

Prepared for:

**United Independent School District
Laredo, Texas**



Helping Children Get Organized For Homework and Schoolwork

One of a series of Parent Guides from



Parent Guide

Helping Children

Get Organized

For Homework and Schoolwork

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Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D. Executive Editor: Jeff Peters. Writer: Maria Koklanaris. Senior Editor: Betsie Ridnour. Staff Editors: Pat Hodgdon, Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley. Editorial Assistant: Pat Carter. Marketing Director: Laura Bono. Business Manager: Sally Bert. Operations & Technical Services Manager: Barbara Peters. Customer Service Manager: Pam Beltz. Customer Service Associates: Peggy Costello, Louise Lawrence, Elizabeth Hipfel & Margie Supervielle. Business Assistant: Donna Ross. Marketing Assistant: Joyce Ghen. Circulation Associates: Marsha Phillips, Catalina Lalande & Diane Perry.

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United Independent School District

Laredo, Texas

Order number: x02579759

Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	.2
Get a Good Start at the End . . . . .	.3
Designate a Space for Your Child to Do Homework . . . . .	.4
Manage Backpacks and School Materials at Home . . . . .	.5
Develop a Routine for Nightly Homework . . . . .	.6
Tips for Organizing Different Areas of Schoolwork . . . . .	.6
Keeping Pace With Projects . . . . .	.7
What Happened to My Organized Child? . . . . .	.8
For More Information . . . . .	.8
Other Guides Available from the Parent Institute . . . . .	.9

Introduction

Being a student today means keeping track of an awful lot of stuff. There's the stuff you need in order to study—books, papers, pens and pencils, notebooks. There's the stuff that's part of daily school life—lunch money, information from the PTA, permission slips, enrollment forms. And then there's the stuff you have to do—tests, homework, projects, returning forms.

Sound overwhelming? You bet. Now imagine having to do all that and being seven years old, or 10 or 14. It's easy to see which students will have the advantage—those who are organized. A student who is organized has a system or routine in place that includes the following:

- A way to make sure he has all the tools he needs for homework and schoolwork.
- Places to keep supplies both at home and at school.
- A way to transport his books and supplies between home and school when necessary.
- A way to make sure parents receive papers and forms for signing.
- A way to return those papers and forms to school.
- A way to stay on top of test dates and due dates.

This may sound complicated, but once your child gets organized, life will actually become much easier. Both you and your child will be more relaxed, because you won't have the constant worry of where things are and when they're due. Your student will have much more time, because he won't have to waste precious minutes and hours scrambling to gather materials and make up missed assignments. Instead, he can get right to work, and use his extra minutes and hours for rest or play. All of that adds up to improved performance at school, and a calmer atmosphere at home.

This guide is designed to get you there. Inside, you'll find dozens of tips to help your student organize his homework and schoolwork. Use them together to set up the system or routine that works best for your student and your family.



Get a good start at the end

The end of your child's school day is a time to wind down, but it is also a time to get started—these last few minutes are critical for preparing for her evening and the next morning. Following are some things your child should do at the end of the school day:

1 Write down or check assignments in an assignment notebook. This step will vary according to your child's grade in school, and the materials she receives. Some schools supply children with an assignment notebook. If not, give one to your child.

Many teachers, especially in the elementary grades, will post the night's homework at the end of the day. If your child's teacher does this, your child should write the assignments down as the teacher is posting them. But if your child is in middle or high school, and has several teachers, she will have to write down assignments after every class period. For her, the end of the day is the time to check that she has done so. She should have a way to contact someone—the teacher, a friend in the class—to get any assignments she has missed.

When you first start this system, or if your child is having a hard time remembering to write things in her assignment notebook, you can check each day when she gets home to see what's been entered into it. If she doesn't have anything written down, she should definitely check with a classmate to make sure she knows the assignment. If there really isn't an assignment for a subject, she should write that, rather than just leave it blank.

2

Make sure she has all necessary materials. One quick, easy way to do this is to give your child a set of stickers, or self-stick notes. Have her put a sticker or note on everything that has to go home that night. Another idea is to make a list throughout the day of materials to go home and check them off as she packs them.

3

Pack materials.

