

Introduction of independent work or homework

There are several concerns related to appropriate use of subject matter homework. Some teachers rarely give homework, and thus are not expecting much of their students. Others assign far more homework that is healthy for students because of the high levels of stress it induces. Many homework assignments might be characterized as busy work because they do not require students to think or elaborate on the information they are supposed to be learning. Fill-in-the-blank study guides and answer-the-end-of-chapter questions are notorious for their poor design when considered from the perspective of how much these activities facilitate student learning.

Another concern involves teachers assigning as homework practice activities that require students to use skills in which they have yet to receive sufficient instruction. This typically occurs when teachers introduce a new skill during the school day and then assign homework that involves practicing the new skill. Because the skill has only been taught on an introductory level, students' attempts at using it when doing their homework are often fraught with errors and cause a considerable degree of frustration.

Effective Alternative

Effective assignments related to subject-matter learning are those that supplement (not replace) classroom instruction. In other words, students should not be expected to read and independently learn about topics not previously introduced and explored, at least to some degree, in class.

Homework designed to develop students' skills is most appropriate when the skills students are practicing are those in which they can *already perform accurately with little assistance*. Thus, skill-oriented homework should focus on building fluency of existing skills, NOT developing new skills.

Implications are that if you introduce a new skill today, the homework for tonight might require students to practice previously mastered requisite skills to the new one you are currently teaching.

Specific Tips

Characteristics of effectively designed assignments include:

- *Can be completed in relatively short amount of time
- *Have a clear purpose from students' perspectives & are personally relevant to students
- *Are different from other assignments
- *Have clear, well organized directions
- *Provide opportunities for creative expression
- *List available resources
- *Include student choices
- *List evaluation criteria
- *Are considerate in relation to time demands
- *Provide opportunities to re-do work

*Allow for feedback

*Are challenging, but doable

HOME – End of lesson tactics

MAKES SENSE HOME