Managing Homework Time

Most teachers divide homework into two distinct categories:
1. Completion of Set Tasks such as exercises, short assignments and extended assignments
2. Study - in order to learn new content and skills, improve understandings or studying for a test.

Some teachers refer to the completion of set tasks as homework.

Planning Your Homework Time in Senior School

Do you have trouble settling to your work? Do you rush your work to meet deadlines? Are your homework sessions as effective as you would like? A homework timetable will:

- Give you a target to aim for and help you stay on track; and thus establishes a routine for study.
- Spread your study throughout the week.
- Save time in decision making and lets you get down to things quickly.
- Encourages you to keep up with your work and not leave things until the last minute.
- Helps to eliminate stress

In year 11 and 12 if you are working towards an ATAR you should be doing a minimum of 15 - 18 hours of completion work and study per week depending on how many examinable subjects you have. You will probably only have about 12-15 hours a week of task completion and the remaining time is for study. (Usually 3-6 hours per week). Students who have no examinable subjects can usually get by with an hour a night.

When you first sit down to study most students develop the following routine: sort out their files, review their list of set tasks to complete and begin daily reviews of the work they have done in class. Then they will turn to their homework timetable to determine if they are about to complete tasks or work on studying. This may need to change on a regular basis determined by test schedules and assignment due dates. Some nights this time will be all taken up with assignment work but other nights there may be no set tasks to complete and you may end up using the whole time for study. If your sport, social and work commitments vary from week to week you may need to do a new homework timetable each week to accommodate those changes. Start each week by filling in the timetable and planning for the coming week.

Completing a homework timetable

On a blank timetable – or type one in a word-processor or make use of MSOnenote. Work out a homework timetable that you will be able to stick to.

- First mark on your permanent commitments like sport and part time jobs, then timetable in your study time and times for assignment work in each subject.
- Ideally come home and have a break and then do one session before dinner and another after. You should not be up until late at night. If you struggle to concentrate for long periods of time break the times up into smaller time slots. Make sure you have a brief break each hour to stretch and have a drink of water. Breaks actually improve your efficiency.
- Keep in mind your peak times. You don't want to be doing difficult homework when you are too tired to learn effectively. Do the most difficult first while you are fresh and save the easy or most active work for last.
- One the of the most challenging processes is to make sure you timetable at least an hour each week that is revision of old work not new work. (Rotate through maths topics, go over old vocabulary, practise chemistry problems etc. Remember our exam preparation should start NOW not a couple of weeks before the exams). **If timetabled then you are more likely to do this.**
• Consider using the mornings. If you have work until late each Thursday night your teachers are not going to be happy for this to be a constant excuse for not doing homework. If you are too tired after work on Thursday you could always get up half an hour earlier on Friday morning to complete your daily homework.
• Allocate time equitably between your courses (don't neglect the ones you don't like - remember it takes four courses to make up an ATAR).
• Timetable a relaxing task before bed such as reading, gaming or watching TV so that you wind down and sleep well. Social interaction may be too stimulating late at night.
• If you are struggling to fit in enough homework time you may need to reconsider your outside commitments such as sport, casual employment etc and make some adjustments.
• Talk to your parents about your homework timetable and ask them to help you stick to it by minimising distractions during this time - tape shows to watch later. Leave your phone on the kitchen bench so you are not tempted to text or use social media. Consider taking Facebook or games that distract you off the computer you do you school work.
• Remember if you work hard in the quiet weeks when nothing is due you will cope with the busy weeks when it is all happening at once!
• Sticking to a homework timetable is the best way to ensure you achieve good results.

What to do in Homework time?

Daily Reviews
The first 10 - 15 minutes of homework time should be spent doing a daily review of that day's classes.

Questions that you may ask yourself while doing a daily review.
1. Do I need to organise my files and notes?
2. What was this lesson about? This may involve passive or active reading over the content and seeing what it is.
3. Where does it fit into what we have been doing? Place the material in some context. You don’t normally get a lesson in isolation; it is usually part of some greater topic. Active note-taking helps here eg Mind Maps and Flow charts.
4. Are there any bits that need special attention? It may be that you understood the whole lot perfectly. If not you may need to look back over it again and if you still don’t understand it you may need to make a note to ask your teacher to go through it again with you (Or a parent, Your tutor (Joondalup residents have access to this this through the library system or older sibling if they are able to help).
5. Is there any work that should arise from this material? Check your notes for any work that must be done - such as preparation for future classes, experiments, writing up reports, useful references for assignments and so on. To do this review each day only takes a few minutes per subject. It is also worth going over a whole week’s work in a similar way. It means that each piece of work gets at least three looks, once when you originally saw it, again at the daily review and once more after a week has elapsed. This means that when you come to study for a topic test your understanding of the work should already be pretty good.

Study! (Knowledge acquisition & test preparation)
Students often make the mistake of just flicking through their notes and text books and calling that study. The problem with this is that at the end of the day when you are tired this is usually ineffective study and the amount you absorb is minimal. Class exercises and assignments are not study. This needs to be done separately.
What to Do in Study Time!

