

# Improving the quality of homework



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## What's the idea?

Homework works best when it is a targeted, well-designed strategy to support learning and understanding. Digital technology offers the opportunity to re-design homework tasks to take advantage of multimedia recording and editing tools.

## What does it mean?

New digital tools and resources can be very enticing and many certainly have the 'wow factor'. We need to think carefully about what homework we set, however, so that it is effective in supporting learning. The quality of homework depends on the quality of the teaching and your ability to set clear, purposeful tasks – no amount of technology can make up for this.

## What are the implications for teachers?

Online research and word-processing are often what first comes to mind when we think of technology-aided homework, but you can do more.

One opportunity for all teachers in all phases is to take advantage of the testing effect by directing students to online quizzes and tests as homework. This not only supports your students with frequent retrieval practice exercises, but it can also reduce your marking workload. Results are compiled automatically and can be retrieved easily so you get a concise picture of what

has been learnt well, and what hasn't, to inform your future planning.

You can also set more in-depth tasks. For example, modern foreign languages teachers can take advantage of digital tools to set speaking tasks for homework; history teachers can ask students to record and edit a video, with the students' own voice-overs, to assess their knowledge about a historical period; and geography projects can be completed and presented using online presentation tools.

The ability to access, record and edit sound and video allows students to use and produce digital artefacts that develop and document their learning.

### TOP TIPS

- Homework is most effective when used as a short, focused intervention, with a specific target and connected with a particular element of learning.
- No amount of technology will make mediocre teaching good or poorly designed homework effective.

## Want to know more?

- Brown P, Roediger H and McDaniel M (2014) *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and Learning Toolkit (n.d.) Available at: <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/> (accessed 13 Jun. 2017).
- Rosenshine B (2012) Principles of instruction: Research-based strategies that all teachers should know. *American Educator* 36(1): 12–19.