

Short Term Assignments

Make Homework Less Work! – Short term assignment tips

Do algebra problems 15 through 25. Conjugate the verbs on page 50 of your French workbook. Read pages 12 through 20 of the Shakespeare play, and when you're finished with that, don't forget to fill in the missing chemical symbols on the Periodic Table of Elements worksheet.

Sound like a roster of your homework for the next few nights — or maybe even just for tonight? Homework is a major part of going to school: It's your teachers' way of evaluating how much you understand of what's going on in class, and it helps reinforce important concepts.

Create a Homework Plan

Luckily, you can do a few things to make homework less work.

1. Be sure you understand the assignment. Write it down in your notebook or day planner if you need to, and don't be afraid to ask questions about what's expected. It's much easier to take a minute to ask the teacher during or after class than to struggle to remember later that night! If you want, you can also ask how long the particular homework assignment should take to complete so you can budget your time.
2. Use any extra time you have in school to work on your homework. Many schools have study halls that are specifically designed to allow students to study or get homework done. It's tempting to hang out with friends during study periods or unstructured time, but the more work you can get done in school, the less you'll have to do that night.
3. Pace yourself. If you don't finish your homework during school, think about how much you have left and what else is going on that day, and then budget your time. Most high-school students have between 1 and 3 hours of homework a night. If it's a heavy homework day and it seems like you've got an assignment in every subject but gym and lunch, you'll need to devote more time to homework. It's a good idea to come up with some kind of homework schedule, especially if you are involved in sports or activities or have an after-school job.

Watch Where You Work

When you settle down to do homework or to study, where do you do it? Parked in front of the TV? In the kitchen, with the sound of dishes being cleared and your brothers and sisters fighting?

These places may have worked when you were younger and your assignments didn't require as much skill and concentration. But now that you're older, a bedroom, study, or any other room where you can get away from noise and distractions is the best place to get homework done. But don't study on your comfy bed — opt for a desk or table that you can set your computer on and is comfortable to work at. It doesn't need to be large, just big enough to spread out your stuff.

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Get to Work

When you start your homework, tackle the hardest assignments first. It's tempting to start with the easy stuff to get it out of the way, but you'll have the most energy and focus when you begin, so it's best to use this mental power on the subjects that are most challenging. Later, when you're more tired, you can focus on the simpler things.

If you get stuck on a problem, try to figure it out as best you can — but don't obsess and spend too much time on it because this can mess up your homework schedule for the rest of the night. If you need to, ask an adult or older sibling for help or call or email a classmate for advice. But don't pick someone you'll be up all night chatting with or you'll never get it done!

Take a Break

Most people's attention spans aren't very long, so take some breaks while doing your homework. Sitting for too long without stretching or relaxing will make you less productive than if you stop every so often. Taking a 15-minute break every hour is a good idea for most people. (But if you're really concentrating, wait until it's a good time to stop.)

Once your homework is done, you can check over it if you have extra time. Be sure to put it safely away in your backpack — there's nothing worse than having a completed assignment that you can't find the next morning or that gets ruined by a careless brother or sister. (And no teacher still believes that "chewed by the dog" line — even when it's true!) Now you're free to hang out.

Get Help When You Need It

Sometimes even though you're paying attention in class, studying for tests, and doing your homework, certain classes seem too hard. Although you may hope that things will get easier or that the explanation to the geometry theorems will magically appear in your dreams, most of the time this doesn't happen.

What does happen for many people is that they work harder and harder as they fall further and further behind. Naturally, this makes them hate a class and everything to do with it. If you need extra help, the most important thing to know is that there's nothing weird or embarrassing about it. No one is expected to understand everything, and people have very different learning styles.

The first place to turn for help is your teacher. He or she may be able to work with you before or after school and explain things more clearly. But what if you don't feel comfortable with your teacher? If you're in a big enough school, there may be other teachers who teach the same subject. Speak to a guidance counselor or to the other teacher directly and you may be in luck. Sometimes it just helps to have someone new explain something in a different way.

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You might also be able to get some help from another student. If there's someone you like who's a good student, think about asking that person if you can study together. This might help because you'll be hearing the information from the perspective of one of your peers. However, keep in mind that this might not get you the results you need. Lots of people understand something perfectly without being able to explain it.

Another option for extra help is a tutor, either after school, on weekends, or in the evening. You'll need to talk to an adult about this because it costs money to hire a tutor. Tutors sometimes come to your home, but there are also tutoring centers across the country. A tutor may have broad knowledge of many things or may be trained in just one subject. Tutors work with you one on one, helping review and further explain things taught in the classroom. The advantage of having a tutor is that it gives you the opportunity to ask questions directly and work at your own pace.

If you're interested in a tutor, check the internet or the yellow pages of your phone book, or get a referral from a teacher, a friend, or classmate who has a tutor. And if you live in or near a town with a college or university, you may find tutors there. Often college students will tutor high school students in their areas of study to help cover the costs of school.

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