1. Choose a small amount of work that can be learnt in the time you have available, i.e. the time you allocated to study in your homework work schedule. You can also add to this time e.g. you may have 20 minutes remaining of your homework time left after completing set tasks – use this. You need to have a goal for the time. For example:
   - Do as many maths problems as possible in the 20 minutes (remember as revision you can always redo problems that you have already done).
   - Learn 15 new Japanese words or terms for woodwork/engineering – see below, study cards.
   - 20 Human Biology Definitions – see below, Cornell notes.
   - Be able to draw a diagram of a cell and explain the functions of the parts - diagram.
   - Be able to describe the main characters in an English novel – list ideas.
   - Be able to explain the main causes of the First World War - see below, mindmap.

2. You then need to do something active to help you achieve that goal.
   - **SUMMARISE TOPICS** – regularly summarise identifiable sections or chunks of your courses. The summary MUST be shorter than the original notes etc. Use:
     - Palm Cards – these enable you to keep all notes together, group on topics (this is mind-mapping), allow others to test you and are easily carried with you to another location for testing.
     - Cornell Notes - Layered Pages set up your pages with a vertical line dividing the page roughly 1/4 (left) [Topic Heading or Question] and 3/4 (right) [Detail]. They enable you to keep all notes together, group on topics (this is mind-mapping), allow others to test you (can cover pages with other pages for testing) and are easily carried with you to another location for testing.
   - Mind-mapping (or concept mapping) 1. Write down a central idea and think up new and related ideas which radiate out from the centre. By focussing on key ideas written down in your own words, and then looking for branches out and connections between the ideas, you are mapping knowledge in a manner which will help you understand and remember new information. 2. Look for relationships Use lines, colours, arrows, branches or some other way of showing connections between the ideas generated on your mind map. 3. Draw quickly on unlined paper without pausing, judging or editing There will be plenty of time for modifying the information later. 4. Leave lots of space Some of the most useful mind maps are those which are added to over a period of time. After the initial drawing of the mind map you may wish to highlight things, add information or add questions for the duration of a subject right up until exam time. For this reason it is a good idea to leave lots of space. Search Google for mindmaps.

[![Mind map for Science](https://example.com/mindmap.png)](https://example.com/mindmap.png)

This mind map was used to plan an essay in Science.
• **PRACTISE EXAMPLES**—do a few extra problems, especially the type that you got wrong in the last test. Practise exam type questions in approximately the same amount of time as you would have in the exam. Then self-correct in another colour. The next time you come back to this aspect, recall the coloured additions/corrections first.

• **FILL IN THE GAPS FROM ASSESSED WORK**—when you get assignments back, identify from the comments, teacher’s assistance what elements of the task did not gain full marks. Add these in, colour code and recall later.

• **ACTIVELY READ**—mostly your reading should always include some action like underlining, taking notes (see techniques listed above), highlighting [always less than the original] or dot-pointing.

• **TWICE WEEKLY/ WEEKLY REVIEWS**—what was this work about? Where does it fit in/connect to the course? Are there bits that need my attention? Do I understand it?

• **REVISE AND REDUCE SUMMARIES** the closer you get to the exam. Easier to do with Cornell notes.

3. Make sure you have a note pad next to your desk or use MSOneNote and make notes of anything you need to clarify with your teachers. **Don't leave all of your study until the night before the test.** This leaves you no time to get help with problems if you find you are having difficulties while revising.

4. **At the end of the time,** test yourself and ask yourself if you have achieved your study goal. If the answer is YES then your study techniques are working for you and you may decide to use that technique again next time. If the answer is NO then you need to try a different study technique next time you have similar work to learn. It is important to remember that study is individual and what works for one person does not necessarily work for another. Sometimes it takes a bit of trial and error to work out what works best for you.

In summary, study time needs to be a balance between active note-taking and testing!

The most common reason that people don’t do well in tests or exams is **lack of RECALL and PRACTICE.** The most common problem here is that students spend most of their “study” time getting the information into their memory and not enough time practising getting it out again.

**In a test you have to be able to do three things:**

- Remember the content of the topic.
- Understand the topic.
- Apply the skills and techniques of the topic to different types of questions.

**There are three aspects to achieving this:**

1. Make study notes or summaries.
   - helps you discover if you really understand the topic
   - think about the information and put it into your own words in point form.
   - helps you start to move the information into long-term memory.
   - also makes it easier to learn from a structured, condensed, organised set of notes.

2. Learning the information means
   - ensuring you understand and ask questions if you don’t
   - studying the information in an active way
   - testing yourself to see whether you can remember it.

3. Practising the skills of the topic.
   - practise doing many questions to assist
   - helps you find out if you really understand it.
Use All Your Intelligence to Study

Howard Gardner, an American educator, has identified at least seven forms of intelligence. Although we use all of these, we develop preferences for some more than others. By using ways to study that suit our preferred intelligence, we can learn more effectively. Try different study techniques to find what suits you best.

