

# Building Better Homework Habits

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## Goals

- Identify personal learning preferences when completing schoolwork
- Develop strong learning conditions and habits for completing schoolwork
- Create a personal plan that includes multiple options for learning/work environments for completing schoolwork

## Duration

60 minutes to complete

## Prerequisites

Completion of the AchieveWorks® Learning & Productivity assessment

## Materials and Preparation

Students will need:

- a printout of their AchieveWorks Learning & Productivity report or an Internet-enabled device to view these results online
- paper and a writing utensil

You will also need:

- a whiteboard/chalkboard or poster

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## Method

### Motivational Set (15 minutes)

1. Share with students the following case study and ask them to write down their responses to the questions.

#### Case Study:

Lorenzo is a 6th grade student. He enjoys spending time with his friends, playing soccer, listening to pop music, and going to the lake. He would rather be outside than stuck doing his homework. His parents make him sit for an hour after dinner to complete his homework.

One evening, while the rest of his friends have left him to go to the lake, Lorenzo is sitting at the kitchen table trying to get through his English homework. His younger sisters are practicing — or rather, playing randomly — at the piano with his father, while his mother is baking a cake for their upcoming recital. Lorenzo is supposed to be answering questions about a short story they read in class but he can't get past the first question. Frustrated, he asks, "Why do I have to even do homework?"

His mother comes over to him and replies, "You know, everyone has had to do homework at some point in their lives." Lorenzo asks, "What's the point? Couldn't it be done in school?"

His mother thinks for a moment before replying. "You know, every person, whether they are a professional soccer player or doctor, or even someone famous like Bill Gates, did homework. Homework was practice for them. It developed their independent skills. You won't always have a teacher or me or your father around when you have to do your work. Homework helps develop your work ethic, your problem-solving skills, your patience. You will need those throughout your life. And if you want to achieve anything, you need to be able to get through a challenge. So why not take a look again at your work and see how you can get through it?"

#### Questions:

- What do you think about what Lorenzo's mom said? Do you agree? Disagree? Explain why you think so.
  - Reflect on Lorenzo's work environment. Are there any distractions or learning conditions impacting his work? What factors would you change to help him be more comfortable when doing his schoolwork?
2. Ask students to share their ideas and start a discussion. If students are having trouble sharing their answers, use the following points to generate discussion.
    - Lorenzo's mom has a point. Although sometimes homework is done because there simply isn't enough class time to complete the work, homework is also assigned to help students develop their work habits. What kind of work habits are developed? Can students problem solve on their own? What happens when they meet a challenge? If students do not develop these skills in their youth, how will they approach challenges as an adult?
    - Lorenzo could change a few factors in his work environment to help him feel more comfortable and focused. The noise from the piano and the smells of baking may be affecting his ability to concentrate. As well, the fact that his friends are off playing bothers him. Lorenzo could try completing his work after school to avoid missing time with his friends. He could also do the following: find a more quiet place to work (perhaps in his room or a private area of the house); listen to music with headphones to help him focus; and, divide his hour into halves, with a five-minute break in between, to allow his mind to relax and refocus.

## Overview

Tell the students they will be reflecting on their learning preferences and their current practices for completing schoolwork. They will need to have completed the AchieveWorks Learning & Productivity assessment prior to the activity as they will be examining their learning preferences and creating a plan that best aligns these preferences with their learning/work habits.

### Weekly Habits Chart (10 minutes)

1. Have students create a chart of a typical week in their lives. It should be a week that takes place during the school year. Have them list the activities they are part of and the approximate hours they spend at each of these. Be sure they include sleeping, eating (they could specify breakfast, lunch, dinner, snack, etc.), school, homework/study time, and any major extracurricular activities they do. Provide your own personal example(s) or create an example of a typical week on the board to help students visualize.
2. When done, ask students to identify how much time they devote to doing homework. Discuss with students what they feel is an appropriate amount of time, but be sure to mention how this is specific to the individual. Comment on how everyone's lives are different and we all have different responsibilities and activities in our lives. Ask students to decide how much time they feel is appropriate to do homework during the week and to write this number down in an "I statement" below their chart. Mention to students that this number can change from week to week but, on average, it should reflect the amount of time they feel they should spend on homework in order to be successful in their classes.
  - Example: I will spend approximately 6 hours a week doing homework.

### Working Conditions (10 minutes)

1. Ask students to think about Lorenzo and his work environment while they reflect on where they complete their schoolwork at home. Have them list five places where they can do their schoolwork. These places do not necessarily have to be in their homes, but anywhere they have done homework — for example, at the library, at school, at a friend's house, in the car, and so on.
2. Have students create a pros and cons list for each of the places they listed. What do they like about the place they work in? What bothers them about it? Again, use Lorenzo's story as an example to point out pros and cons. Have them aim for at least two to three pros and cons for each.

## Access AchieveWorks Results (20 minutes)

1. Have students review their AchieveWorks Learning & Productivity reports. Ask students what their personal learning preferences are. Do they like a lot of light in their work environment? Are they highly motivated? Do they need a teacher or parent working with them? Do they work better in the morning or at night? Have students briefly list their learning preferences.
2. Once done, have students compare this list to the five places in which they like to work. Have them add these preferences to their list of pros and cons.
  - For example, if they picked the library as a place, it usually is brightly lit, there is an adult around to help them, it is quiet, there is no eating allowed, but it isn't always open in the morning and you can't always work with a partner.
3. When students are done, have them reflect on their lists. Based on these reasons, have students rate their five work environments from 1 to 5, with 1 being their best place to work (where they are most focused and work will most likely get done) and 5 being a place in which they could work but is not ideal.
4. Using "I statements", have students write out a plan for completing their homework. Students can use the following format: "When I have to do homework, I will work in [LOCATION ONE] because [REASONS]. If [LOCATION ONE] is not available, I can work in [LOCATION TWO] because [REASONS]. If either of these locations is not available, I can work in [LOCATION THREE] because [REASONS]. These locations are best for me because [REASONS]."

## Reflection on Learning Environments

Ask students to put their plan into practice and, over the next couple of weeks, have students reflect on their schoolwork experiences. Were they successful in getting their work done? Were they focused? Did the learning conditions and environment suit them? Do they need to change something? After completing homework, have students reflect on these questions in a way that suits them. They could simply rate their experience using numbers or smiley/sad faces or jot down a few sentences explaining how well they worked. Be sure to ask them later how well their learning environments are working for them and discuss if changes need to be made.

## Closing Activity (5 minutes)

Ask students to revisit the number they decided on for the amount of time they devote to their homework. Ask students how they know when this time is up — or do they work until the homework is completed? Or until they are satisfied? Ask students if they use a timer or create lists when completing their work, and ask what the benefits would be to using either of these ideas. What is the benefit of knowing, or seeing or hearing, a goal like this?