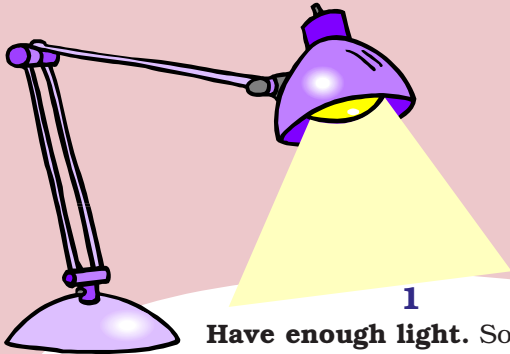
Beginning in kindergarten, every student needs a backpack or sturdy bag to carry things between home and school. When at school, your child's backpack should stay in the same place (probably a hook, cubby or locker), until it's time to pack up. That way, she can quickly grab it, pack and go.



4 Make sure the backpack gets home. If your child walks or bikes home from school, the backpack should not leave her shoulders until she's in the door. If she goes by car, bus or other transportation, have her always ask herself, "Do I have my backpack?" as she is preparing to leave the vehicle.

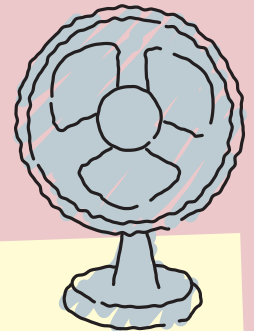
Designate a Space for Your Child to Do Homework

Your child will likely do her best work if she almost always does it in the same place. Her mind will come to associate that place with “buckling down” to study. Here are some ways to create an effective study spot.



1

Have enough light. Some people like to work under bright lights, while others prefer a soft lamp. What matters is that your child can read and write clearly and comfortably with her light.

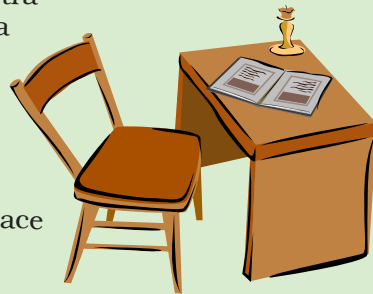


2 Have the right

noise level. Many students need absolute silence, but some do better with soft music playing or a fan whirring in the background. But avoid areas where she will hear ringing phones, loud voices or TV.

3 Support your child's learning style.

A desk or table is traditional, and still a great choice for a study spot. But some students really do think best if they have some floor space to move around.



4 Keep necessary tools at hand. Your child should keep a supply of pencils, paper, reference books and other needed materials at her workspace at all times. Ask her to let you know when she runs low, and replenish as needed. Scrambling around the house to find these things wastes time and is a distraction.

5

Keep it neat. An overflowing desk or table is another major distraction. Give your child some organizers—a cup for pencils, a bin for papers, a basket for tools such as scissors and tape.



Manage Backpacks and School Materials at Home

Here are some suggestions for organizing the things your child brings home from school.

- 1 Have a set place for the backpack. Just as at school, your child's backpack should "live" in one place at home. The idea is that when he comes home, he puts the backpack in its place, removes the necessary materials, and puts them in their assigned places. Later, when it's time to put the completed materials back in the backpack for the next day, he knows exactly where the backpack is. The next day, when it's time to leave for school, the backpack again is to be found in its usual place. No time is wasted hunting for the backpack.
- 2 Set up a filing system. On many days, children come home with a backpack full of papers. Some are for homework, some need your signature, others are examples of completed schoolwork or artwork. Set up four files or bins for papers.
 - One bin should hold papers that need your signature.
 - Another should hold informational papers (such as notes about upcoming school events).
 - The third bin is for completed work.
 - The fourth is for information about schoolwork due at a future date, such as handouts about tests and long-term projects. Papers and books needed for that night's homework should go immediately to your student's desk or workspace.

- 3 Set up a calendar system. Once papers are organized, use them to transfer information to a calendar. Write down test due dates, project due dates, deadlines for signed papers and materials to return to school, and dates for school events on a large family calendar in your kitchen, or on a calendar your child keeps in her work area.

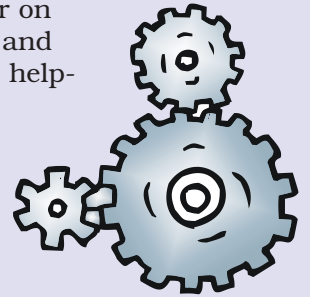


- 4 Periodically go through your files. Several times a week, go through filed papers with your child. Once an event or test date has passed, or you've met a deadline, get rid of the paperwork. Exceptions: your student may need to keep old tests or completed schoolwork to help him study for midterms or finals. And you'll want to keep artwork or projects he's especially proud of.

Develop a Routine for Nightly Homework

Students who stick to an established study routine are more likely to do better on tests. They also keep themselves on track to complete their nightly homework and make steady progress on long-term assignments. Following are some ideas for helping your child establish an efficient homework routine.

