

# Is Homework Beneficial? - Top 3 Pros and Cons

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A child working on homework.  
*Source: Image by lourdesnique via pixabay.com, May 25, 2016*

What are the **pros and cons** of homework? Is it beneficial? From dioramas to book reports, and algebraic word problems to research projects, the type and amount of homework given to students has been debated for over a century. [1]

In the early 1900s, progressive education theorists decried homework's negative impact on children's physical and mental health, leading California to ban homework for students under 15. [2][1] Public opinion swayed in favor of homework in the 1950s due to concerns about keeping up with the Soviet Union's technological advances. [3] Today, kindergarten to fifth graders have an average of 2.9 hours of homework per week, sixth to eighth graders have 3.2 hours per teacher, and ninth to twelfth graders have 3.5 hours per teacher, meaning a high school student with five teachers could have 17.5 hours of homework a week. [4]

Proponents of homework say that it improves student achievement and allows for independent learning of classroom and life skills. They also say that homework gives parents the opportunity to monitor their child's learning and see how they are progressing academically.

Opponents of homework say that too much may be harmful for students as it can increase stress, reduce leisure and sleep time, and lead to cheating. They also say that it widens social inequality and is not proven to be beneficial for younger children.

## Is Homework Beneficial?

### Pro 1

#### **Homework improves student achievement.**

Studies show that homework improves student achievement in terms of improved grades, test results, and the likelihood to attend college.

Research published in the *High School Journal* indicates that students who spent between 31 and 90 minutes each day on homework "scored about 40 points higher on the SAT-Mathematics subtest than their peers, who reported spending no time on homework each day, on average." [6]

On both **standardized tests** and grades, students in classes that were assigned homework outperformed 69% of students who didn't have homework. [7] A majority of studies on homework's impact - 64% in one meta-study and 72% in another - showed that take home assignments were effective at improving academic achievement. [7][8]

### Con 1

#### **Too much homework can be harmful.**

A poll of high school students in California found that 59% thought they had too much homework. [24] 43% of respondents said that homework was their greatest source of stress, and 82% agreed that they were "often or always stressed by schoolwork." [28]

The American Educational Research Association says that "whenever homework crowds out social experience, outdoor recreation, and creative activities, and whenever it usurps time that should be devoted to sleep, it is not meeting the basic needs of children and adolescents." [27]

High-achieving high school students say the amount of homework they have to complete leads to sleep deprivation and other health problems such as headaches, exhaustion, weight loss, and stomach problems. [29]

Research by the Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA) concluded that increased homework led to better GPAs and higher probability of college attendance for high school boys. In fact, boys who attended college did more than three hours of additional homework per week in high school. [10]

Excessive homework leads to cheating: 90% of middle school students and 67% of high school students admit to copying someone else's homework, [30] and 43% of college students engaged in "unauthorized collaboration" on out-of-class assignments. [31] Even parents take shortcuts on homework: 43% of those surveyed admitted to having completed a child's assignment for them. [32]

## Pro 2

### **Homework helps to reinforce learning and develop good study habits and life skills.**

Everyone knows that practice makes perfect. Students typically retain only 50% of the information teachers provide in class, and they need to apply that information in order to truly learn it. [11]

Homework helps students to develop key skills that they'll use throughout their lives, such as accountability, autonomy, discipline, time management, self-direction, critical thinking, and independent problem-solving. [12][13][14][15]

A study of elementary school students who were taught "strategies to organize and complete homework," such as prioritizing homework activities, collecting study materials, note-taking, and following directions, showed increased grades and positive comments on report cards. [17]

Research by the City University of New York noted that "students who engage in self-regulatory processes while completing homework," such as goal-setting, time management, and remaining focused, "are generally more motivated and are higher achievers than those who do not use these processes." [18]

## Con 2

### **Homework disadvantages low-income students.**

41% of US kids live in low-income families, which are less likely to have access to the resources needed to complete homework, such as pens and paper, a computer, internet access, a quiet work space, and a parent at home to help. [34][35] They are also more likely to have to work after school and on weekends, or look after younger siblings, leaving less time for homework. [35][25][36]

A study by the Hispanic Heritage Foundation found that 96.5% of students across the country said they needed to use the internet for class assignments outside of school, and nearly half reported there had been times they were unable to complete their homework due to lack of access to the internet or a computer, sometimes resulting in lower grades. [37][38]

Private tutoring is a more than \$6 billion enterprise that further advantages students from wealthier families. [25][39] A study published in the *International Journal of Education and Social Science* concluded that homework increases social inequality because it "potentially serves as a mechanism to further advantage those students who already experience some privilege in the school system while further disadvantaging those who may already be in a marginalized position." [39]

## Pro 3

### **Homework allows parents to be involved with their child's learning.**

Thanks to take-home assignments, parents are able to track what their children are learning at school as well as their academic strengths and weaknesses. [12]

Data from a nationwide sample of elementary school students show that parental involvement in homework can improve class performance, especially among economically disadvantaged African-American and Hispanic students. [20]

Research from Johns Hopkins University found that an interactive homework process known as TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) improves student achievement: "Students in the TIPS group earned significantly higher report card grades after 18 weeks (1 TIPS assignment per week) than did non-TIPS students." [21]

Homework can also help clue parents in to the existence of any learning disabilities their children may have, allowing them to get help and adjust learning strategies as needed. [12] Duke University professor Harris Cooper, PhD, noted, "Two parents once told me they refused to believe their child had a learning disability until homework revealed it to them." [12]

## Con 3

### **There is a lack of evidence that homework helps younger children.**

An article published in the *Review of Educational Research* reported that "in elementary school, homework had no association with achievement gains" when measured by [standardized tests](#) results or grades. [7]

Fourth grade students who did no homework got roughly the same score on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math exam as those who did 30 minutes of homework a night. Students who did 45 minutes or more of homework a night actually did worse. [41]

Temple University professor Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek, PhD, says that homework is not the most effective tool for young learners to apply new information: "They're learning way more important skills when they're not doing their homework." [42]

An entire elementary school district in Florida enacted a policy that replaced traditional homework with 20 minutes of reading each night - and students get to pick their reading material. [43] A study by the University of Michigan found that reading for pleasure - but not homework - was "strongly associated with higher scores on all achievement tests" for children up to 12 years old. [40]