

Parent/Student Homework Contracts



What is a *homework contract*?

A homework contract is agreement between a student and his/her parent(s) that clearly outlines what each will do to ensure that out-of-school assignments are completed accurately and on time. Contracts should outline rewards that will be given to students for completing assignments and consequences for not doing the work.

Why should students have a homework contract?

Homework is an essential part of the learning process. Concepts taught at school are reinforced through homework. Students learn life skills such as time management, independence, organization, and responsibility by being held accountable for assignments. Some students, however, need assistance in getting motivated to tackle homework tasks. Homework contracts can help students get on track. Contracts also help students develop positive homework habits *before* problems arise.

Whose homework is it, anyway?

Many parents have said, “When my child gets a lot of homework, I get a lot of homework!” This should not be the case. Even though there are items in the homework contract that parents promise to do, they should be supervisory in nature, for example, making sure the student adheres to the set “homework time” each day. Although parents should support their children and enforce homework rules, they should **not** be responsible for doing the assignments nor teaching the content to the student.

Are all homework contracts the same?

Homework contracts should be tailored to a student’s individual needs. A student who procrastinates has different needs from the student who forgets to write down assignments. Students are empowered when given the chance to provide input about the homework contract. Parents and students should work together to identify problems and solutions. Contracts should be revisited and revised frequently. If the contract is not working, parents and students need to identify why and then make changes.



Incentives for homework completion:

For a homework contract to be effective, it is important for adults to be consistent in enforcing the rules. Creating a system of rewards and consequences may be an effective way to keep students on task.

☆ **Daily rewards:** Students may do an activity they enjoy, such as reading for fun, watching a program, chatting online with friends, or playing outside, for example, for a set period of time when their homework has been completed.

☆ **Weekly rewards:** When the student has been successful at completing homework all week, s/he is rewarded with a special activity during the weekend, such as a movie or pizza night at home.

☆ **Monthly/term rewards:** Some parents have found it helpful to use a “point system” in which students earn a set number of points for each night they complete their assignments (1 night’s worth of completed assignments = 1 point, for example.) Students can “cash in” their points at the end of the month, or term, for something special, such as a meal at a favorite restaurant, a trip to the zoo, a game from the toy store, etc. (20 points = 1 game, for example).

Consequences: If the student does not complete his/her assignments, an appropriate penalty may include taking away privileges such as: time with friends; TV, stereo, or video games; internet or phone use.

NOTE: Parents know their children best! Therefore, it is up to them to decide what rewards and consequences will work best for their individual children and their family’s situation.

OVERCOMING HOMEWORK BARRIERS: TIPS FOR PARENTS



PROBLEM: The student does not write down assignments or does not bring assignments home from school.
☆ **POSSIBLE SOLUTION:** Student is given an assignment book, such as a small notebook, or a daily/weekly homework planner. A special homework folder for assignments may help students be more organized. Parents check the student's assignment book or planner every day. If the parents have difficulty understanding the assignment, they should call the child's teacher for clarification.

PROBLEM: The student completes the homework, but it is often sloppy and full of mistakes.

☆ **POSSIBLE SOLUTION:** Parents make certain that student does not rush and that the student spends time checking his/her own work. Parents can get students into the habit of proofreading. In one technique, the parent looks over the assignment then says to the student, "I have found two spelling mistakes on this page. Let's see if you can find them."

PROBLEM: The student is distracted by younger siblings, television, video games, the internet, loud music, or people talking.

☆ **POSSIBLE SOLUTION:** The parents and student should designate a specific "homework time" for each day in a distraction free area in the home. While the student works on homework, parents and young siblings engage in quiet activities.

PROBLEM: The student puts off doing homework until the last minute, so there is not enough time to complete the assignment or the student is too tired to concentrate.

☆ **POSSIBLE SOLUTION:** An earlier homework time will likely be beneficial, for example, immediately after returning from school. It is harder for many children to do homework once they are in "relaxation mode." If a student attends an after school program, parents should check with the program's director to see if there is a set time and place for studying.



PROBLEM: The student has many scheduled after school activities and is too busy to complete assignments.

☆ **POSSIBLE SOLUTION:** Parents recognize that time management is an acquired skill, and it may not be possible to do everything. Students must prioritize their activities with school work being their first priority.

PROBLEM: The student does not have the tools necessary to do homework, such as writing utensils, dictionary, paper, ruler, calculator, etc.

☆ **POSSIBLE SOLUTION:** The parents create a "homework box" that contains supplies for doing assignments. Parents can ask teachers, parent program coordinators, or the principal if supplies could be borrowed from, or provided by, the school.



PROBLEM: The student frequently gets stuck on difficult problems or does not understand the material.

☆ **POSSIBLE SOLUTION:** The purpose of homework is to reinforce skills already learned at school. If the student does not understand how to do an assignment, parents and teachers need to address the student's academic needs. It is helpful for parents to be available during the scheduled homework time, or at some time later that day, to provide encouragement. It is recommended that parents ask students about their assignments, make sure the student comprehends the tasks, and when possible, supervise the student through the first few parts of the assignment. Parents should not, however, do the assignment for the students. When necessary, parents should redirect the students to their textbook or notes where they are likely to find helpful information.

PROBLEM: The student has difficulty focusing for long periods of time.

POSSIBLE SOLUTION: Parents can help students break daunting task into doable chunks. One way to do this is for the parent and student to agree on a schedule of breaks, for example, a 10-minute break after the student completes 10 math problems.

PROBLEM: The student completes the homework, but it never seems to make it into the teacher's hands.

☆ **POSSIBLE SOLUTION:** The parents and student work together to identify what is going wrong. Parents can help the student create a system for getting the work returned to school, for example, having a special folder for completed assignments.