

UNDERSTANDING MEAN, MODE AND MEDIAN

The question of homework



Curated by



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How much is enough?

From studies of effective teaching, we know there is a positive correlation between homework as a learning tool and student achievement in the classroom. Some educators argue that homework does not have as much of an effect on the scholastic achievement of elementary students as it does on secondary students. Nevertheless, we know there are measurable gains at both levels. That statement comes with a caveat; that is, the amount of homework assigned needs to be tailored to the student's age and grade level.

The burning question is: how much homework should teachers assign to students? There is no clear answer to that query, but I'd like to offer the following simple formula, which has been suggested by many teachers:

This means that the amount of after-school homework (in minutes) is equivalent to the grade you teach times 10. For example, if you teach fifth grade, you would assign 50 minutes of homework per evening (5th grade \times 10 = 50). Here's a sampling:

Grade Level	\times	Minutes of Homework per Evening
2	10	20
4	10	40
6	10	60
8	10	80
10	10	100

How involved should parents be?

The question of parent involvement in the completion of homework is often one of those black or white issues for teachers. Teachers are either very supportive of the notion of parents helping children or they are dead set against it.

Some schools and many districts have written policies regarding the degree of involvement parents should have in their children's homework. Based on a review of many of those documents, I'd like to offer the following suggestions regarding the role of parents in homework:

- Keep parents regularly informed about the amount of homework assigned to their children.
- Parents should facilitate the completion of homework assignments. They should not do assignments for students; rather, they should provide the atmosphere and support system that will increase the likelihood of student completion (e.g., a quiet place to study, encouragement, and praise).
- Parents should have active and regular conversations with their children about homework assignments, concerns, and issues. A solid interest in homework helps support the completion of that homework.
- Be sure parents understand the purposes of homework, the amount of homework assigned, consequences for noncompletion of homework, and a list of the types of suggested or acceptable parent involvement.

What's the purpose of homework?

Teachers will say that homework if it is to be effective, must serve one of two purposes. The first is for the general purpose of practice. Homework cannot be used to introduce a new concept; it should be used to provide students with necessary practice to help them master a concept presented in the classroom.

Although the practice is both important and necessary, I'd like to suggest that the practice has to be realistic. For example, assigning students 100 2-digit addition problems as a homework assignment may be overdoing it. There's nothing to suggest

that 100 is any better than 20 (for example). If 20 gives your students the necessary practice time, why extend it even further?

The second general purpose of homework would be to prepare students for a forthcoming presentation or new topic. For example, before you introduce the topic of desert animals to your third-grade students, you may ask them to read the children's book "Around One Cactus: Owls, Bats and Leaping Rats" (by Anthony D. Fredericks) as a homework assignment the night before. Or before you lecture your eleventh-grade students about small-business economics, you might want them to interview one or more small business owners in the local community beforehand about the challenges they face with supply and demand issues.

What's the response to homework?

Doing a homework assignment and turning it in without receiving any feedback is nonproductive as well as demoralizing. My own experience, as well as those of teachers at all grade levels, has shown that the impact of a homework assignment is directly proportional to the immediacy and nature of any resulting feedback.

Here's the bottom line: if you assign homework, grade it, comment on it, and get it back to students as quickly as you can. Timely, frequent, and specific feedback to students has been proven to be the most powerful academic motivator (for the completion of that homework) and has a greater impact on learning.

Two keywords: Interesting and relevant

"This is boring!" Have you ever heard a student use that comment in reference to a homework assignment? Have you ever used that comment in reference to a homework assignment? Many students define homework in terms of punishment or redundancy. They will often ask, "What does this have to do with anything?"

Although there is a need for practice and reinforcement in some homework assignments, it is not necessary (and may even be counterproductive) to fill every homework assignment with lots of skill-and-drill practice. Instead, spice up those assignments with some creative and unique learning opportunities that help students connect with the real world.

Mathematics

Students frequently think math assignments are the most uncreative of the entire curriculum. Consider these suggestions as to ways of changing that perception:

- Find 15 items in your house that are rectangles.
- Select one of your mother's favourite recipes and double it.
- Use a menu from a local restaurant and plan a meal for four people within a budget of \$50.
- Locate a chart or graph in the local newspaper. Explain what it means in words.

