

Ingredients of Useful Homework

Expectations. At the beginning of the school year, communicate your expectations for homework to both students and parents. Which days do you collect homework? What are the penalties for late or incomplete homework? How can parents and students reach you if there is a problem?

Consistency. Be as consistent as possible throughout the school year. Getting students accustomed to a regular homework pattern early in the year is helpful to all students but may be especially important for students with learning disabilities (Patton, 1994).

Purpose. Make sure the purpose of homework assignments is clear to the teacher, student, and parent. Students and parents alike are less likely to become frustrated when they understand the value and the objectives of an assignment.

Time. Don't underestimate the length of time it will take for students to complete assignments. Include time for gathering supplies and organizing materials in your calculation of how long your students will take to complete an assignment.

Explain. Take time to explain instructions to students and give them an opportunity to ask questions before the end of class. When possible, give students time to get started on homework assignments in class, so you can be sure they understand what they are being asked to do.

Variety. Provide a variety of homework assignments throughout the school year to prevent homework from becoming boring or monotonous.

Coordinate. Make an effort to coordinate with other teachers, so students aren't overwhelmed with long assignments for several classes all on one night.

Evaluate. Finally, evaluate homework assignments and give students feedback on their work. When assignments are just checked off as completed, students perceive them as meaningless, which leads to frustration and low-quality work. Invite parents and students to evaluate a homework assignment, perhaps using a feedback form.

Rename homework. Instead of referring to homework consider describing it as practice, review, sharing, mastery, exploration, skill demonstration, etc. Is reading every day really homework? Read out of habit, fun or desire for information.