

Homework wars: The battle and how to win

<http://www.kidspot.com.au/school/stuff-for-school/getting-organised/homework-wars-the-battle-and-how-to-win>

Melanie Hearse

A former homework hater, Mel Hearse shares why she's finally come around.



I hated homework. Somewhat ironically, considering I didn't spend a lot of time doing any. I still vividly recall spending an entire two-week school holiday grounded after my maths teacher told my parents that I hadn't completed any assignments during the term. And not only was I grounded, I spent those two weeks catching up on all the missed assignments.

It was as awesome as it sounds

I wasn't an especially bad student or a naughty kid, I just really lacked the motivation and drive to excel at school, so I did what I needed to do, and not a lick more. When my own children proved reluctant after-hours scholars, I can't say I was unduly concerned. My husband and I both spent our educational careers being told we could "do better if we applied ourselves", but went on to work in the exact fields we want to, albeit arriving by a different (slower) path.

However, as much as I'd hate my children to believe school is everything and their entire future rides on it, I'd equally hate for them to believe it doesn't matter - because frankly, doing well does open doors, and we all want as many doors as possible opened to our children. Just not to the expense of a balanced life. I just loathe the idea of them doing a full day at school, then coming home to do more, instead of chilling out, doing sport and hanging with the family.

However, I've recently come to rethink my stance on homework, when I was informed my son had been failing to hand in his maths and general studies assignments. As in any of them. For a term.

By coming home from school each day and saying he had a far smaller amount than he did, combined with them being encouraged to develop autonomy with their schoolwork, he managed to fly under the radar. As visiting the classroom had become discouraged, and correspondence about said homework was being sent to the wrong email address, he managed to avoid detection until a chance conversation with another mum from his class about said emails. I caught up with his teacher and all was revealed.

Needless to say, he was grounded and had to catch up on all missed assignments.

It changed my perspective totally

Much to my surprise, the whole experience has totally changed my perspective on homework. Why? For one, I realised I was being all a bit dramatic - they are hardly being sent home to toil for hours after a long day at the coalmine. They spend a decent amount of time outside doing sport while at school, they have a lot of fun activities woven into every school day, and really, it amounts to 20 minutes of proper concentration at home most days.

Secondly, as well as giving an additional opportunity to consolidate what they are learning at school, it gives me a chance to note patterns and use them to help my son learn better.

I can see by the types of mistakes and effort he puts into any given task what topics he needs help with motivation-wise, and which tasks he doesn't understand and needs extra help with.

The teacher's verdict

Jenny Atkinson, former teacher and founder of [Sparks Education Australia](#), says homework can be beneficial if teachers take the time to target it to the children's needs, while homework for the sake of it is an unnecessary strain on school children and their family life.

"Homework needs to be differentiated and involve some choice. Some of the best homework that I have seen, and given, are the tasks that develop skills while allowing children to tap into their individual interests. The children are more interested, parents have less struggles and the children retain the information more easily because it is more enjoyable," she says.

Interestingly, the homework my son's teacher has set fills this criteria. And a few weeks into the new regime, my son actually thanked me for catching him up, and started working hard to not only do the work, but do it well - because his teacher set tasks in a way he knows had the best shot at sparking an interest with his students.

For those entering high school next year, it's also an opportunity to learn the skills they need to complete work in an environment that rarely involves one-on-one between teacher and parent the way primary school does.

"In high school, children in Year 7 can expect up to one hour homework per night which may include assignments. And teachers expect that if there are no assignments or homework that they need to be studying. A key issue for children starting high school is that they often don't have the skills in organisation and time management to manage their workload, especially in the beginning," says Jenny.

Parents can help make it worthwhile

There are tips and tricks to make homework more useful (and less stressful!) Jenny suggests:

- **Give them a break when they first get home.**
- **Set a homework time** and give your child fair warning as to what time they are starting their work.
- **Understand how and when your child works best.** Some parents have their child do homework after dinner time, others after snack time, but one mum even made time in the morning for homework. Not because she left it to the last minute, but because she knew her child worked better after a good night's sleep and the work got done much quicker – with less grumbles.
- **Break bigger tasks down into smaller, bite-sized pieces.** It's less overwhelming and good training for managing high school assignments.
- **Support them, but let your child do the work.** Get them to ask for help when/if they need it. Also remember it's the child's homework, so it doesn't need to be finished to an adult's standard.
- **If they're getting very frustrated (or you are), take a short break.**
- **If your child is struggling** with the amount or difficulty or even if it's just terribly boring, meet with their teacher and see if something can be negotiated that works for all of them.
- **If your child doesn't enjoy reading,** do whatever you can to encourage them – for example, books on a topic they're interested in, or reading with them. If they really struggle, try reading one page, then have them read one page to take the pressure off. Keep it calm, make reading time enjoyable and give lots of praise for effort!

For more tips and tricks to happy homeworking, check out ['High School Rocks: Make Starting High School An Awesome Experience' \(A Parent's Guide\)](#) which includes chapters about handling homework and getting organised for Year 7.