Sounds good ... Now what?

These suggested homework assignments include both short-term as well as long-term assignments. Most importantly, they let students know that homework doesn't have to be dry and pedantic but can be filled with all sorts of learning possibilities, possibilities that stimulate students in applying what they learn in your classroom to the world outside the classroom.

In generating hypotheses and predictions and problem-solving, I talked about ways you can enhance the thinking that takes place in your classroom. You can use four of those thinking strategies to create dynamic and engaging homework assignments. For example, here are some homework suggestions for a lesson on tide pools:

- Fluency. Make a list of all the words you can think of that describe a tide pool.
- Flexibility. Describe a tide pool through a seagull's eyes. Or describe how a sea star might see that same tide pool.
- Originality. You are a sea urchin. Describe your feelings about the rise and fall of tides.

- Elaboration. Imagine that you had to live in a tide pool for the next year. What habits would you need to change?

Some practices to practice

Students either like homework or they don't. And guess what. Teachers either like homework or they don't! I've talked to and visited lots of classroom teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels; here are some suggestions they'd like to pass along to you.

The end product

Students will often ask, "Why do we gotta do this stuff?" The question they are asking is one of purpose. Students at any age need to know the "why" of a homework assignment. If the response is, "It's for your own good," the assignment will be less than meaningful for them.

Be sure you provide your students with a valid reason and rationale for any homework assignment. Attach the assignment to their real and immediate world. State clearly the purpose for any assignment. A wise assignment is one that includes the "whys."

Shifting perspective

Often students feel as though homework is assigned strictly for the benefit of the classroom teacher. Provide your students with alternate audiences for their homework assignments, and you will increase the interest level significantly.

For example, as part of a social studies lesson on communities, invite students to create a brochure of historical sites in your community for members of a local senior citizen centre. Here are a few other audiences:

- Parents
- Members of their peer group
- Community members
- Other school personnel
- Siblings and other family members
- Another class or section

It's your choice

As appropriate, offer students several choices within a homework assignment. Of course, not every assignment will lend itself to choice-making. However, when the teacher gives students the option of making some choices, they will be more motivated to complete those assignments. Here are a few possibilities:

- Do the even-numbered or odd-numbered problems.
- Select any four of the following nine questions.
- Select any two of the following eight multiple intelligence activities.
- Work alone or work with a buddy.
- Select an appropriate due date from one of the following.

By providing students with choices, you are also providing them with a sense of ownership in their homework assignments. As a result, they will be more invested in those tasks.

Give them a break

Students have other obligations in their lives besides school. For that reason, I'm a firm believer in not assigning any homework over the weekend. Students need opportunities to be with their families, play, or just "chill out" from all the demands of the academic world. Scheduling a homework assignment to be due on Monday morning puts an additional burden on students that just isn't fair or necessary. Let kids be kids on the weekend there's plenty to do from Monday through Friday.

The same rule holds true for holidays and vacation periods. These are times away from the academic rigours of classroom life. Let your students enjoy these breaks free of the anxiety of an impending assignment or fast-approaching due date. You'll see higher levels of motivation as a result.

Final tips

Here's an assembly of tips and suggestions from teachers who have wrestled with the homework issue for years. Tap into their expertise, and incorporate some of these ideas into your classroom routines.

- At the beginning of the year, assign each student a “Homework Buddy.” If one partner is absent, the other can gather assignments and call or visit her or his buddy to let them know what was missed.
- Give students a second (or third) chance. Remember, very few of us mastered the art of walking the first time we tried it. Most authors (this one included) need multiple drafts before a book is finished. In both cases, many attempts were necessary. Give your students the same option.
- Be sure to share any homework assignments in both verbal and written form. For each subject or class, post the homework assignments on individual clipboards attached to the wall. Consider tape-recording assignments for physically challenged students in your class.
- Always put a date on every homework assignment. That way, students who are absent for extended periods of time can retrieve the necessary assignments by date.

Source:



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