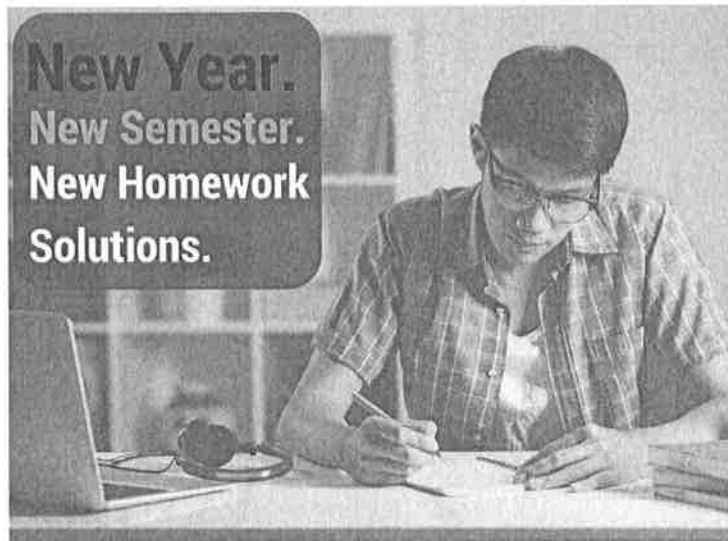


The start of a new year means it is the perfect time for a new outlook on homework: homework systems! As a parent or a teacher, you know just how much of an energy drain homework can be for your students (and you!)



As students begin a new semester, this is the perfect time to establish some new routines to improve the process of doing homework. Pass these tips along to your student(s) .

Let's start from the top. The first question you need to ask yourself is, "If I could improve one thing about homework, what would it be?" The first answer that probably came to mind was, "Get rid of it!" Honestly, that would be my first response, too. However, homework is a fact-of-life and serves a very good purpose (whether we like it or not), so let's try that again...

So, if you could improve one thing about homework, what would it be? Have your answer? Let's see if I guessed it.

I've asked many students over the past 20 years this question and these are the four most common answers:

1. "I wish my homework didn't take me so long to do."
2. "I wish I could stop losing assignments, because it is dragging down my grade."
3. "I wish my parents would stop complaining that I wait until the 'last minute' to tell them important things (like the supplies I need for that science fair project...tomorrow.)"
4. "I wish my homework stopped causing so many arguments in my house, I want some peace!"

Now that you know the problem, create a solution!

Once you have recognized a specific problem, it is much easier to identify a solution. The best solutions are homework systems. Systems are procedures or routines that help you simplify the issue and develop positive habits to overcome it.

I could write an entire book on each of the problems above, but here are some quick examples of "solution systems" for each one:

1. **The biggest contributor to homework taking a long time is a lack of focus.** If you fight to stay focused while doing homework, set an electronic timer for the amount of time you think an assignment should take and challenge yourself to beat the timer. Not

only does this help you focus in on your work, it makes getting your homework done into a game!

2. **If lost assignments are your issue, you first need to reduce the number of folders that you have to manage.** Most students juggle 7-9 separate folders and 7-9 notebooks... up to 18 different supplies! No wonder assignments get lost! Start by streamlining all folders into one, 1" binder. Then, "Take Ten" every time you sit down to do your homework; two minutes to put all loose papers into their correct folders and the next eight minutes to review any handouts or notes from the day.
3. **If you are a victim of "Last Minute Syndrome," start having a Weekly Family Meeting.** This meeting is an informal gathering (usually on Sundays) where everyone shares their schedules for the upcoming week (including parents). Discuss sports schedules, upcoming tests/projects, needed supplies, etc. Ask your parents to share if they will be working late one night or have other after-school obligations that may impact the family. This system is a great cure for LMS because it encourages everyone to be proactive and plan ahead together.
4. **If you do your homework in a timely fashion, don't lose your assignments, and plan out your week, you will have less stress!**

These suggestions are merely examples, but they illustrate the concept of developing systems to help solve common homework problems.

Tip for Parents: Whenever possible, involve your children in the search for solutions. Children of all ages usually give honest and very insightful suggestions, especially when they feel like their input is taken seriously. The more input they can have in identifying reasonable solutions, the more willing they will be to participate.

Homework inherently causes problems. Ironically, one of the most significant purposes of homework is to learn how to solve problems. In almost every situation, a "recurring problem" can be solved with a "recurring solution," better known as a "system." To create your solution system:

1. Identify and label the problem so you can truly focus on a solution.
2. Brainstorm solutions that will simplify the problem and help everyone develop habits to overcome them.
3. Test your system. Be prepared to make adjustments and give it two-four weeks for it to take hold.
4. Recognize the fruits of your efforts! This is the best motivation for solving future problems.

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