

Expository Writing Task #1

Write an essay that explains both sides of the debate for and against homework. Use specific examples from these articles; you must use at least three of the sources and have at least one quote per body paragraph. Remember that you must explain both sides of the debate, and you are not stating with which side you agree. In fact, your position on the topic should never be stated.

Article #1

Should Homework Be Banned? by Etta Kralovec for CNN.com news

With a new school year starting, homework is front and center in many homes. Parents worry if their kids are completing the assigned work while kids wonder why they have to work when really they prefer to play in the sun.

There's good news for some families in Quebec. The College de Saint-Ambroise, an elementary school in Quebec, has banned homework for kids in grade one through six for a year. The Canadian media exploded with blogs, tweets and radio talk shows questioning the decision or applauding the action.

Attempts to ban homework aren't new. In 2012, President Francoise Hollande of France proposed banning homework for all primary and middle school students, which was roundly ridiculed by The Wall Street Journal. In the same year, a school in Germany decided to actually do away with homework for students in grades five to nine.

Oddly, when schools decide to ban homework, it is big news, but we know little about what happens afterward. What we do know is that Finland assigns little homework and its students have some of the highest test scores in the world.

Los Angeles Unified School District -- America's second-largest school system -- took a different tact. In 2011, it set a policy that homework could not count for more than 10% of a student's grade. The decision caused such an outrage that a 15-member panel was formed and subsequently changed the policy so that homework accounted for 20% of a student's grade.

This kind of intense debate about homework has a long history. For example, in the 1920s, some physicians were concerned about the impact of homework on children's health. They argued that children need between six to seven hours a day of fresh air and sunshine. In the 1930s, editor Edward Bok of the Ladies Home Journal also called for an end to the practice. For the rest of the 20th century, different research reports were used to support or dismiss the practice, yet it persists despite the lack of clarity on its educational value.

What is clear is that parents and kids don't live in the world of academic research; they live in the real world where there are piles of homework on the kitchen table. The experience of homework is very different depending on which side of the economic divide you sit. The unequal distribution of educational resources means that some students go home to nannies, well-stocked home libraries, tutors, well-educated parents and high-speed Internet. Others students go home to caring for siblings in crowded apartments and often-absent parents who barely make ends meet. The issue of inequality was a main reason that the French President proposed banning homework.

What about parents' educational hopes for their kids? Homework forces families to follow the state's educational agenda. Most parents are willing to turn their kids over to the state for the seven to nine hours of the school day for educational enrichment. But then they want to build a rich family life with

their kids, and homework can interfere with that. For example, if parents want their children to be actively engaged with grandparents or church activities in the evening, those things would compete with homework time.

Who controls a child's time has tremendous implications for the debate on homework. Should children be in school nine hours only to come home to two hours of homework? Could the intense pressure on children to achieve academically have negative health impacts down the road, in addition to the increased childhood obesity we are seeing?

When schools ratchet up the pressure for higher academic achievement, one of the first things to go is recess even as homework is piled on. While scholars debate the value of homework -- and pundits, politicians and educators call for increased educational choices, greater standardization and accountability for schools -- many parents and students feel overwhelmed. The pressure of longer school days and more homework doesn't help matters.

Parents who want to connect personally in meaningful ways with their children after a long day at their job would do well to remember that they have a right to family time uninterrupted by homework. They would do well to listen to what their kids have to say about the impact of homework on their lives.

Too much homework may not be a good thing, especially for younger children. For families interested in clearing the kitchen table they can find support and advice from the growing Healthy Homework movement. At the end of the day, it's about how one wants to balance work, family, educational goals and happiness.

Article #2

Should We Ban Homework? by Jonathan Butcher for Townhall.com

Earlier this week, *Washington Post* writer Valerie Strauss kicked the homework beehive with a column that included homework among a list of items that supposedly don't help students learn. Last fall, a *Today* show story revealed that some schools have decided students are spending too much time on their studies and have banned homework. Apparently, schools from Rockville, Maryland to Aliso Viejo, California have either stopped assigning homework entirely or adopted policies that restrict the amount of work schools assign students.

University of Arizona South professor Etta Kralovec, who wrote a book on the topic, asks, "Kids are at school 7 or 8 hours a day, that's a full working day and why should they have to take work home?" Perhaps it's not the homework load that we should be worried about, but what is happening in those seven to eight hours kids spend at school. After decades of funding increases and trendy reforms like smaller class sizes and new academic standards, 17-year-olds' average test scores haven't changed in math or reading for more than 30 years.

