

12. Homework support

What will be covered

12.1 Appropriate homework

12.2 Homework hints for tutors

12.1 Appropriate homework¹¹⁴

Key understanding

- Appropriate homework and support will benefit students from refugee backgrounds.

There is currently much debate about the value and purpose of homework. Indeed, research and practice indicate that ill-structured homework may have a negative effect on student achievement, whereas appropriate homework may foster improved school achievement.¹¹⁵

Completing homework may be difficult for newly arrived students and especially so for students from low literacy backgrounds. This can be because of the student's understanding and because they often have family obligations and responsibilities, including looking after siblings and preparing dinner.

Homework should be:

- appropriate to the student's language and literacy development and age;
- interesting, challenging and, where appropriate, open ended;
- purposeful, meaningful and relevant to the curriculum; and
- promoting learning as fun.

Types of work that meet these requirements include:

➤ Practise exercises

These provide students with opportunities to apply new knowledge or to review, revise and reinforce newly acquired skills. Examples include:

- completing consolidation exercises for maths;
- memorising times tables;
- practising spelling words;
- reading for pleasure;
- writing essays and other creative tasks;
- playing games and doing other fun activities; and
- practising a skill or process that students can do independently but not fluently.¹¹⁶

➤ Preparatory homework

This provides opportunities for students to gain background information so they are better prepared for future lessons. Examples include:

- reading background material for history;

¹¹⁴ Adapted from: DE&T (2005), *Homework Habits: Homework Guidelines*, DE&T, Victoria.

¹¹⁵ Marzano R & Pickering D (2007), *The Case for and Against Homework*, Educational Leadership, March, p.77.

¹¹⁶ Marzano R & Pickering D (2007), *The Case for and Against Homework*, Educational Leadership, March, p.78.

- reading English texts for class discussion;
- researching topics for class work;
- collecting newspaper articles; and
- revising information about a current topic.

➤ **Extension assignments**

These encourage students to pursue knowledge individually and imaginatively. Examples include:

- writing a book review;
- making or designing an art work;
- completing science investigation exercises;
- researching local news;
- finding material on the internet;
- monitoring advertising in a newspaper; and
- providing opportunities for students to explore their own topics of interest.¹¹⁷

Suitable activities for supporting students at particular stages include:

➤ **In the Early Years (Prep to Year 4)**

- Practising skills or gathering extra information or materials for class
- Reading to, with, and by tutors
- Writing and spelling games and practise
- Counting and maths games

➤ **In the Middle Years (Years 5 to 6)**

- Independent reading
- Practising skills
- Extension of class work
- Projects and assignments

➤ **In the Middle Years (Years 7 to 9)**

- Independent reading
- Practising skills
- Extension of class work
- Subject-based homework assignments, essays and research

In the **Later Years (Years 10 to 12)**, the amount of work will increase, and require from 1–3 hours per week night, with up to 6 hours on weekends during peak VCE periods.

Schools expect students to be independent learners at this level. However, refugee background learners may require extra support to:

- improve their academic skills by discussing ideas;
- improve their writing skills;

¹¹⁷ Marzano R & Pickering D (2007), *The Case for and Against Homework*, Educational Leadership, March, p. 78.

- prepare for assessment tasks, including SACs and exams; and
- understand subject-specific concepts and tasks.

Activity 12.1

If you are working with secondary school students, read the ‘Advice for Working with Secondary Students’ that follows. It was originally written for teachers but has been adapted for OSHLSP tutors. **If you are working with primary school students**, proceed to activity 12.2.

Do you think these suggestions will be useful to you as an OSHLSP tutor?

What needs to happen if the homework the students are presented with is not appropriate for their level?

Advice for working with secondary school students

The following advice is based on excerpts from an article by a secondary school teacher.¹¹⁸

The amount and type of modification required ... depends on the individual. Generally, students who have been in Australia the least amount of time require intensive modification, and a heightened awareness of ... [potential] confusion/exhaustion ... However, students who have been here longer can still be experiencing major difficulties.

Suggestion 1: Projects/assignments

- Simplify the task entirely, by asking the student to focus on the main aspect of the task (e.g. tell one important thing in China’s ancient history).
- Instruct the student to produce a written piece, with graphics/illustrations if necessary, on the chosen topic, which explores the six questions:

Who?
What?
Where?
When?
Why?
How?

- Show them the relevant text (often subject textbook) or an easy-to-read informative text.
- Tell the student to provide any relevant information, as long as this answers each component of who, what, etc. They may generate the questions themselves, or a helper may assist them. Answers do not have to be in any particular order.

Example:

The Great Wall of China

*Who built the Great Wall of China?
What is the Great Wall?
Where is it?*

A data chart may be useful to record responses to these questions (see example in table 12.1).

¹¹⁸ Santolin L (2005), Modification of Major Language-based Tasks for Recently Arrived ESL/CLD students (unpublished).

Suggestion 2: Projects

Have the student cut up the project questions, and paste them into two different sections:

- compulsory questions (must answer all)
- free choice questions (must answer 5).

Do not expect students to complete the entire project.

State the minimum number of questions which must be completed overall (e.g. 10 out of 20 questions).

The problem for recent arrivals is not only structuring and writing answers, but actually comprehending the text or information, then changing information into their own words, then writing grammatically and correctly, and so on!

Suggestion 3: Written tasks

It may be appropriate to exempt the student from several questions in a task, OR FROM THE ENTIRE TASK, and ask them to produce a word glossary (vocabulary and meanings) from the text or research in lieu of the exempted questions, or another replacement activity.

