

# Breaking Homework into Chunks

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by John Hoffman

One factor that can interfere with children's ability to put mental effort into doing their homework is a feeling of helplessness that comes when the amount of work seems overwhelming. This feeling can be extremely stressful for a child, especially when it concerns a subject that your child is finding very difficult. One way parents can help is by showing children how to break homework down into smaller, more manageable chunks. Then have them tackle one chunk at a time. Here are some ways to do that.

## Chunk It by Time

Instead of trying to tackle all the homework in one long session, try having two or even three short sessions. "I'll tell you what. Do 15 minutes of math homework now, and then another 15 minutes after supper."

With longer assignments that children are given more than one day to finish, help them plan how to spread the work out over two or three nights instead of trying to do it all in one night.

## Chunk It by Task

Another way to "chunk" homework is to divide it into portions and take breaks between each portion. This can be helpful with projects and other longer assignments. "Let's think about the different parts of this project. OK, you need a title page, then you need to read a section of your history book, and then you need to write three paragraphs. So that's five parts all together. Do you want to try doing one part at a time or do you think you could do two parts tonight?"

For some children, it might be helpful to make a chart of all the steps of a project that need to be done and then decide which nights each step will be done (or put the steps on a calendar).

## Build in Little Rewards Between Chunks

For some children, simply finishing a chunk of homework and taking a break is all the reward they need. But if a child needs more motivation, spending a short period of time doing something they enjoy might help refresh them and get them ready to take on the next chunk. Short periods of physical activity—playing catch outside, throwing sticks for the dog, or going for a walk—can help some kids get their focus back.

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### **Help Your Child See that She's Making Progress**

Has your child ever said, "I'll never get this all done?" It can be very challenging to keep children motivated when they feel discouraged by the amount of homework they have to do. One way to help is to remind children, as they complete a section of homework, that they have moved closer to their goal of being finished. "OK, you've finished the first three math questions. Now there are only four more to go."

### **What If There Are Too Many Chunks?**

Sometimes children "hit the wall" with homework. They reach the point where they are too tired, frustrated, and irritable to work any longer, even with breaks. If, at that point, you feel that your child has spent a reasonable amount of time working, it's OK to say, "That's enough for tonight," even if they haven't finished their homework. You might want to send a note to the teacher saying, "Jeremy spent 30 minutes on this science homework last night, and I felt that was enough for one night, especially since he had other homework to do. I hope you understand." It's actually quite useful for teachers to know how much time children spend doing their homework and if they are finding something particularly difficult.