



How To: Help Students to Complete Missing Work: The Late-Work Teacher-Student Conference

When students fall behind in classwork and homework, they can quickly enter a downward spiral. They must stay caught up in their current assignments --but must also submit overdue assignments. As the work piles up, some students become overwhelmed and simply give up.

The reasons that students fall behind in assignments are many. Students who are just developing homework skills, for example, often need more time than peers to complete independent assignments, can find it challenging to focus their attention when working on their own, and may not have efficient study skills (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). To be sure, student procrastination and avoidance in work assignments is a widespread problem. And many students who fall behind in their work also develop a maladaptive, self-reinforcing pattern of escape-maintained behavior: as these students owe ever-increasing amounts of late work, they respond to the anxiety generated by that overhang of overdue assignments by actively avoiding that work. And thus the problem only grows worse (Hawkins & Axelrod, 2008).

When a student begins to slip in the completion and submission of assignments, the teacher can take steps proactively to interrupt this work-avoidant pattern of behavior by meeting with the student to create a plan to catch up with late work. (It is also recommended that the parent attend such a conference, although parent participation is not required.) In this 'late-work' conference, the teacher and student inventory what work is missing, negotiate a plan to complete that overdue work, and perhaps agree on a reasonable penalty for any late work turned in. Teacher, student (and parent, if attending) then sign off on the work plan. The teacher also ensures that the atmosphere at the meeting is supportive, rather than blaming, toward the student. And of course, any work plan hammered out at this meeting should seem attainable to the student.

Below in greater detail are the steps that the teacher and student would follow at a meeting to renegotiate missing work. (NOTE: Teachers can use the *Student Late-Work Planning Form: Middle & High School* that appears later in this document to organize and document these late-work conferences.):

1. *Inventory All Missing Work.* The teacher reviews with the student all late or missing work. The student is given the opportunity to explain why the work has not yet been submitted.
2. *Negotiate a Plan to Complete Missing Work.* The teacher and student create a log with entries for all of the missing assignments. Each entry includes a description of the missing assignment and a due date by which the student pledges to submit that work. This log becomes the student's work plan. It is important that the submission dates for late assignments be realistic--particularly for students who owe a considerable amount of late work and are also trying to keep caught up with current assignments. A teacher and student may agree, for example, that the student will have two weeks to complete and submit four late writing assignments. NOTE: Review the *Student Late-Work Planning Form: Middle & High School* that appears later in this handout as a tool to organize and document the student's work plan.
3. *[Optional] Impose a Penalty for Missing Work.* The teacher may decide to impose a penalty for the work being submitted late. Examples of possible penalties are a reduction of points (e.g., loss of 10 points per assignment) or the requirement that the student do additional work on the assignment than was required of his or her peers who turned it in on time. If imposed, such penalties would be spelled out at this teacher-student conference. If penalties are given, they should be balanced and fair, permitting the teacher to impose appropriate



consequences while allowing the student to still see a path to completing the missing work and passing the course.

4. *Periodically Check on the Status of the Missing-Work Plan.* If the schedule agreed upon by teacher and student to complete and submit all late work exceeds two weeks, the teacher (or other designated school contact, such as a counselor) should meet with the student weekly while the plan is in effect. At these meetings, the teacher checks in with the student to verify that he or she is attaining the plan milestones on time and still expects to meet the submission deadlines agreed upon. If obstacles to emerge, the teacher and student engage in problem-solving to resolve them.

References

Cooper, H., & Valentine, J. C. (2001). Using research to answer practical questions about homework. *Educational Psychologist, 36*(3), 143-153.

Hawkins, R. O., & Alexrod, M. I. (2008). Increasing the on-task homework behavior of youth with behavior disorders using functional behavioral assessment. *Behavior Modification, 32*, 840-859.



Student Late-Work Planning Form: Middle & High School

Teacher: _____ Course: _____

Student: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Directions: At a teacher-student conference, use this form to create a plan for the student to complete and submit missing or late work.

Assignment	Target Date for Completion	NOTES

What penalty--if any--will be imposed for these late assignments? _____

Student Signature

Teacher Signature

Parent Signature