

Homework



Tom Sherrington and Sara Stafford

What's the idea?

Homework can be a powerful means of supporting student learning and study habits, provided it is designed appropriately.

What does it mean?

Studies into the effectiveness of homework are very mixed. Typically, as Hattie's (2008) research shows, it makes a much bigger impact for older, higher-attaining students in secondary, rather than primary, settings. This is because they are more likely to understand the task, persevere if the work is difficult and avoid reinforcing negative attitudes or misconceptions when studying without teacher guidance.

Homework that is typically higher impact tends to be highly structured and focused on practising using knowledge and skills that have been secured already. More open-ended, high challenge tasks are typically less successful, especially with less confident learners or those with no support outside school.

What are the implications for teachers?

Instead of talking about homework being either effective or not, teachers should consider which forms of homework are most likely to support learning for their students at any given point. The diet of homework over time might include:

1 Learning tasks: Use clear knowledge sources to support retrieval practice, teaching the various techniques in advance. Spelling and vocabulary are classic examples.

2 Practice tasks: Repeating procedures that have been covered extensively in class – i.e. where students are practising for fluency – are effective homework tasks. Maths questions fall into this category.

3 Occasional structured research tasks: This is where students seek answers to specific questions. Time between lessons can be used to find

things out or read ahead. Be sure to keep this structured – open-ended research can be overwhelming or result in blind copying; structured questions allow students to focus their research in a productive manner.

4 Occasional redrafting tasks: If feedback has been given during lessons homework time could be used to re-do task to a higher standard.

Top tip: Establish an appropriate diet of homework that is sustainable for students and teachers with a few special extended pieces amongst more routine practice. Don't equate more homework with more marking: design homework that can largely be self-checked by the students.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

» Hattie J (2008) *Visible Learning*. London: Taylor and Francis

» Sherrington T (2012) What does the Hattie research actually say? Available at: <https://teacherhead.com/2012/10/21/homework-what-does-the-hattie-research-actually-say/> (accessed 31 May 2019).