

Getting Organized For Schoolwork & Homework

*Ideas to Help Your Child
Do Better in School*



Homework & Study Skills Series

THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®

Let's Get Organized!

Organization is one of the most important skills successful students have. Good organization helps them keep track of assignments, finish projects on time and study efficiently. And being organized has another benefit kids love: free time! Instead of looking for lost items or cramming for tests, organized kids have time to relax, knowing they're prepared.

But organization doesn't come naturally to everyone. Most kids have to learn organization skills, and parents are the best teachers. Experts say kids are much more likely to get organized if parents show them how.

This booklet can help. It's full of tips for organizing everything from notes to notebooks. Soon your child will become more organized—and more successful!

Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate the use of "he" and "she" throughout this booklet.



Organize Assignments Right Away

Throughout the school day, students are given many assignments: a chapter to read in history, a math worksheet or a report due next week. No matter what needs to get done, being organized will help. Here are some steps for your child to follow:

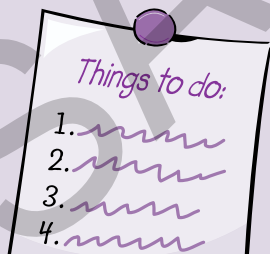
1. **Write down assignments.** Make sure your child has an assignment notebook. He should clearly record each assignment and when it's due. (Calendars can be used for planning big projects.)

2. **Use self-stick notes.**

Your child can attach them to books he needs for homework. At the end of the school day, everything with a note on it goes home.



3. **File papers.** Divide a large binder into sections for each subject. Include areas for finished and unfinished assignments. Use a filing system at home for saving homework, handouts and tests.



4. **Make to-do lists.** Each day, your child should create a list of tasks to complete during study time. Crossing them off will help him stay organized and feel a sense of accomplishment.

5. **Put books by the door.** If your child's schoolwork is in his backpack by the front door ready to go each morning, he'll avoid having to search for it—or forgetting it altogether.

Tackling Large Assignments

For many students, there's nothing more intimidating than a large assignment. Whether it's a science project, a term paper or studying for a major test, sometimes projects seem so overwhelming that students put them off. But large assignments usually aren't as hard as they look at first. The key is organization.

Plan Projects Step-by-Step

Every large assignment can be divided into the following steps. Have your child:

1. **Take clear, specific notes** about the assignment. For example, if she needs to write a paper, should it have a title page? What about a bibliography? When is it due? If your child has any questions, she should ask the teacher as soon as possible.
2. **Use a large calendar** and write down the due date.
3. **Divide the project into small parts.** For example, select a topic, do research, create an outline, etc. Write each task on the calendar, working backwards from the final due date.

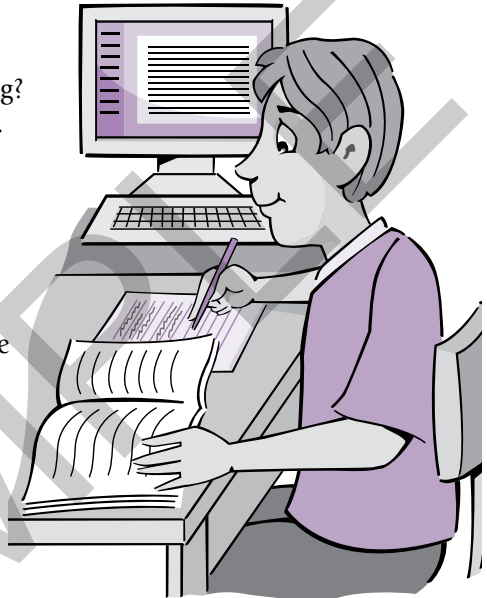


4. **Make to-do lists every day** and check off items as they're completed. This will give her a sense of organization and accomplishment.
5. **Evaluate.** When the assignment is finished, congratulate your child. Ask what worked well and what she would do differently next time.

Set Up a Study Spot

The best place to do homework is in an organized study spot. It can be as large as a room, as small as a desk or one end of the kitchen table, as long as it meets your child's needs. Help him find a place that is:

- **Well lit and quiet.** Does your child study best near a window? Next to soft lighting? See what works best for him. Let him put up a "Do not disturb" sign. This should mean no phone calls, text messages or other interruptions.
- **Neat.** It's hard to study in the middle of a mess. Consider creating a shelf area where he can keep his books and reference materials. Show your child how to set up a filing system to keep his schoolwork organized. He might use colored folders for different subjects. A desk organizer can help him know where to find a pen, pencil, paper clips or calculator.
- **Stocked.** Be sure your child always has all the supplies he needs. Make it his responsibility to let you know when he's running low on anything so he doesn't have to waste time looking for paper or a highlighter.



Tip: Encourage your child to study in the same place every day. Why? He will become "conditioned" to studying in that spot. Soon, he will be able to concentrate there automatically.