American students still woefully lag their peers in other countries – including Poland, Estonia, Ireland, and Singapore, whose students all report spending more time on homework than do American students. The latest international comparison finds that students in 18 countries had higher average scores than American students in math, science, and reading.

Moreover, research shows American students are not, in fact, overworked. The Brookings Institution's review of homework assignments finds claims that students are overburdened with homework are "unfounded." Brookings Senior Fellow Tom Loveless does not discount parents' stories—such as those cited by the *Today* show and elsewhere—about the stress that homework causes at home. But data suggest these anecdotes are "atypical." "The question is whether strong empirical evidence confirms the anecdotes about overworked kids and outraged parents," says Loveless.

Considering the test results cited above for 17-year-olds, it should come as no surprise that nearly 40 percent of those in a U.S. Department of Education survey said they had no homework at all or did not do it. Students were asked how much time they spent on homework the previous day, which, when tracked over multiple years, is an indicator of how much schoolwork students are bringing home. For those who think senior year should just be a rest stop before college, think again. In Kralovec's home state of Arizona, research from the state board of regents found that in half of the state's high schools, just 5 percent of graduates went on to earn a bachelor's degree in six years. Overall, only 19 percent of Arizona high school graduates that entered a four-year college finished during that time period.

What research exists on homework and student achievement suggests the extra work, at a minimum, does students no harm. In their international research, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found, "Schools whose students spend more hours on homework or other study set by teachers tend, on average, to perform better, even after accounting for the

socio-economic status and demographic background of students and schools and various other school characteristics.”

The OECD also explains that when comparing national education systems, the number of homework assignments from one nation to the next does not explain the differences in student achievement. This means that homework, by itself, is not the answer to America’s education woes. Too many students are assigned to failing schools, especially in urban areas, and too few families have choices about where or how to educate their children. More take-home worksheets aren’t going to fix that. However, evidence indicates our students are not overworked right now. Parents and schools in the U.S. should be looking for ways to help students succeed, even if it means more work.

Parents and educators should be less concerned with homework levels and more concerned with using homework and other assignments to inspire students for the future.

Article #3

Now, for Tonight’s Assignment by Jonathan Rauch for The Atlantic magazine

There's a way to raise student achievement that's sensible, cheap, and ridiculously straightforward. It'll probably go nowhere!

Suppose I told you that I knew of an education reform guaranteed to raise the achievement levels of American students; that this reform would cost next to nothing and would require no political body's approval; and that it could be implemented overnight by anybody of a mind to undertake it. You would jump at it, right? But Americans haven't jumped at it. They rarely even talk about it.

In 1983 I began my reporting career covering education for a North Carolina newspaper. Then—as now—everyone talked about reforming schools, but I became convinced that one of the key ingredients of successful schooling was being mostly overlooked. Learning depends on what educators call "time on task," which is what the rest of us call attending class and studying.

American schools are remarkably parsimonious with time. The school year is fixed at or below 180 days in all but a handful of states—down from more than 190 in the late nineteenth century, when Saturday-morning sessions were common. The instructional day is only about six hours, of which much is taken up with nonacademic matters. In 1994 a national commission calculated that in four years of high school a typical American student puts in less than half as much time on academic subjects as do students in Japan, France, and Germany.

Extending the school day or the school year can get expensive and complicated, and reducing nonacademic electives and gym brings hollers from parents and kids. But there is one quite cheap and uncomplicated way to increase study time: add more homework.

You may not be shocked to learn that homework raises student achievement, at least in the higher grades. For young children homework appears not to be particularly helpful. Even among older students it is hard to be sure of the extent to which more homework causes higher achievement, because higher achievement also leads to more homework (brighter or harder-working kids will take more-demanding courses). Still, no one doubts that, as all kinds of studies have found, older kids learn more if they study more. Surveying the evidence in 2001, Harris Cooper, an educational psychologist, wrote, "For high school students the effect of homework can be impressive. Indeed, relative to other instructional techniques and the costs involved in doing it, homework can produce a substantial, positive effect on adolescents' performance in school."

