

# Why do teachers give homework? The reasons for, the reasons against, and the evidence: a debate sheet

For a speech, a debate or a persuasive essay. Each reason has a source; quote the number and name the study.

## Why teachers give homework (the case for)

| Reason                                   | The evidence or logic                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Practice makes skills automatic          | Times tables, spelling, algebra need repetition that class time cannot hold; most people do not choose practice they find hard |
| In high school it works                  | Cooper, Robinson and Patall (2006): a clear positive link between homework and achievement in grades 7 to 12                   |
| It tells the teacher who is lost         | Work handed in is a signal; optional work gives none                                                                           |
| It prepares for college                  | Most college learning happens outside the lecture                                                                              |
| Optional is skipped by those who need it | The confident student does the optional work; the struggling one avoids it                                                     |

## Why homework should be optional (the case against)

| Reason                                          | The evidence                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. In elementary school it barely moves results | Cooper et al. (2006): link close to zero in K to grade 6                                                                      |
| 2. Past a point, more does nothing              | Benefit flattens after 1 to 2 hours a night in high school; the 10-minutes-per-grade rule (NEA, National PTA)                 |
| 3. It is a leading cause of stress              | Stanford (Galloway, Conner, Pope 2013): 4,317 students, 3.1 hours a night, 56% named homework a primary stressor              |
| 4. It takes sleep                               | Teenagers need 8 to 10 hours; three hours of homework after practice and dinner comes out of sleep                            |
| 5. It widens the gap                            | PISA 2012: advantaged 15-year-olds do about 1.5 hours more a week than disadvantaged; grading homework partly grades the home |
| 6. One assignment cannot fit thirty students    | The child who mastered it gains nothing; the child who did not practises mistakes alone                                       |
| 7. Countries with less homework do not do worse | PISA 2012: Finland and Korea under 3 hours a week, near the top                                                               |
| 8. It crowds out other things                   | Sport, music, reading for pleasure, family dinner, play                                                                       |
| 9. Compulsory invites copying                   | Work graded for completion gets completed by any means                                                                        |
| 10. Choice builds responsibility                | Deciding what practice you need is what college demands                                                                       |

## What the evidence actually supports: optional in amount, not in principle

| The research supports                                                    | In practice                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Little or no compulsory homework in early elementary, apart from reading | Twenty minutes of reading a night; nothing graded                          |
| The ten-minute rule as a ceiling                                         | 30 minutes in grade 3, 60 in grade 6, 90 in grade 9, two hours in grade 12 |
| Practice that is short, specific and checked                             | Ten questions on today's skill with feedback, not forty for completion     |
| Choice inside a requirement                                              | 'Do any eight of these twenty' or 'until you get five right in a row'      |

## A two-minute speech outline

| Part           | Seconds | Say                                                                                           |
|----------------|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hook           | 15      | One number: 'Fifty-six percent.'                                                              |
| Claim          | 10      | 'Homework should be optional, and I will give you three reasons.'                             |
| Reason one     | 25      | It barely works for younger students: the Cooper review                                       |
| Reason two     | 25      | It harms: the Stanford figures on stress and sleep                                            |
| Reason three   | 25      | It is unfair: the OECD gap                                                                    |
| The other side | 15      | 'Some say practice must be required. But optional does not mean none.'                        |
| Close          | 15      | Return to the number; ask for one change: the ten-minute rule, or choice within an assignment |

## Plan your own argument

My position: \_\_\_\_\_

Strongest reason (with number): \_\_\_\_\_

Second reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Third reason: \_\_\_\_\_

The other side says: \_\_\_\_\_

My answer to it: \_\_\_\_\_

The one change I ask for: \_\_\_\_\_

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