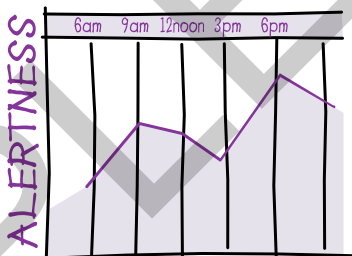
Stick With a Study Routine

It's important to have an organized study spot. But it's just as important to have a study routine—and to stick with it! To do their best in school, kids need to study every day. If they don't have assignments, they can review or do extra reading. But the important thing is to stick to the routine.

Many parents have questions about how to arrange study time. Here are some examples:

1. When should my child study?

The ideal time is when your child is most alert. This might be right after school, after a snack and some play time, after dinner—or even early in the morning. Find out what works best for your child. Then, if possible, have him study at the same time every day.



2. What should my child study first? He should probably start with his hardest subjects because they demand the most energy and motivation. But for some kids, starting with the easy parts gives them the motivation and confidence to tackle the rest.

3. How long should my child spend on homework? That depends on his age and skills, as well as the subject matter. Talk to his teacher to get a good estimate. Then consider setting a required working time so your child doesn't rush through assignments.

Many experts agree on these general guidelines:

Grades 1–3: 10 to 30 minutes per day

Grades 4–6: 30 to 60 minutes per day

Grades 7–9: 50 minutes to 2 hours per day

Grades 10–12: 1-1/2 to 3 hours per day

4. **Should my child take study breaks?** Yes. Short, regular breaks help most kids think better.
5. **Is it okay to play music or watch TV while studying?** Some experts say quiet music is fine if children find it helpful. Experiment to see what produces the best grades. But TV should not be allowed during homework time.
6. **Where should I be while my child studies?** If your child is young, stay nearby. She may have questions or need supervision. While she is studying, encourage a “family quiet time.” You can do things like pay bills or read.
7. **Should I let my child study with friends?** Sometimes studying together helps kids. They can encourage and learn from one another. But group studying isn’t always effective for kids who are easily distracted, or for those who end up socializing instead of working.



Students Need Organized Notes

When it comes to studying, there's nothing more helpful than organized notes. They keep students from having to re-read information and remember everything the teacher said. Share these note-taking tips with your child:

- **Find the method** that works best for you. Here are some examples:
 - Take notes in outline form—important points first, details underneath.
 - Draw a line down the middle of the page and put homework notes on one side and class notes on the other.
 - Put major points on the left side and details on the right.
- **Be brief.** Write down only the key facts from textbooks and lectures. Look for cues from the teacher, such as writing some points on the board or saying, "This is important."
- **Use abbreviations and symbols.** This makes note taking easier and faster. Here are some examples: w/ (for *with*), = (for *same as*), esp. (for *especially*), and ↑ (for *increase*). Create some new ones, too!
- **Be neat.** Write legibly so notes don't have to be copied. After class, read them over and clear up anything that's confusing. Also add details and highlight important information. Date and number pages so they stay in order.



Study for Tests Step-by-Step

If your child takes organized notes, she's one step closer to acing her next test. She should save notes (and other materials, such as quizzes and handouts) to review before exams. She should also:

- **Make a plan.** Schedule time to prepare for the test over several days. It's better to study things repeatedly over time than to "cram" before a test.
- **Review.** Divide materials into logical sections. Then read them over as a memory refresher.
- **Memorize.** Use flash cards (or another method) to study vocabulary words or other important information.
- **Take a practice test.** Ask questions the way they might appear on the test. Study until they can be answered confidently.
- **Relax.** Get a good night's sleep before the test, then eat a healthy breakfast. Take a few deep breaths and think, "I'm prepared. I'll do fine!"



Keep Storage Areas Organized

Students have a lot to keep track of—handouts, notebooks, forms, graded tests and quizzes, assignment sheets, gym clothes, instruments, sports gear ... the list goes on and on. It's no wonder that backpacks, lockers and desk areas can quickly get out of control! Children often need help figuring out which items they need to have with them—and when. Teach your child how to organize his:

- **Backpack.** Folders are great for keeping papers from being crushed into the bottom of a backpack. Pencil cases can keep writing utensils confined to one, easy-to-find pocket. Consider having your child start his after-school study routine with a five-minute “backpack cleanout”—that way, he won't be trying to shove completed assignments into a messy backpack, and he'll start each day fresh.
- **Locker.** Your child should only keep essential school-related belongings in his locker—it shouldn't be a backup closet or pantry in which he's storing half his wardrobe or enough snacks for the next month. Suggest that your child clean out and organize his locker once a week, sorting things into “keep,” “take home” and “throw out” piles.
- **Desk area.** Provide folders, binders or other containers so your child can easily file away—and keep track of—old tests and quizzes. Have your child ask himself, “Do I really need this?” before adding anything to his desk drawers. And encourage your child to keep the top of his desk tidy. It'll be easier to get right to work if he doesn't have to move stacks of paper aside first.