You may also not be shocked to learn that, for the most part, American students don't do much homework. Nowadays homework loads among the Ivy-bound superelite can be downright inhumane, but they are the exception. In 1999, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, two thirds of seventeen-year-olds did less than an hour of homework on a typical night (in other words, only about ten minutes per subject). Forty percent did no homework at all—up from 34 percent in 1984. In 1995 the Third International Mathematics and Science Survey asked high school seniors (or their equivalents) in twenty countries about study time. "Of twenty nations," says a recent report by the Brookings Institution's Brown Center on Education Policy, "the U.S. ranked near the bottom, tied for the next-to-last position."

I asked Tom Loveless, the director of the Brown Center, what might happen to achievement if students did more homework. "Let's say we took the forty percent who do no homework and they suddenly did an hour a night," he replied. "I think it would go up a lot. That's a hundred and eighty more hours of schoolwork"—assuming these kids studied only on school nights. For a reality check I called Raymond J. Pasi, the principal of Yorktown High School, in Arlington, Virginia, not far from where I live. He and his guidance counselors estimate that 25 to 30 percent of their students do no homework. "I believe if the average student spent twenty more minutes on homework—and by homework I would even include reviewing the day's notes—you'd see an increase in achievement of that student," Pasi told me.

It seems peculiar that in a country that chatters obsessively about its educational shortcomings, the word "homework" goes all but unspoken. In vain have I waited for governors and Presidents to give speeches about homework, for states to audit and emphasize homework, for programs to identify and assist and prod students who don't study.

Why the silence? Perhaps because no one stands to earn billions of dollars on homework; perhaps because people resent politicians' and schools' intrusions into home life. I suspect that the biggest reason, however, is reluctance to use or even hint at the L-word in reference to American kids.

The country's schools certainly need plenty of fixing. But it is also the case that many American students are lazy (there, I said it!). Just ask them. In 2001, 71 percent of high school and middle school students agreed with the proposition that most students in their school "[did] the bare minimum to get by." A minority described themselves as "trying [their] best to do well in school," and 56 percent said they "could try a little harder."

Americans like to view their children as passive recipients of education—as products of the schools. If the product is defective, fix the factory. You will know that Americans are finally serious about education reform when they begin to talk not just about how the schools are failing our children but also about how our children are failing their schools.

Article #4

Homework Should Be Banned Pros And Cons from the Asian-Pacific Economics Blog

No one LIKES homework, so why do we have it? Essential information about whether or not we should ban homework. For many adults, homework was just a way of life when they were kids. It meant a couple hours of looking at the school books before being able to watch a movie or favorite television show. The benefits of having homework sent with students has been debated for several years and there are some definite advantages and disadvantages to the idea of banning homework. Here is a closer look at this potentially controversial subject.

The Pros of Banning Homework

1. Homework reduces family time.

Most parents have to work full time in order to support their family today. In the American middle class, tangible wage increases haven't been seen in 30 years. Single parents are working two or three jobs to make ends meet. Two-parent homes have both parents working during school hours. Sending homework home takes time away from needed family time.

2. Modern assignments might not match up with a parent's knowledge.

Curriculum has changed over the years and the way information is being taught may be a lot different than a way a parent learned that information decades ago. Banning homework would eliminate the potential inconsistencies that may occur between two different teaching styles.

3. Homework doesn't always create learning circumstances.

Although group study can further learning opportunities, it can also further cheating opportunities. If one or two students in a group of friends are good and the subject, it would be very easy for the rest of those friends to simply copy the data and present it as their own.

The Cons of Banning Homework

1. Homework gives the chance for a student to learn lessons in a more comfortable environment.

Sitting in a classroom all day is not always the best way for a student to learn. Some kids learn better visually than verbally and vice-versa. Homework allows the student to go back over a day's lesson in a way that best suits their learning needs.

