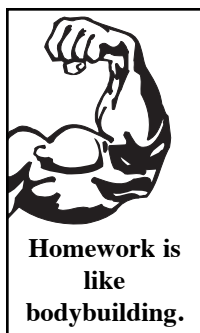


## Why Do ADD Students Procrastinate About Homework?

Dealing with homework is one of the universal problems of ADD students. Some of them never finish their homework; others never even start the assignments. The basis of this problem lies in two areas. First of all, many ADDers possess above average intelligence, which presents a classic case of “mixed blessings.” ADD students are often so bright they are able to get by and make passing grades without doing homework—at least for a while.



However, somewhere in their academic career (often in middle school, sometimes later), they inevitably reach a breakdown point where having natural “smarts” doesn’t do the trick anymore, and they **must** do homework in order to make a passing grade. Unfortunately, they have never

developed the “homework muscles” of personal responsibility and focused concentration; these students have not habituated themselves to homework assignments.



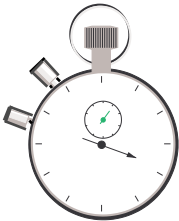
**School's out!**

The second problem with homework relates to time awareness and estimation. Having just spent eight hours in school feeling bored and restless, the ADDer escapes into “free time twilight zone” as soon as the last bell of the day rings. Indeed, leaving the tight structures of school time

for the realm of unplanned time *is* like entering another dimension for the student. To begin a homework assignment would mean sacrificing this dimension of unregulated freedom, perhaps giving up the only part of life which the student sees as belonging to him. The “**all-or-nothing**” perspective of the ADDer leads him to treat reality as **all work or all play**, with no room for compromise. To the ADD mind, “doing homework” is an open-ended task; once it’s started, it could go on forever! Therefore, the best way to protect one’s free time is not to start this (apparently) endless assignment.

Of course, the irony is that the procrastinator never really gets “free time” at all. The time

spent avoiding homework is tainted by guilt and, eventually, by failure. As parents complain and teachers pressure, the student’s peace of mind is disrupted; the next thing he knows, he is spending most of his “free time” worrying about what isn’t getting done. The procrastinator’s “escape” has become another trap!



**Estimate and time the homework.**

In order to overcome procrastination, the student needs to treat homework assignments as requirements, not as options. He must understand the **purpose** of doing work outside of class. In addition, the student needs to

increase his awareness of how long tasks actually take and to balance work with true free time—time which belongs to him without guilt. The tips below can help the student develop better homework skills.

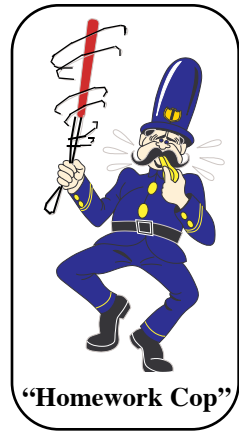
1. For **every** homework assignment, the student should estimate in writing how long it will take to complete the assignment. For example, if there are twenty math problems, he should time how long it takes him to do two problems, then use that estimation to project how long it will take to do the rest of the

LOG SHEET			
Date	Assignments	Estimated Time	Actual Time

problems. Then he should time the work and see how accurate the guess was. (This information can be written on the student's calendar or on a separate "log" sheet of paper.)

2. Since ADDers often work best in "short bursts," homework time should be set up on that basis. Set a timer and tell the student that she has **only** ten minutes to work on vocabulary before she has to stop. (Avoid saying "You must work for **at least** ten minutes.") Then switch to another assignment for ten minutes. If necessary, she can return to her first task for another "short burst." (Many of our clients at Brainworks are surprised by how much they can accomplish in a ten or fifteen minute time span.)

Avoid "homework marathons" in which the student must sit and work until the task is completed; hours later, the bored student will probably be only halfway done, and the parent playing "homework cop" will be frustrated. Homework time should have clearly defined, realistic limits appropriate to the age of the child. A general rule of thumb on homework time used at Brainworks is:

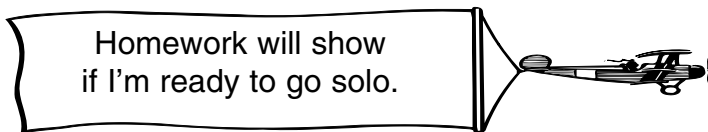


**Primary/elementary grades = 30-45 minutes**  
**Middle/junior high school = 45-60 minutes**  
**High school = 1-2 hours**

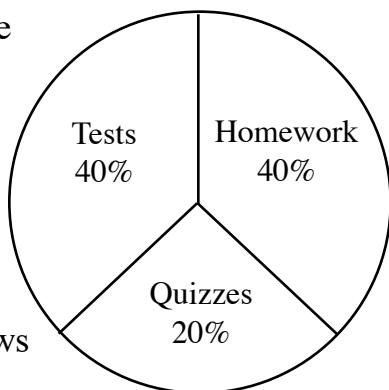
Of course, these times will vary depending on the school, the types of classes being taken, etc. However, if a student consistently spends more time than these guidelines indicate, the situation should be examined for other factors which could be inhibiting the student's progress, such as having a learning disability.

3. More than most other students, ADDers need to comprehend the **purpose** of homework, and teachers and parents should frequently reinforce the function of out-of-class assignments. Remember: In the student's mind, he understood the information when the teacher explained it during class; all this homework is just "busy work" as far as he is concerned. However, the student should be reminded regularly that there is a difference between understanding something in class and practicing it independently, and in that difference lies the distinction between quick comprehension and long-term memory. Therefore, homework provides the student with a chance to apply the knowledge as well as check for mastery of the material involved.

In other words, the student should not only be able to explain **what** the assignment requires, but also **why** it is important to do the work.



- On one level, the answer is that homework grades figure into the grade average. For each class in which the student has homework, parents should ask the student if he knows exactly how much of a percentage homework grades “count” in his final grade. If he doesn’t know, he should ask the teacher and write this percentage on Post-it<sup>®</sup> notes inside his folder or textbook and near the spot where he normally studies for the subject.



**Find out how much homework counts.**

- It’s also a good idea to review the actual effect of not taking time for homework. For example, if homework assignments equal 40% of the overall grade average, the student should be aware she can make straight A’s on every test and **still fail** the class. **DO NOT ASSUME** the student can draw this conclusion on her own; sit down with the student and use a calculator to show her the numerical results of not doing homework.

- Also, students should be aware that homework assignments are often designed to present information in small amounts which will eventually be put together to create a larger

mastery test. Although this pattern of instruction may seem obvious to teachers and parents, it is precisely the type of long-range connection which many ADD students may not make on their own.

- On another level, the answer to the ADD student’s “Why do homework?” question involves what skill or information is being imparted through the homework. In other words, what knowledge will be demonstrated if the student is able to execute the assignment successfully? Have the student explain this purpose aloud to his ADD coach, teacher, or parent.

4. If the student stalls about starting the homework assignment, time how long it takes him to begin. Call his attention to these times by writing them on his calendar or time recording sheet.



**Doing homework is a major step  
toward making good grades.**