Writing Requires Organization

A writing assignment can seem like a tough challenge for many students. But good writing starts with good organization. You can help your child organize her writing by guiding her through a series of steps:

1. **Choose a topic.** One of the best ways to do this is to brainstorm. Your child can write or draw whatever comes to mind.
2. **Prewrite.** Encourage your child to think of questions about her topic. What does she need to know about it? Where can she find this information? Take her to the library if she needs to do research or help her find it online.
3. **Organize.** Before your child begins writing, she should make an outline. This involves putting information in logical order, like this:

I. Major topic

A. Subtopic

1. Example of subtopic

a. Detail about example

b. Detail about example

c. ...

4. **Draft.** Have your child write the first version of the paper, focusing more on facts (who, what, when, where, why and how) than on grammar or spelling.
5. **Revise.** Now it's time to check things more closely. For example:
 - Is the writing easy to understand?
 - Are paragraphs logical and indented?
 - Have facts been double-checked?
 - Are grammar and spelling okay?
 - Is the paper neatly written?
 - Has your child followed the teacher's instructions?
6. **Publish.** Make necessary changes, then turn in the paper!

Other Things to Organize

It will be easier for your child to organize his schoolwork and homework if other parts of his life are organized, too, including:

- **Belongings.** Make sure your child has specific places to keep his things. You'll be less likely to hear, "Mom, where are my shoes?" or, "I can't find my house key!"
- **TV time.** Children should not watch more than 10 hours per week. To limit viewing, help your child plan which shows to watch. If programs interfere with homework time, record them for later.
- **Chores.** There's nothing wrong with expecting your child to help around the house. Make a chart explaining chores and when they should be done. As jobs are completed, your child can check them off.
- **Daily routines.** Your child should be able to count on doing some things regularly. For example, doing homework at the same time, having dinner as a family, laying clothes out before bed or going to bed at a certain time.
- **Extracurricular activities.** Encourage your child to participate in after-school activities he likes. But if they conflict with his schoolwork or family time, he'll have to cut back.





Keep Up to Date With Calendars

Keeping track of family activities can get complicated. It helps to have one large family calendar, plus individual calendars for each family member. Here are some tips for using calendars:

- **Use a large calendar for the family.** It should have plenty of space for writing. Mark key dates, such as birthdays, holidays, doctor visits and after-school activities.
- **Have family members check the calendar** often and update it weekly—perhaps on Sunday night. This is a good time to add family information to personal calendars, too.
- **Use individual calendars for detailed scheduling.** For example, your child's calendar should include long-term plans, such as how she'll prepare for a test. Your child should check her calendar every day and before making plans. Record new commitments right away.

How Else Can Parents Help?

Parents have a big impact on how organized children are. When parents value organization, kids often do, too. You can promote organization by doing these things:

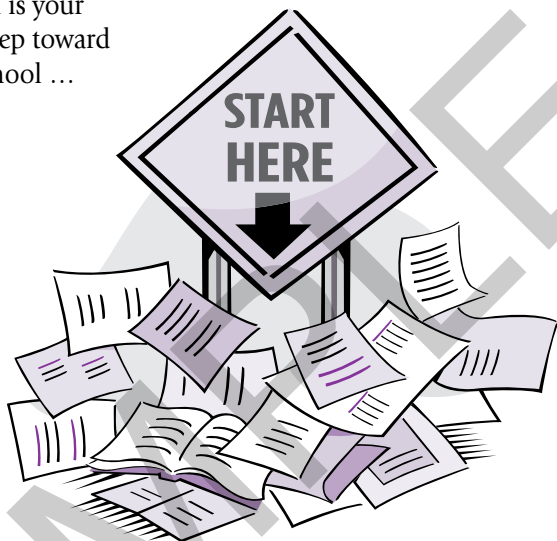
- **Set an example.** Use calendars, make to-do lists for yourself, and finish tasks on time without procrastinating.
- **Reward orderliness.** Look for opportunities to praise your child's organization. Say, "Wow! Your room looks so neat." Or, "I'm proud that you finished your project on schedule."
- **Practice together.** Do organizational activities with your child, such as planning a birthday party or dinner.
- **Start small.** Don't expect your child to organize everything at once. Ask what he'd like to work on most. Or pick an easy goal, so he'll build confidence and see results quickly.
- **Use a timer.** If your child is having trouble sticking to a schedule, set a timer. This might prevent dawdling during homework time.
- **Ask for help.** If your child's disorganization seems severe, contact the school. Ask what the teacher has observed in the classroom.



As the saying goes,

**“The longest journey begins
with a single step.”**

Organization is your
child’s first step toward
success in school ...
and in life!



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