- 1 Change gears before getting started.** Few students can walk straight in the door from a busy day at school, and immediately plop down to effectively complete homework. Suggest a light snack and something to drink. Many children also need 15 to 30 minutes of physical activity to refresh and relax before beginning their work.
- 2 Begin with the most challenging assignment.** Your child will probably have more energy at the beginning of his homework time and less at the end. So he should start with the work that will take the most energy. However, this part of the homework should not reduce him to frustration each day. If it does, let his teacher know at once.
- 3 Build in short breaks.** Encourage your child to pause for 10 minutes after finishing the first part of his work. He may need to stretch, visit the bathroom, or get a glass of water. No TV, phone or Internet during breaks!
- 4 Spend some time on a long-term project.** Read a chapter for next week's test, do some research for an upcoming project, or revise the first draft of a paper that's due in a few days. Then take another short break.
- 5 Finish up with easier assignments.** The end of homework time can be used to complete assignments that are typically not difficult for your child.
- 6 Be flexible when needed.** The above routine should usually work well, but there will be evenings when your child will not have time to do it all and still get to sleep at an appropriate hour. On those evenings, give top priority to assignments due the next day.



Tips for Organizing Different Areas of Schoolwork

Organization is not just about having a place for everything and sticking to a schedule. With schoolwork, organization also means having a plan or a system for tackling your studies. Here are some suggestions for your child.

- 1 Read the SQ3R way.** This stands for *Survey* (look the material over), *Question* (ask yourself questions about it, such as "what is the main idea?"), *Read* (read the material through carefully), *Restate* (put it in your own words) and *Review* (read it again until you know it well).
- 2 Keep numbers lined up properly.** Many math mistakes happen to children who know how to do the problems, but they put one or more numerals or symbols in the wrong place! Have your child try using graph paper to do math homework. Now he can put one numeral or symbol in each box. It is much easier to keep them in a straight line this way.
- 3 Put each spelling word** on a 3" x 5" card. This will allow your child to manipulate the words—an especially good organizational technique for visual or hands-on learners. Now your child can flip through the cards as he says the words aloud. He can post them in spots around his room where he frequently looks. He can lay them out on the floor and put them in alphabetical order.

Keeping Pace With Projects

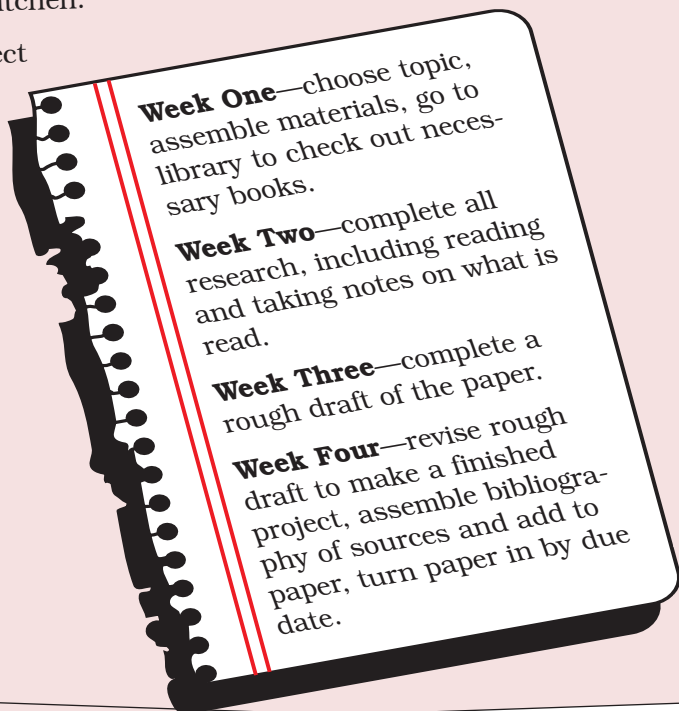
A month is a long time to a child. So if it's March 1 and the teacher assigns a project due April 1, your child may wait several weeks to even get started. By then, she's running behind. The project is late, or its quality is not as high as it might have been. Following are some steps your child can follow to stay on top of projects.

1 Put the project assignment in plain view. This may keep your child from "forgetting" about the project. On the day the assignment comes home, have her write down the following information:

- The requirements for the project
- The due date
- Any materials she'll need.

Post it at her workspace or in the kitchen.