For example, provide a photocopied page of dot-point notes and ask the student to produce a glossary of all unknown words, plus a simple summary of the notes.

Suggestion 4: Question/answer responses, short tasks

- Accept dot-point answers, or fill-the-gap or answers written very simply.
- As long as the basic facts are presented, the grammar (which is very time-consuming) can be shortened into note or phrase format for the time being.
- Show the student how to get started.
- Refer to visual cues and clues wherever possible.
- Reduce the amount of questions.
- Simplify the questions.

Suggestion 5: Any written task

- Show student the format of a data chart (table 12.1 below), where a page is divided into several sections, and one key heading from the topic is placed in each section. The student then fills each column with relevant information (dot-points) and vocabulary/meanings.
- The data chart can be used to formulate a written piece of two or more paragraphs, or can be left as is for study purposes.

Table 12.1: A sample data chart

Energy is:	Exothermic reactions are:
The greenhouse effect is:	Endothermic reactions are:

Suggestion 6: Oral work

Give plenty of opportunity for repetition and reinforcement of learned vocabulary and oral work.

Suggestion 7: Homework

The student should only be required to do 15–30 minutes of homework per subject.

Reducing content to facilitate understanding is an important modification to make.

Activity 12.2

If you are working with primary school students, read the following information that focuses on newly arrived primary students and answer the questions that follow.

New arrivals can attempt the class homework, including book reviews, projects on factual topics, maths, home reading, and spelling of class lists or topic lists.

They can:

- *Demonstrate their understanding visually*
- *Work on ... activities ... that consolidate the school learning*
- *Label diagrams related to the class topic eg maths concepts*
- *Read texts that have repetitive structures and/ or clear visual support linking with the text*
- *Practise handwriting exercises*
- *Plan a talk around photographs*
- *Draw, paint or cut and paste.*¹¹⁹

Are these suggestions practical?

If not, why not?

What other suggestions do you have?

¹¹⁹ Zammit K (1997), *The PETA Guide to Homework*, PETA, NSW, pp. 67–68.

12.2 Homework hints for tutors

Key understanding

- To effectively support low literacy background students, tutors need to provide focused support.

Although more detailed hints can be found in section 7.4, Tutor Hints, the following additional suggestions may be useful:¹²⁰

- Observe and acknowledge the student's success and ask how their home and class work is progressing.
- Encourage them to set aside a regular daily time to read and complete homework and to study.
- Complement and reinforce classroom learning (e.g. read texts set by teachers and discuss students' responses to the texts).
- Link the work to students' previous experiences.
- Develop proofreading and drafting skills.
- Help students develop organisational and time-management skills and good information skills.
- Encourage upper primary and secondary school students to use homework diaries by demonstrating how to use them effectively.

The following recommendations are excerpts from an article by Dr Karen Dooley, lecturer in ESL at Queensland University of Technology, based on her work as a tutor of refugee background students.¹²¹

Worksheets are filled out: and workbooks, filled in. The day's lessons are completed ...

Assignments are written: information reports, orals, argumentative essays, book reviews, informative essays, letters to the editor, poems, stories and assorted projects ... [we] scrutinise assignment requirements and marking criteria, [provide] formative feedback on first drafts and notes copied from the board or ... taken in from classroom talk. They search the net and download information. Locate relevant references on shelves and newspapers ... Make notes and plans ... discuss emerging drafts ... clarify by pointing to words in dictionaries or scribbling on bits of paper ...

I help students understand what a thesis statement does in persuasive essay ... or the conclusion in an informative essay, that it, 'tells the reader your whole argument in one sentence. So tell me what you want them to think after reading your essay and we can write it down together ...' Talk the response though together, tutor acts as a scribe to free the student up to grapple with ideas. Much time is dedicated to language ... 'make your argument very clear to your reader, you are going to need a word that means ... you are going to have to structure this sentence so that it ...'

¹²⁰ Adapted from: DE&T (2005), *Homework Habits: Homework Guidelines*, DE&T, Victoria.

¹²¹ Dooley K (2004), *Will You be Here Tomorrow? Reflections of a Homework Club Tutor*, *Practically Primary*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 15-17.

Sometimes the difficulties are more experiential and cultural. Students might be able to decode and comprehend excerpts from an Act of Parliament, for example, but without fully understanding the cultural context of the text ... I discuss differences between judges, barristers, police and politicians.

In putting what has been learned in class to work in assignments ... there are difficulties ... when students do not know when or how to apply that knowledge ... or are overwhelmed by having to put so much new knowledge to work at once.

1. Ensure that students understand assignment requirements and marking criteria. After overt instruction in textual and language features, help students:
 - mark target features on an exemplar text that can be used as a model during the assignment writing (by tutors as well as students); and
 - refer to assignment requirements and marking criteria sheets to construct a checklist of features for inclusion
2. Plan sequences of activities that account for the ‘amount’ of new learning ... [in] an assignment. Avoid overwhelming students with too many new demands at once by:
 - breaking assignments up into manageable sequences of sub tasks (e.g. a persuasive essay might be produced in sections by a series of sub tasks ... [developing] arguments, conclusion, introduction), and
 - following brief stretches of [explicit] instruction relating to each sub task with opportunities to work on the relevant part of the assignment.
3. Ensure that ... feedback is comprehensible by:
 - using the student-created checklist of features for inclusion in the assignment for self-, peer- and [tutor-] assessment of the emerging texts; and
 - explicitly referring to the exemplar text created by the students when using the checklist to provide ... feedback.

Activity 12.3

Highlight the key points from Dr Dooley’s suggestions. Discuss and share ways of incorporating these in your tutoring. Are they practical for you to use?