2. It lets parents see the quality of a curriculum.

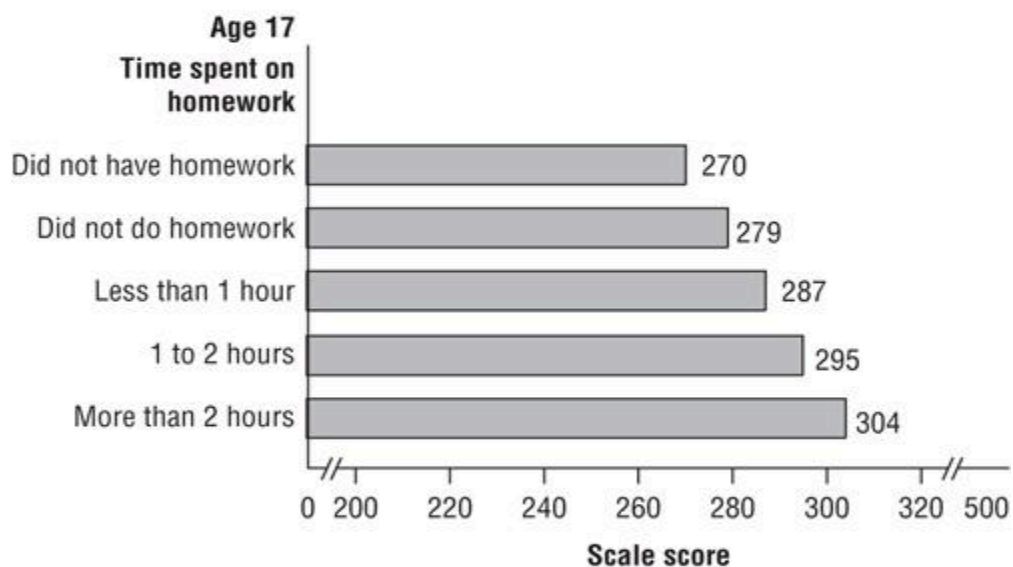
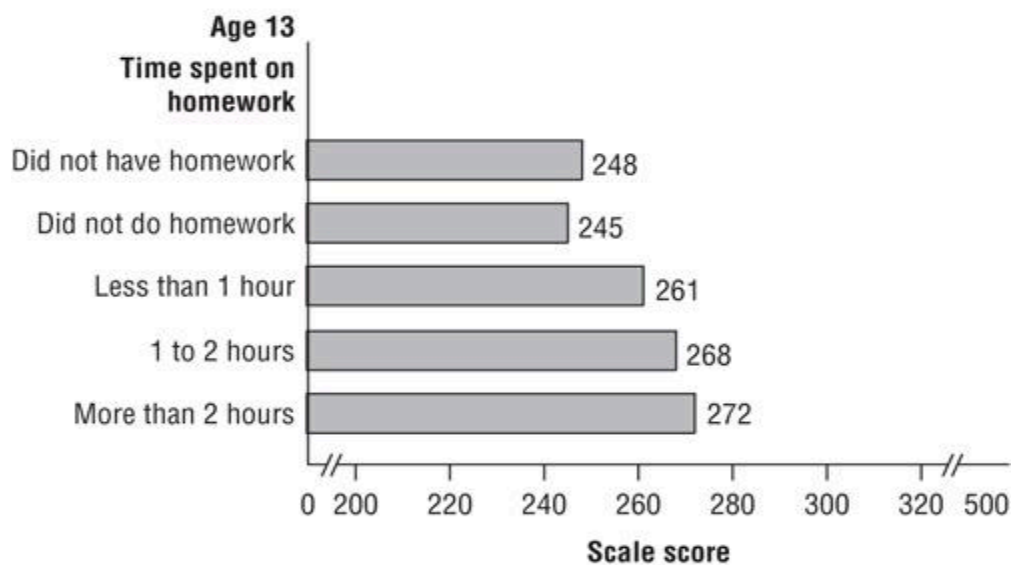
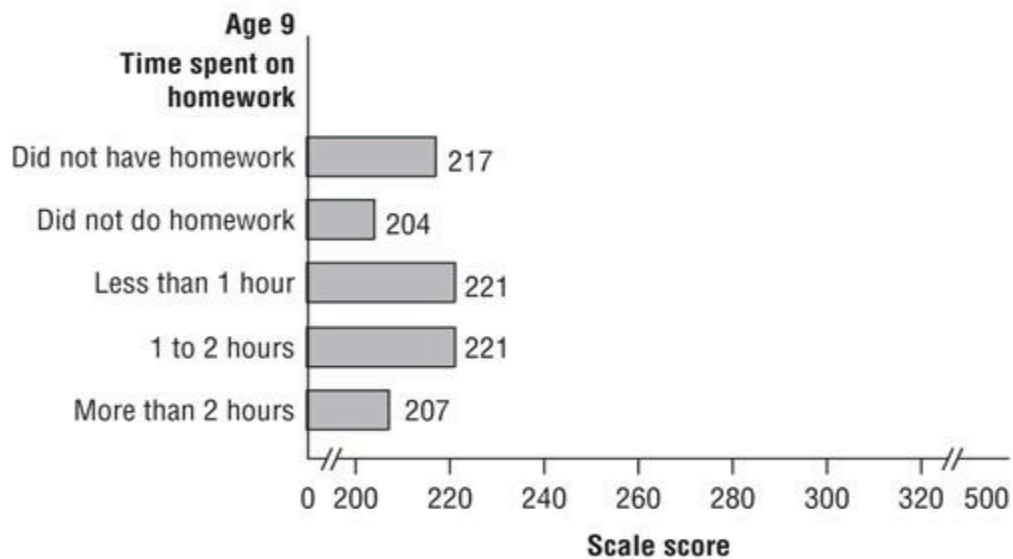
Without homework, the only real way for a parent to see what is going on at school would be to stop and observe the classroom while information is being taught. Even parent-teacher conferences would only give parents a small glimpse into the quality of education their child is receiving.