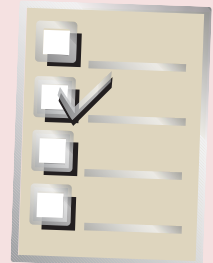
2 Create a plan for breaking the project down into steps. (Some teachers and students call this "chunking.") Suppose your child has four weeks to write a research paper. A sample plan could look like this:



3 Select a time to do some work on the project each day. For example, 15 minutes of nightly homework time will be devoted to the project. Each night, make notes on how much was completed.

4 Review progress each week. If your child falls behind, or hits a stumbling block, she should set aside time on her calendar to catch up, and then follow through. As she finishes each phase of the project, she can check it off.

5 Turn completed project in on time. Celebrate a goal reached! Then, have your child self-evaluate. Is there anything she would change? Would she use this plan again for her next project?



What Happened to My Organized Child?

Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, two experts on the development of children in middle school, say there are “three D’s” to expect from a middle-school child. They are not talking about grades, but about being *Distracted*, *Disinterested*, and *Disorganized*.

Even a child who was highly organized in elementary school can experience chaos in middle school. Instead of keeping track of assignments from one teacher, your child may have a teacher for every subject. Instead of staying in one classroom, she may travel all around what is probably a much larger school than she went to before. On top of all that, she also has to cope with managing a locker, and an increasing amount of extracurricular or social options.

When middle-school disorganization strikes, revisit the tips in this guide. And try these suggestions designed especially for children in middle and high school:

- 1** Consider trimming down her schedule. The chess club sounds fabulous. But so does the tennis team. And the debate team would certainly be exciting. More than one middle schooler, faced with an array of interesting choices, has decided to pick “all of the above.” After that, it’s not long before schoolwork and good habits begin to suffer. If you see signs of overload, talk with your child about doing less. You may even have to impose a limit on the number of outside activities she can participate in each season.
- 2** Get help with study skills. Sometimes the skills your child learned in elementary school are not enough to help her succeed in the upper grades. Ask the guidance counselor at your child’s school for specific tips on studying for classes in middle and high school. There may even be a short course your child could take to help her learn or polish these skills.



Getting organized is a process, and there will be days when your child—and you—will slide back. Don’t worry, just get going again the next day. Eventually, these good habits will become routine. Your child will experience more success in school, and in life!

For More Information

“Disengaged Students”

by Marc Straus
 CWK Network
www.connectingwithkids.com/tipsheet/2004/159_jan14/disen.html

“My Child’s Academic Success”

U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/homework/index.html

“The Realization and Utilization of Organization”

by Dr. Mel Levine
 All Kinds of Minds
www.allkindsofminds.org/articleDisplay.aspx?articleID=1&categoryID=8

The Roller Coaster Years

by Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese,
 Broadway Books
 1-800-726-0600
www.broadwaybooks.com

The School Survival Guide For Kids With LD

by Rhoda Cummings, Ed.D., and Gary Fisher, Ph.D.
 Free Spirit Publishing
 1-800-735-7323
www.freespirit.com

Family & Home Set

10 Great Ways to Teach Children Responsibility
25 Ways You Can Put the Power of Routines to Work for You and Your Child
52 Great Ways Families Can Spend Time Together

School Readiness—Set 1

Developmental Milestones for Preschool Children—Is My Child on Track?
Preparing Your Child for Reading Success—Birth to Age Five
How to Choose the Best Preschool or Day Care for Your Child

School Readiness—Set 2

Common Discipline Problems of Preschoolers and How to Deal With Them
37 Experiences Every Child Should Have Before Starting School
Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten

School Success—Set 1

The Road to Reading Success—Elementary School Years
Common Discipline Problems of Elementary School Children and How to Solve Them
31 Alternatives to TV and Video Games for Your Elementary School Child

School Success—Set 2

Give Your Child the Edge: Teachers' Top 10 Learning Secrets Parents Can Use
How to Help Children Do Their Best on Tests
Helping Children Get Organized for Homework and Schoolwork

School Success—Set 3

Help Your Child Develop Good Learning Styles
How to Instill the Character Traits of Success in Your Child
Seven Proven Ways to Motivate Children to Do Better in School

When There is a Problem—Set 1

Help Your Child Deal With Bullies and Bullying
Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure
How to Help Your Struggling Student

Other Important Titles

Common Discipline Problems of Teenagers and How to Solve Them
What to Do If Your Child Has ADD/ADHD
Common Discipline Problems of Middle School Children and How to Solve Them
Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School

*For more information about these and other materials for
parents to encourage learning in their children:*

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