



## Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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### Homework and Practice

from Classroom Instruction that Works  
by Robert Marzano, et al.

Homework and practice are instructional techniques that are well known to teachers. Both provide students with opportunities to deepen their understanding and skills relative to content that has been initially presented to them. Two key ideas should guide the assigning of homework.

1. **The purpose of homework should be identified and articulated.** Not all homework is the same. That is, homework can be assigned for different purposes, and depending on the purpose, the form of homework and the feedback provided students will differ. Two common purposes for homework are practice and preparation or elaboration. When homework is assigned for practice, it should be structured around content with which students have a high degree of familiarity. For example, if students are asked to practice a new skill, they have learned in class via homework, they should be fairly familiar with that skill. Practicing a skill with which a student is unfamiliar is not only inefficient, but might also serve to habituate errors or misconceptions. A second purpose for homework is to prepare students for new content or have them elaborate on content that has been introduced. For example, a teacher might assign homework to have students begin thinking about the concept of the cell prior to systematically studying it in class. Similarly, after that concept of the cell has been introduced, the teacher might assign homework that asks students to elaborate on what they have learned. In both of these situations, it is not necessary that students have an in-depth understanding of the content—as is

the case when homework is used for practice.

2. **If homework is assigned, it should be commented on.** One set of students found that the effects of homework vary greatly, depending on the feedback a teacher provides. Assigning homework without commenting on it produces poor results. When the homework is graded, the effect size increases. Finally, homework on which the teacher provides written comments for students produces the largest effect size.

Research indicates that students from grade 2 and beyond should be asked to do *some* homework. The critical question is how much homework is the *right amount* of homework. Unfortunately, there is no clear answer on this point.

Even though there is certainly a practical—and ethical—limit to the amount of homework that should be assigned to students at the high school level, the more homework students do, the better their achievement. Data indicate that for every 30 minutes of “additional” homework a student does per night, his or her overall grade point average (GPA) increases about half a point. This means that if a student with a GPA of 2.00 increases the amount of homework she does by 30 minutes per night, her GPA will rise to 2.50.

Researchers have found that schooling occupies only about 13 percent of the waking hours of the first 18 years of life, which is less than the amount of time students spend watching television. As a result, it makes sense to extend learning opportunities beyond the confines of the school day. Homework allows this to happen.