Sonna, Homework Help for Harried Parents, PTA Today, 1992

Students must recognize that homework is their responsibility. To facilitate the process, students could complete time logs to build homework time into their schedules. Contracts and charting techniques can be used when necessary.

J. Kuepper, Homework helpers: A guide for parents offering assistance

Students who are well rested and nourished learn better. Students should be encouraged to relax by reading books for enjoyment.

Albert and Joan Hodapp, Homework: Making it Work

The two best predictors on the effectiveness of homework are (a) percentage of homework completed and (b) the accuracy of homework.

M. Tosenberg, Journal of Learning Disabilities

“As vital facilitators, parents must support the value of learning and homework. In essence, parents need to create a mini-classroom in their homes.”

Albert and Joan Hodapp, Homework: Making it Work

*Researcher Harris Cooper examined studies on homework and student achievement and found that homework substantially raises high school students' achievement; in junior high, homework raises students' achievement only about half as much; and in elementary grades, homework has no discernible effect on students' achievement.

Susan Black, The Truth about Homework, American School Board Journal

*Does not support homework at the elementary school level.

Activities To Do With Your Child At Home

Many everyday activities can provide opportunities to reinforce the learning taking place in school and allow for “expanded opportunities” in real life situations.

Some examples:

- Encourage your child to:
 - read the labels or help make change when you are shopping
 - help make up a shopping list
 - read the newspaper to find specific information
 - read the recipe or measure out ingredients when cooking
 - watch educational television programs
 - take a neighbourhood walk and read street names
 - write letters and thank you notes to relatives
 - help plant and nurture plants in a garden
 - write a journal or keep a log of a family trip or vacation
 - assist in the workshop, garage
- share a day at the office or work place and have your child assist
- make your house a home of books – model reading for your children
- subscribe to good children’s magazines, i.e Owl
- plan a daily discussion or sharing time with family members
- play a game – snakes and ladders, dominoes, checkers, chess, scrabble, monopoly
- teach your children to play different card games and play with them – crazy eights, cribbage
- tell a joke or riddle of the week
- play alphabet games, I spy..., license plate bingo
- display artwork at home – encourage hobbies and interests of the child
- assign small jobs/chores to your children to develop a sense of responsibility
- play memory games – concentrate, pairs
- purchase construction kits – Lego, Knex, Dupelo
- arrange trips to places like Woodside Park, Doon Heritage Crossroads, Lion Safari, Laurel Creek, Royal Ontario Museum, Ontario Science Centre, Farm tours, Safety Village


Recommended reading: Homework Without Tears by Lee Cantor (Harper & Row)


It is important for parents to show a positive interest in their children’s homework as well as their school work. It is important to provide children with a suitable place to do homework away from the television or pre-school children. Encourage but do not pressure children. Homework must not be seen as a punishment. A positive attitude about homework and making it a regular routine is very beneficial over time for students. The role of parents in helping develop this attitude is very, very important!


HELP WITH HOMEWORK





Children who resist or avoid homework need to understand why they have it, and how to approach the task in an effective way. Here are several practical strategies which parents can use to promote the development of good homework habits.

 Schedule homework at the same time each day, or follow a similar pattern each week. Also, let your children have a say in selecting the best time to do homework, for example after school or after supper. **TIP:** Using a timer to signal that it's homework time can help establish a routine; it also reduces stress between parent and child.

 Children need a designed spot where they regularly do their homework. Often, the best place is a desk in their bedroom, but it can be a table in the dining room or kitchen. Ideally, children should do their homework in a quiet location where they will not be distracted by others. **TIP:** For a child who experiences extreme difficulty sitting still, try a stand up desk.


 The fewer distractions the better, and that includes television and music. Most children already watch enough television and they will concentrate better without it. Music can be distracting too, but it depends on the child. **TIP:** The best approach is no television, and music only if it promotes homework.

 To get off to a good start, children must listen to the teacher's instructions and write down their assignments. Reviewing this list is the beginning of the homework routine each night. Children also need to look at long term assignments and plan how to chunk the work into smaller sections. **TIP:** While doing homework, it's important to take study breaks; get some fresh air or have a snack, and then go back to work.


 The amount of homework varies with the grade level, the teacher and the child. Generally, homework increases with age, but there will be variations from day to day, and from child to child. It's hard to predict how long a child will spend on a particular

assignment at home on a given night.

TIP: Spending either too much or too little time on homework can be cause for concern.

 If a child is spending too much time on homework, there may be related issues which need to be addressed. Other indicators include difficulty working independently, leaving assignments until the last minute, turning homework in late, and telling parents there is no homework when there is. Parents who are concerned should contact the school. Teachers appreciate the support parents provide, and children benefit from positive communication between home and school.

TIP: If teachers and parents set up a homework monitoring system, be sure that the children clearly understand it's still their homework.

 Homework is not finished until it is returned to school and handed in on time. Parents can help children establish a routine that includes putting completed homework into their book bag. **TIP:** A check list by the door helps children remember all the things they must take to school: lunch, key, library books, gym clothes and homework.



Leslie Hossack is a principal with the Carleton Board of Education and a former member of OPSTF's Public Relations Committee. This column can be downloaded through the opstf.public.relat conference on the electronic village.

CUT AND PASTE - A COLUMN TO INCLUDE IN YOUR SCHOOL NEWSLETTER