

**8<sup>th</sup> GRADE WRITING PROMPT  
ARGUMENTATIVE**

Some teachers torment students with hours of homework every night, while others assign nothing their students cannot accomplish during class time. After reading “The Homework Revolution” and “Homework: Too little or too much? It depends,” write an essay in which you identify the problem regarding how much homework is beneficial and propose a solution. Support your position with evidence from both texts.

## THE HOMEWORK REVOLUTION

By: SpaceKing800, Glen Rock, NJ

Teen Ink Magazine

This is a teen-written article from our friends at Teenink.com.

- 1 A young girl sits at her desk, reviewing her homework assignments for the evening. English: read three chapters and write a journal response. Math: complete 30 problems, showing all work. Science: do a worksheet, front and back. French: study vocabulary for tomorrow's test. It's going to be a long night.
- 2 This describes a typical weeknight for students across the country. Now is the time to start a homework revolution.
- 3 According to guidelines endorsed by the National Education Association (NEA), a student should be assigned no more than 10 minutes per grade level per night. For example, a first grader should only have 10 minutes of homework, a second grader, 20 minutes, and so on. This means that a student in my grade -- seventh -- should have no more than 70 minutes of work each night. Yet this is often doubled, sometimes even tripled!
- 4 There are negatives to overloading students. Have you ever heard of a child getting sick because of homework? According to William Crain, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at City College of New York and the author of Reclaiming Childhood, "Kids are developing more school-related stomachaches, headaches, sleep problems, and depression than ever before." The average student is glued to his or her desk for almost seven hours a day. Add two to four hours of homework each night, and they are working a 45 to 55 hour week!
- 5 In addition, a student who receives excessive homework "will miss out on active playtime, essential for learning social skills, proper brain development, and warding off childhood obesity," according to Harris Cooper, Ph.D., a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Duke University.
- 6 Everybody knows that teachers are the ones who assign homework, but they do not deserve all the blame. "Many teachers are under greater pressure than ever before," says Kylene Beers, president of the National Council for Teachers of English and the author of When Kids Can't Read What Teachers Can Do. "Some of it comes from parents, some from the administration and the desire for high scores on standardized tests." Teachers who are under pressure feel the need to assign more homework. But why aren't teachers aware of the NEA homework recommendations? Many have never heard of them, have never taken a course about good

- versus bad homework, how much to give, and the research behind it. And many colleges of education do not offer specific training in homework. Teachers are just winging it.
- 7 Although some teachers and parents believe that assigning a lot of homework is beneficial, a Duke University review of a number of studies found almost no correlation between homework and long-term achievements in elementary school and only a moderate correlation in middle school. "More is not better," concluded Cooper, who conducted the review.
- 8 Is homework really necessary? Most teachers assign homework as a drill to improve memorization of material. While drills and repetitive exercises have their place in schools, homework may not be that place. If a student does a math worksheet with 50 problems but completes them incorrectly, he will likely fail the test. According to the U.S. Department of Education, most math teachers can tell after checking five algebraic equations whether a student understood the necessary concepts. Practicing dozens of homework problems incorrectly only cements the wrong method.
- 9 Some teachers believe that assigning more homework will help improve standardized test scores. However, in countries like the Czech Republic, Japan, and Denmark, which have higher-scoring students, teachers give little homework. The United States is among the most homework-intensive countries in the world for seventh and eighth grade, so more homework clearly does not mean a higher test score.
- 10 Some people argue that homework toughens kids up for high school, college, and the workforce. Too much homework is sapping students' strength, curiosity, and most importantly, their love of learning. Is that really what teachers and parents want?
- 11 Do students in the United States receive too much homework? If schools assign less homework, it would benefit teachers, parents, and students alike. Teachers who assign large amounts of homework are often unable to do more than spot-check answers. This means that many errors are missed. Teachers who assign less homework will be able to check it thoroughly.
- 12 In addition, it allows a teacher time to focus on more important things. "I had more time for planning when I wasn't grading thousands of problems a night," says math teacher Joel Wazac at a middle school in Missouri. "And when a student didn't understand something, instead of a parent trying to puzzle it out, I was there to help them." The result of assigning fewer math problems: grades went up and the school's standardized math scores are the highest they've ever been. A student who is assigned less homework will live a healthy and happy life. The family can look forward to stress-free, carefree nights and, finally, the teachers can too.
- 13 Some schools are already taking steps to improve the issue. For example, Mason-Rice Elementary School in Newton, Massachusetts, has limited homework, keeping to the "10 minute rule." Raymond Park Middle School in Indianapolis has written a policy instructing teachers to "assign homework only when you feel the assignment is valuable." The policy also states, "A night off is better than homework which serves no worthwhile purpose." Others, such as Oak Knoll Elementary School in Menlo Park, California, have considered eliminating homework altogether. If these schools can do it, why can't everyone?

