

## Homework (October 2011)

Homework time can be really challenging for some families, especially if the students are dyslexic or have other learning disabilities. Here are some tips that can be helpful for parents and students when homework time comes:

### The basics:

1. Establish a routine.
  - a. Be sure that homework is completed at the same time every day in a predictable structure.
  - b. Be sure that the homework assignment is in an obvious place that the child can observe
  - c. Check as homework is completed.
2. Find a good homework "spot." It should be quiet, with good light, and all items necessary for homework available (books, pencils, calculators, etc.).
3. Make homework manageable. Sometimes children are overwhelmed by the amount of work they need to do.
  - a. Break work into 10-15 minute tasks with breaks in between, to ensure that your child will not be frustrated or discouraged by large amounts of work.
  - b. A timer can help with this. Set the time for a prescribed time and have the child check in with you at set intervals, (10 minutes or so) to ensure that work is getting accomplished.
  - c. This builds independent work skills, and it is fun for the children to see how much they can accomplish.
4. Model when possible.
  - a. If a child does not understand directions, following instructions may be better if you model your thinking and show how you would think about and execute the problems.
  - b. Think aloud so that the child can be metacognitive and understand how you would think about a difficult problem.
5. Be sure your child has the information he/she needs to complete the homework.
  - a. If handwriting is illegible, be sure someone checks the homework agenda for clarity.
  - b. If notes from class are needed, and the child has problems with note-taking, ask the teacher to provide a copy of the notes in time to complete the homework assignment.

**Share your concerns:**

1. Communicate with the teacher if homework continues to be a frustrating experience. Many times teachers have no idea that children are struggling with homework. If parents let teachers know the issues, teachers can re-design assignments to provide more practice of independent skills, rather than a re-teaching experience for the parent.

**If writing is in order:**

2. If the child has a difficult time writing larger amounts:
  - a. Be a scribe. Let the child dictate the important information so that he can get credit for his ideas.
  - b. Other ways to show information may include drawing pictures of new ideas that can be used as prompts when explaining new information.
3. Help your child organize his/her thoughts. Often children have wonderful ideas about what to write, but become confused about describing their thoughts in a sequential order.
  - a. A story map or an outline can go a long way in helping children organize their thoughts before they actually write. Try Inspiration software for this purpose (you can download a free 30-day trial at [Inspiration Software.com](http://Inspiration Software.com)).
4. Help children develop self-monitoring skills. They can learn to proofread their work and check for completeness before they put their books away for the evening, with just a little practice.

**If reading is a struggle:**

1. Read assignments to him/her. Children should not be required to “double dip on their deficits!”
  - a. If a child has difficulty reading, it is not necessary for him to fail in other content areas that require reading such as science, social studies and other subjects because of decoding issues.
  - b. Help them out by reading assignments and directions, and let their teachers know that you have done so.
  - c. If the child has to read from a novel each evening, you may be able to motivate him/her by alternating pages. You read a page, then the child reads a page. By allowing the child to get through the selection more quickly, you can encourage him/her to enjoy reading. You also model fluent reading and reading in meaningful phrases.

2. Use technology when possible.
  - a. Children can use electronic readers (many free e-reader programs are available online, such as Listen NJ). This allows children to “read” information that may be too difficult to decode independently. Learning information that is cognitively more challenging than they can easily decode allows children to increase critical background information and vocabulary.
  - b. Books on tape are often available for literature selections. Many of these may be available on Playaways--tiny recordings that can be worn around the neck and which accept your child’s MP3 player earbuds.
  - c. Many texts are available on CD. Ask your child’s teacher if this option is available. Also check if the text is online. If so, a text reader downloaded to your computer can read it to your child.
  - d. Get the teacher’s approval to have your child complete writing on the computer. This makes editing and proofreading much easier.
  - e. Programs such as CoWriter or Write Out Loud can help with word prediction (from initial letters typed) and a choice of spellings. When the word is highlighted, the child can hear it read and determine if this is the correct choice.
  - f. They can also dictate information when spelling is challenging, using Dragon Dictate. The newest free application for the iPad needs no training and can be used immediately!

**Math can be a problem too:**

1. Copy math problems for your child onto a separate sheet(s) of paper, leaving plenty of white space and room to work.
2. Check with the teacher if the child can complete just selected problems, to limit the number of problems, and thus allow the child to successfully complete the work in a reasonable timeframe.