

► **Escape the Homework Trap**

Homework can serve a number of purposes—to enhance student learning, to review previous content and to introduce new content. While the benefits of assigning homework are many, don't get caught in the dilemma of assigning homework for homework's sake or not assigning homework because no one does it anyway. Here are some guidelines for keeping the subject of homework in perspective.

- Don't give homework as punishment. The value of homework will be lost on your students.
- Don't give spur-of-the-moment homework assignments. They should be well-thought out and be a segment of your daily lesson plans.
- Don't assume that because no questions are asked when you give the assignment that students have no questions about their homework. Be clear in your directions. Write the assignments on the board. Be sure to explain the purpose of the homework assignment, too.
- Don't expect students—even your best ones—to always have their homework done. Sometimes a student's best intentions for doing homework can be interrupted by the realities of life.
- Understand that not all kinds of homework assignments are equally valuable for all students. Provide variety in the type of assignments you make to account for different abilities.
- Offer to help students before and after school with some homework assignments. Sometimes a little help getting started with the assignment is enough encouragement for the student to complete the work at home.
- Acknowledge and be thankful for students' efforts to complete homework. At the same time, don't confuse excuses with legitimate reasons for undone or incomplete homework assignments. ("The dog ate it"; "It was crinkled up and I tried to iron it"; "Homework? What homework?"—clever excuses but probably not legitimate reasons.)
- Make every effort to acknowledge completed homework assignments. If you grade them, grade and return them right away.
- Listen to what students say about their experiences with homework. It's a good indicator of how well they understand the lesson.
- The amount and frequency of homework needs to be appropriate for the grade level. Talk to your mentor and other teachers at your grade level to get a perspective on what's reasonable.
- Provide students with guidelines for when and how to complete homework or how to get assignments they missed.
- Determine how you will handle late or missed assignments. Be consistent in your policies.
- Homework should be a part of your overall assessment of student progress and your own success in presenting a lesson. Let it be just one more way of measuring student learning.
- Decide whether it's acceptable for students to ask for help with homework from their parents. If so, send home the tip sheet for parents on how they can help. A tip sheet is included in these New Member Tips.
- Be sure to talk to your mentor, association reps and other teachers for more tips on handling homework.