

# An Anti-Homework Primer

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[This is not entirely what it seems.]

# **An Anti-Homework Primer**

OR

## **What Teachers *Really* Think Of Homework: An Expose'**

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*(Here is some advice to novice teachers. Parents and others should pass it up:  
It's an in-house secret.)*

For those who are bored with reading articles about how to make homework creative; tired of listening to pro-homework advocates (policy-makers and teachers) whose main reason for homework often boils down to "Parents won't stand for no homework;" and wearied by parents who view this task as the *sine qua non* to their child's success and the teacher's continued employment—for those teachers I offer a primer on how to avoid the onerous effects of preparing, checking and following up the usually mandatory, automatic, four-nights-a-week homework assignments.

There is little point in my enumerating the various purposes for which homework is said to serve. We have heard them time and again. In fact, evaluating the need for homework is quite beyond reason: It is as well entrenched as motherhood and apple pie. It is real public relations.

But it is well known that individuals, as well as professional and non-professional groups, have demonstrated resourcefulness in circumventing unfavorable laws. Teachers are no exception. Both pro- and anti-homework advocates know how to lessen on them the ill effects of any homework policy. All veteran teachers are adept in the practice. So, you novices, carefully read the following do's and don'ts:

1. Always assign a minimum amount of homework. There may be protests, but at least you are fulfilling the letter if not the spirit of the "law". Besides, apart from keeping parents and administrators happy, what good is most of it? If they can do the assignment, why give it? If they can't do the assignment, why give it? Should learning outside school hours be the teacher's responsibility?

2. Never give creative or practical compositional writing assignments. They take forever to read and evaluate. Besides, you may feel compelled to follow-up some of the problems with the students, which will simply make your day more crowded. Provide work that requires uniform, non-individualistic answers, such as in workbooks. They are easy and fast to check.

3. Take part of your students' classroom day and have each student correct his or her own paper as you call out the answers. This will rob the pupils of instructional time each day, but it will save you much time at home. (Just think of the more important things you have to do at your personal abode: execute family and community responsibilities, prepare lessons, read professional and children's literature, study for self-improvement or college credit, write a magazine article or boo, check non-homework papers, allow time for thinking, and, of course, simply escape from work by pursuing personal pleasures.)

4. Assign groups of teacher's helpers on a rotating basis to check the class's papers. They may lose a half hour of their school day, but they will enjoy getting out of harder work. Or you may wish to check homework papers yourself—in school, of course. What better reason to give the students a daily (or frequent) free period? Or mark papers while the students are reading, doing math and so on. You get the picture.

5. Make a conscious effort to be sick only on required homework days.

6. "Forget" to give homework every now and then—and punish the kid who reminds you.

7. Absolutely refuse to give homework, or to give it other than when you professionally consider it appropriate. You may be hauled into the principal's office or sent to district headquarters, but are they really going to fire you just for not giving homework?! But if you're so threatened, "repent."

8. Once weekly, at least, deposit the homework papers in your circular file. If asked, you can always claim to have looked them over for whole-class diagnostic purposes.

9. Assign non-homework-type homework. Such as, to watch a TV special for discussion next day. The fact that less than one-fourth the class ever does this type of assignment and, therefore, in effect, prohibits any classroom discussion, in no way subtracts from your professional (not personal) intent.

10. Never provide your class with photocopied/duplicated homework. Write it on the chalkboard. By the time you have given careful directions (including clear handwriting—which slows the write down) and the students have finished copying the work, you will have enjoyed a relatively peaceful (depending on management skills) 15 minutes, at least. Presto! Another recess break. (This method is so acceptable you can even schedule it in your daily lesson plan book.)

11. Indirectly, communicate to your students that you are not much on homework. You will see a drastic drop in the number of pages.

12. Or you might take this route: Persuade your principal to prepare a flyer that indicates the school's homework policy. At the bottom should be a tearsheet for the parent to sign. Once you have proof via a parent's signature of which nights are for

homework, it is now his/her obligation to see that homework is done. (After all, a number of parents are trying to find ways to hold teachers accountable for their child's progress, who why not a little equalizer?) Thus, you can now eliminate the usual phone calls and notes from your schedule.

13. On the other hand—and to contradict myself—you may wish to give much more homework. A myth believed by some parents is that a caring, hard-working teacher gives lots of homework. Capitalize on this. Build your image. Outsmart them. Of course, you can't possibly hold up under such a homework load if you check anywhere near all of it. But don't worry. It's the image that counts.

14. As a last resort, try to get yourself transferred to a school with a less-strict enforcement of the school district's homework policy. There are some.

The fact that some of the primer suggestions were discovered by learning of the practices of pro-homework advocates is a commentary on just how teachers often view this mandatory task.

The primer was written tongue-in-cheek. (*Of course, you'll never know that for sure*). Although some of the methods are considered acceptable, and others practiced out of a felt necessity, a few are purely fanciful. Can you tell which are which?

In conclusion (but see below), most teachers, I believe, want to give homework when they think it appropriate—but not under the gun of a four- or five-nights-a-week policy, or to the requirement of a pre-determined length of time on task. Professional reaction to such pressure will continue to be inventive.

You might find the following poem by the prolific young children's poet, Jack Prelutsky, to be apropos to the above article. His humorous poems are suitable for the primary through middle school years, but all ages get a chuckle out of them. Visit the poet's site at <http://www.jackprelutsky.com/> for a list of most of his books and classroom ideas. (This is from *The New Kid on the Block*, text copyright 1984 by Jack Prelutsky. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers. Visit their site at [www.harpercollins.com](http://www.harpercollins.com), type in "Jack Prelutsky" under "Authors," and scroll down for the book. Also available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and other Internet booksellers.)

## Homework! Oh, Homework!

by Jack Prelutski

Homework! Oh, Homework!

I hate you! You stink!

I wish I could wash you

away in the sink.

If only a bomb

would explode you to bits.

Homework! Oh, homework!

You're giving me fits.

I'd rather take baths

with a man-eating shark,

or wrestle a lion

alone in the dark,

eat spinach and liver,

pet ten porcupines,

than tackle the homework

my teacher assigns.

Homework! Oh, homework!

you're last on my list.

I simply can't see

why you even exist.

If you just disappeared

it would tickle me pink.

Homework! Oh, homework!

I hate you! You stink!

Well, I just can't quit. If you feel swamped by too much homework, go to [www.alfiekohn.org](http://www.alfiekohn.org). Then decide about reading Mr. Kohn's *The Homework Myth*. Click on the book and you will also be given the option to hear an interview with this educator and parent.