# HOMework: TOO LITTLE OR TOO MUCH? IT DEPENDS

**By: Pittsburg Post-Gazette, adapted by Newsela staff**  
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- 14 PITTSBURGH — Two complaints parents have about their kids' homework are: There's too much and there's too little.
- 15 In a report by the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., education expert Tom Loveless says those who think there is too little homework are more numerous.
- 16 But, he adds, those complaining about too much homework get most of the attention.
- 17 "The homework horror stories need to be read in a proper perspective," he wrote. They seem to come from the very personal problems of a small group of parents. "They do not reflect the experience of the average family with school-age children."
- 18 And, Loveless continues, media reports about increasingly overburdened children are real but not the norm.
- 19 "The homework load has been pretty stable over the last two to three decades," he said in an interview.

## A Rule Of Thumb

- 20 The National Parent-Teacher Association and the National Education Association are in agreement when it comes to how much homework is the right amount. Both favor the rule of thumb limiting homework in all subjects to 10 minutes times the grade level. With this thinking, a first grader should have no more than 10 minutes of homework a night, a sixth grader up to 60 minutes, and a high school senior up to two hours.
- 21 Some schools have policies by which kindergarten homework is limited to 10 to 15 minutes a night, growing to 40 to 60 minutes in grade 5. This is the case, for example, with the Quaker Valley elementary schools in western Pennsylvania.
- 22 "I think homework is a good time for kids to practice the skills they've learned in the classroom," said Jillian Bichsel, director of academic services in Quaker Valley.
- 23 The actual amount of homework can vary widely.
- 24 Take these three Pittsburgh Public Schools students, all members of the TeenBloc at A+ Schools.
- 25 Imani Downing, of the North Side, a sophomore at Pittsburgh Perry High School, said she rarely gets homework and usually in just one class.
- 26 "I feel like we should have homework in every class," she said, explaining that would allow for "more learning" and "a better chance to understand things."

## Time And Quality

- 27 Amma Ababio, of Highland Park, is an 11th-grader at Pittsburgh Allderdice High School who is taking advanced classes. She figures she does homework from about 5 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. on school nights. She said her phone is off, her computer is off except for research, and she even does homework while she eats dinner.
- 28 "I have homework in every single class," she said.
- 29 Jermalle Johns, of the North Side, a sophomore at Pittsburgh Obama 6-12, is between the two. He figures he spends "maybe an hour on homework tops."

- 30 He doesn't think the homework helps because he learns from paying attention in class. "I get it done because it's another grade that helps me get an A."
- 31 The Brookings report doesn't address homework quality, a topic of many studies.
- 32 Education expert Alan Lesgold summarized what those studies had to say about the value of homework for students:
- 33 "Bottom line is that it depends heavily on the quality of the assignment, the extent of quick feedback, whether the student is motivated to do it," he said. And, he added, another important factor is whether there is support outside of school. This is especially true for "the kind of big projects that can be demanding of a lot of parent time that may be less available when the parents are working multiple minimum-wage jobs."
- 34 Loveless based his conclusions on numbers from three surveys: a student survey that was part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as NAEP or the Nation's Report Card; a MetLife annual survey of parents and students; and a survey of college freshmen by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

### Details From Studies

- 35 In the 2012 college freshmen survey, students were asked how much time they spent per week on various activities in their last year of high school. Nearly two-thirds said they spent six or more hours a week socializing with friends.
- 36 But only 38.4 percent spent that same amount of time on studying or homework their last year in high school. Homework came in behind not only socializing but also exercise or sports as well as working for pay.
- 37 That percentage is less than in 1986. In that year 49.5 percent of college freshmen said they spent six or more hours a week studying and doing homework in their last year of high school.
- 38 "When I give this talk and show the college freshman data to college professors, they gasp and they all nod their heads, like, 'We thought there was a problem,'" Loveless said.
- 39 The 2012 NAEP survey asked students how much time they spent on homework yesterday.
- 40 In all three age groups questioned, more than a fifth had no homework at all: 22 percent of 9-year-olds; 21 percent of 13-year-olds; and 27 percent of 17-year-olds.
- 41 For most, that was close to 1984 except for 9-year-olds, whose 1984 results show 35 percent didn't have homework.
- 42 Of 9-year-olds, 57 percent said they received homework, but less than an hour's worth. The percentages were 44 percent at age 13 and 26 percent at age 17.
- 43 As for those receiving more than two hours of homework, the percentages in 2012 were within a point or two of those in 1984.
- 44 In 2012, 5 percent of those age 9, 7 percent of those age 13, and 13 percent of those age 17 reported they had more than two hours of homework the previous night.