Body Intelligence
- Use physical actions • Walk or move while learning
- Write it out or write with your fingers • Make models
- Act it out • Be active in your breaks

Visual Intelligence
- Draw diagrams, pictures and cartoons • Make mind maps • Visualise - use mental pics • Colour code your notes • Highlight key points • Add graphics and symbols

Auditory Intelligence
- Put notes on tape and listen to them • Make up and use songs and rhymes • Say information aloud or to a rhythm • Listen carefully and discuss ideas • Repeat information while learning

Self Intelligence
- Study alone, test yourself • Reflect - notice when learning is or is not happening • Set challenging goals for yourself

Another Approach – one or the other
Are you an Active or Reflective Learner?
- Active learners tend to retain and understand information best by doing something active with it--discussing or applying it or explaining it to others. Reflective learners prefer to think about it quietly first. "Let's try it out and see how it works" is an active learner's phrase; "Let's think it through first".
- Active learners tend to like group work more than reflective learners, who prefer working alone.

Everybody is active sometimes and reflective sometimes. Your preference for one category or the other may be strong, moderate, or mild. A balance of the two is desirable. If you always act before reflecting you can jump into things prematurely and get into trouble, while if you spend too much time reflecting you may never get anything done.

Are you a Sensing or Intuitive Learner?
- Sensing learners tend to like learning facts, intuitive learners often prefer discovering possibilities/relationships.
- Sensors often like solving problems by well-established methods and dislike complications and surprises; intuitive learners like innovation and dislike repetition.
- Sensors tend to be patient with details and good at memorizing facts and doing hands-on (laboratory) work; intuitive learners may be better at grasping new concepts and are often more comfortable than sensors with abstractions.
- Sensors don't like courses that have no apparent connection to the real world; intuitive learners don't like "plug-and-chug" courses that involve a lot of memorization and routine calculations.

Are you a Visual or Verbal Learner?
Visual learners remember best what they see—pictures, diagrams, flow charts, time lines, films, and demonstrations. Verbal learners get more out of words—written and spoken explanations. Everyone learns more when information is presented both visually and verbally.

Are you a Sequential or Global Learner?
- Sequential learners tend to gain understanding in linear steps, with each step following logically from the previous one. Global learners tend to learn in large jumps, absorbing material almost randomly without seeing connections, and then suddenly "getting it."
- Sequential learners tend to follow logical stepwise paths in finding solutions; global learners may be able to solve complex problems quickly or put things together in novel ways once they have grasped the big picture, but they may have difficulty explaining how they did it.

From LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGIES Richard M. Felder & Barbara A. Soloman: North Carolina State University
Exam Techniques

The most common reason that people don’t do well in tests or exams is lack of **RECALL and PRACTICE**. The most common problem here is that students spend most of their “study” time getting the information into their memory and not enough time practising getting it out again.

**Well Before the Exams:**
- Long term preparation is best.
- Maintain routines before the exam.
- Flick through your colourful condensed, well organised notes and remain active by making key notes, verbally explaining and creating mind-maps etc.
- Practise techniques, questions or essay writing.
- Be honest with yourself. For each of your courses, make a table of course content (techniques in prac exams). Next to each rate your understanding or skill level from strong to weak. Allocate time accordingly – more time on weaker areas.
- Don’t just rely on the knowledge and skills you have learnt through completing class work and assignments. Go back to the syllabus which describes what can be examined. The Curriculum Council also provide previous years Examiner’s Reports for each course.

**Immediately Before Exams:**
- Ensure you have all necessary equipment the day before – pens, highlighters, rulers, pencils, check calculator batteries, cheat sheets if permitted, student enrolment form with candidate number (yr12s).
- Consider walking the morning of the exam.
- Plan your transport arrangements – plan to arrive 20 minutes prior to the start time.

**During the Exam:**
- Being afraid of performing badly will cause anxiety and tension which will prevent you from thinking clearly.
- Be relaxed for best performance.
- Be comfortable at the desk – sit well, do some tense and release exercises.

**The Paper Test:**
- Scan the entire exam paper during reading time – read all of the instructions, decide on the order in which you will complete the sections, questions etc.
- Divide up the time sensibly and equitable for the marks allocation.
- Allow time for quick mind-mapping and planning.
- Write in short-notes, key formula etc.
- Psychologists indicate that it is better to make a ‘work in progress’ plan for essay answers before going onto multiple choice/short answer questions as the sub-conscious can keep working while you are doing other Qs.
- Start by doing the multiple choice/short answers. Skip any that do not come immediately to mind. Don’t throw time at what you don’t know. Come back at a later stage. **Remember** – don’t leave multiple choice questions unanswered.
- Finally, write any essays using the mind maps/plans made earlier once you have sequenced the order in which you should develop the points in your essay.
- Keep to your time plan.
- If you are feeling fatigued, distracted – drink water, tense and relax.