

# Rethinking Homework for Remote Learning

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Reducing homework has long been a conversation point amongst parent and teacher groups, but the pandemic has hastened the debate over whether it is something that can be limited or even eliminated. Studies over the past decade, including [this one from Stanford University](#), have pointed out that homework tends to place a lot of stress and pressure on students, while yielding unreliable results as to its ability to boost a child's performance in any given subject.

And now that many schools are still offering online classes to a large amount of their students, the homework debate has only deepened. After all, after spending so many hours glued to a screen, why would any parent want their kids to spend even more time on the computer to complete homework after the school day is done?

It's true that educators have been searching for alternative ways to assign homework, or even alternatives to homework period since before the pandemic and the introduction of

widespread virtual classes. Some might argue that such thinking should extend further to free up more time away from the screen during this unprecedented time of online learning. But as teachers and parents, how can we ensure that students are getting enough practice with the skills essential to their academic success?

Join us as we discuss strategies for limiting busy work and best practices for ensuring that homework that is assigned is both creative and meaningful to student learning.

## Rethinking Homework in the Age of Online Learning

According to the Stanford study mentioned above, homework can limit a student's success because it can be discouraging to students who otherwise love learning. Instead of learning for discovery and joy, children are essentially completing work that they inevitably complete to earn points or grades. This tends to suck the fun out of learning, making school seem like only a means to an end: to graduate.

Now that many classes are delivered through an online format, homework serves as yet another chore that requires a child to be logged into a device that much longer during the day. That's why it's even more critical to adapt assignments in creative ways that can take kids away from their screens to learn in a hands-on and authentic way.

To get started, it's important to rethink each and every homework-oriented task and ask oneself the following questions:

- By completing this assignment, what will the students gain that they can't from in-class work?
- Is this homework assignment worth my students' time?
- Will this task create more stress or take time away from a child's home and family life?

If the answer to any of the above questions is a "yes" or if a specific skill or benefit cannot be identified, it's probably best to stay make changes or eliminate that task altogether.

Kids may be spending more time online, but Kids Academy makes screen time count! The Talented and Gifted app is an all-in-one learning app that makes learning quick and enjoyable! Download the app today to get started! Otherwise, your kid may practice [interactive lessons](#) online - with or without your help - directly on our website!

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## Successful Homework Assignments for the Remote Classroom

So, how can teachers tweak homework assignments to ensure that kids benefit from it? Consider the following methods for creating successful assignments that can be completed outside of class:

- Build in time for independent reading

Ask any ELA teacher, and they will be quick to say that studies have long shown that the more one reads, the better they are at reading. Over the years, teachers have tried to build in more time during the school day for independent self-selected reading, where children pick out whatever it is they want to read, and read it! However, this may seem like an awkward use of virtual class time, as students are in their own homes instead of in the classroom.

One solution to this problem is to encourage families to use homework time for independent reading. Apps like Epic! or myON exist to give kids unlimited resources for

[reading worksheets](#) or ebooks. Free apps available through the county library, or even the school's library may also grant access to a vast number of books available for learners.

Get families the information they need to access titles that their kids will love, and simply encourage little learners to use some of their homework time to read for enjoyment. This can help reduce homework-related stress, while fostering a love for reading, improving their fluency and comprehension along the way!

- Sometimes, less is more!

Some teachers tend to give more homework than others. Think back to your own childhood experience; which subject did you receive the most homework for compared to the rest? If you're like many folks, the answer is math! Understandably, [math requires practice](#) to master concepts and build numeracy, but how many problems should students really be completing per night?

One way to adjust homework is to zero in on the individual skill that students are working towards learning, and only assign a few problems to help children practice that specific skill. For many students, working on an entire workbook page full of word problems can actually take hours and produce tears. Limit the number of problems assigned per night to focus only on what's needed for meaningful practice.

- Make assignments more individualized and personalized

Students are as unique as we are! Everyone has their own individual interests and hobbies, and children are no different. Some kids are passionate athletes, while others excel in the arts. Some may be interested in collecting items, while others are busy reading everything they can about animals. One way to motivate students to connect assignments to real-life applications, is to mix in elements from the things they enjoy the most!

Get to know your students and create word problems that involve topics that your class enjoys. Let them choose their own topics for writing, based upon their own interests. By personalizing assignments, students will find more value in the homework they complete, and they will be in a better position to connect the skills they learn to elements in their own daily lives.

- Mix in elements of home and family

Here's an option that encourages children to discuss their work with the people they love the most: their families! Of course, before utilizing this option, try to get a feel for your student's family situations, to ensure that this is an appropriate idea to meet the needs

of your learners. If you're ready to proceed, try the following ideas to mix in elements of home and family into homework assignments:

- Ask students to bring a family recipe and utilize it during a math lesson regarding fractions. Task students to adjust the recipe to account for more or less servings.
- Most teachers know that students retain information more when they are tasked with teaching something to someone else, as opposed to passively listening to a lecture or taking notes. With this in mind, assign students to teach a recently learned concept to a family member or sibling, and record their "lesson".
- Task children with interviewing a family member or sibling over a particular topic.
- Send home puzzles or riddles and assign kids to discuss them with friends and family members to see what different answers they get.

No matter what, be sure to consider the fact that many families are busy, especially during the pandemic. With parents working at home, many families find themselves stretched thin. Give them plenty of time to prepare for such an assignment and keep alternative assignments ready to go in case an assignment might not work for child/family. Utilize this type of homework sparingly and keep them as stress-free as possible.

- Use your learning management system or teleconferencing app to display and share student work!

Little learners love to explore their ideas through drawing and coloring. They also love to share their pictures with others, so why not combine these positive factors into high-interest homework assignments? While students may not be physically present in a classroom during a remote session, technology can be used to compile and share student work.

To get started, plan an assignment that students can represent through drawing and coloring pictures. For example, assign kids to read a passage and to imagine the setting of the story, or picture the action in their heads. Task them with drawing a scene from the passage as they visualize it in their minds. Another idea might be to assign children to learn about different cultures by drawing pictures of food or dishes from the culture and writing a few sentences describing it. After they complete the picture, have students post it to a media gallery in your learning management system, or share it during class using their cameras.

Understandably, homework poses unique challenges in the online learning environment. Even before many classes pivoted online, educators and parents alike have questioned the merits of assigning too much busy work. Even so, there are still ways to offer

children the practice they need, while making homework more enjoyable, and taking them away from the screen to complete it. Be sure to question each and every assignment, assessing for relevance and need, and utilize the above tips to make homework less stressful for everyone involved!

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