

Make your Homework Time Count

Under more pressure than ever to achieve, high school students often find themselves overwhelmed with increasing amounts of homework. While some high schools are guilty of assigning too much homework, there are ways of approaching the task that allow you to become more productive and efficient. Organizing your homework assignments saves a lot of time and wasted effort. Make sure you record your assignments for each class as they are given, and then make a checklist - before you leave school for the day if possible - to make sure you have all the tools and supplies you need for each assignment, including textbooks, class notes, additional reading material from the library, etc. If you have a study hall near the end of the day, use at least a few minutes of that time to organize yourself.

Are there assignments that you believe are going to give you more trouble than others? Use your study hall time to think about those particular assignments, and either tackle them in study hall or think about some resources you can access before you leave school for the day. Maybe you need to clarify something with the teacher, or get information from one of your classmates about the assignment. Get a library pass and use your library time to gather resources for your evening's homework.

You should arrive home with everything you need to complete the evening's homework assignments. Again, organization will save you time and trouble. Wherever you do your homework, whether it's at your own desk or stretched out on the bed in your room, have all the books, notebooks, and supplies you need within easy reach.

There are a few standard tricks to approaching reading assignments. Before you start to fully read the assigned passages, glance through them. Notice the chapter titles and the interior headings and subheadings, if any. Look at all the illustrations, charts, and tables, and be sure to read all the captions. Go to the back of the chapter or subchapter to see if there are any questions; if there are, read them. Then start reading the assignment in full, keeping a notebook handy. When you run across information which looks like it will help you answer the questions at the end of the passage, take notes, or at least jot down the page number as you come across relevant information. Even if you haven't been assigned the questions as homework, try to answer them, at least by jotting down a few notes on each question (chances are your teacher will use these questions in class the next day, or as the basis for future tests). Make a list of your own questions about the subject to ask your teacher.

At the beginning of each course, consider going through your assigned texts and creating an outline of each textbook. Create a three-ring binder and provide sections for each chapter and subchapter, and file your class notes and completed assignments as they come up in the appropriate section. If a class - for instance, algebra or physics - includes formulas which you need to work with and commit to memory, write the formula and one or two examples of the calculations on a separate page, and file the homework on succeeding pages. Do the same with theories - the commutative and associative principles

of math should each have a separate page in your algebra notebook, for example. Design these particular pages in a way which will stand out and be easily found as you page through the notebook. What you create by imposing an organization at the beginning of your course is a template for studying as you move through the course and submit to quizzes and tests.

Don't forget to review your homework when you get it back from your teacher. If you've missed a few math problems, make sure you go over your work and figure out what you did wrong, and recalculate until you're sure you've come up with the right solution and the reason for it. If your homework involves creative writing, which you enjoy, file it in its own binder. You may not have time to revise assigned writings now, but sometime in the future you may want to do some additional work on the subject, and you'll have your writing assignments ready and organized, available for creative inspiration.

One neat trick to keep you on task: Keep track of your time. Create a log which records the assignment, including page numbers of reading material, and record a start time and a finish time for each task. After a while you will develop an understanding of just how much time it takes to complete various assignments, and will help you plan your day and evening. It'll also help conquer the worst problem many of us have with any task - procrastination - because you'll know that a certain assignment is only going to take fifteen minutes, and then it'll be over, and you can move on to another part of your life, like watching your newest DVD. Also, in the event that you really do have way too much homework - some schools and teachers are notorious for piling on very demanding assignments, day after day - you'll have evidence! If you're consistently burning the midnight oil and then arriving at school the next day bleary-eyed and sleep-deprived, talk to your parents. Armed with specific information, they may be able to intervene, either directly or through your local PTA.

If you have an assignment - a school project, a term paper, or other task - which requires an extended period of time to complete, make your checklist and create a timetable for each task. Include planning, gathering of resources, outlining, reading (drawing, painting), etc., and divide up the necessary tasks into chunks of work which you can schedule over the time allowed for the assignment. Consider scheduling the task so that it actually gets done early; if the assignment is supposed to be passed in two weeks from Friday, for instance, try to schedule it for completion by Tuesday or Wednesday of that week. This give you time for false starts and problem solving, and will take the heat off and lower your stress level as you meet each task ahead of schedule.

Don't forget to schedule time for your personal life! Getting a handle on your homework assignments and the time they take means that you can incorporate them into other aspects of your life, like school activities, trips to the mall, parties, get-togethers with friends or family, etc. When you know that a particular group of assignments is going to take you two hours, it frees the rest of your time up for - well, living!

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