3. There is the potential to bring families closer together.

Children who need help with their homework will likely ask their parents for assistance. This creates a natural bonding moment where parent and child can work together to solve difficult problems. Without homework available, bonding moments may involve technology and social media interactions more than verbal or personal interactions.

Most people don't like to receive homework. The idea of banning it makes a lot of eyes light up at the prospect of never needing to do it anymore. By weighing the pros and cons of the subject, families and schools can find the best course of action to pursue.

**Average reading scale scores for students ages 9, 13, and 17,
by amount of time spent on homework, 2004**

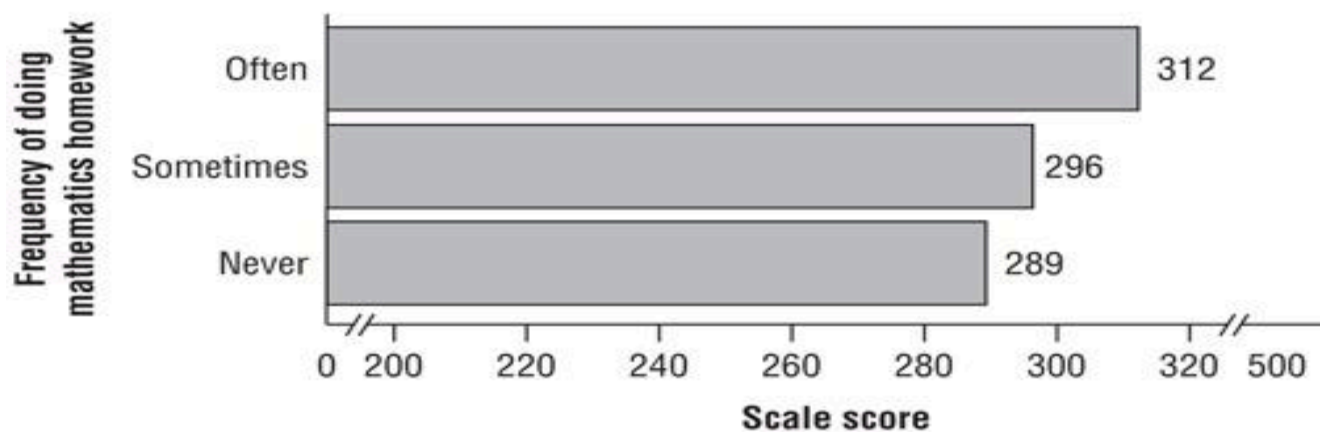


Source Citation

"Average reading scale scores for students ages 9, 13, and 17, by amount of time spent on homework, 2004." *Education: Meeting America's Needs?* Sandra M. Alters. 2008 ed. Detroit: Gale, 2008. Information Plus Reference Series. *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*. Web. 10 Jan. 2016.

Average mathematics scale scores for students age 17, by frequency of doing mathematics homework, 2004

Age 17



SOURCE: M. Perie, R. Moran, and A.D. Lutkus, "Figure 4-15. Average Mathematics Scale Scores for Students Age 17, by Frequency of Doing Mathematics Homework: 2004," in *NAEP 2004 Trends in Academic Progress: Three Decades of Student Performance in Reading and Mathematics*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, July 2005, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2005/2005464.pdf> (accessed August 15, 2007)

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