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Homework Do's and Don'ts - Part II

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3. The PNP Method

Suppose your daughter has just completed her midweek spelling pretest. There are ten words on the list and she spelled nine correctly and misspelled one. When she brings you her paper, your job, naturally is to first point out to her the word she spelled wrong. Right?

Wrong! PNP stands for "Positive-Negative-Positive." Whenever any kid brings any piece of schoolwork to you, the first thing out of your mouth must be something good. Then, after saying something nice about the child's effort, you may throw in something negative, if it's absolutely necessary. Finally, you conclude your insightful remarks with something positive again.

Using the spelling pretest as an example, you would first say something like, "Gee, you spelled 'consideration' correctly. That's a pretty hard word. And you also got 'appearance' right. In fact, there's only one word on here that I can see you didn't get. Not bad."

You might stop here and try to kill her with suspense. See if she's dying to find out what the wrong word is. If she's not, you can tell her. Then end the conversation with another positive comment.

Remember the rule: every time she brings you some work to check, the first thing you say must be positive, even if it's only the fact that she brought the work to you. Kids will never want to bring you anything if your first response is consistently to shoot from the hip with criticism.

4. The Rough Checkout

The Rough Checkout idea is based on the fact that 8 pm is no time for scholastic perfection. You have worked all day, and your child has also put in just about the equivalent of a day on a full-time job—before she started her homework.

Unless there is some major indication to the contrary, if her work is anywhere near 80 percent neat, correct and thorough, consider calling it a day. Let your youngster and teacher worry about the assignment tomorrow. This advice is doubly true for ADD or LD children who are already having a tough enough time with school. If, on the other hand, the child is generally a very good student (not potentially, but actually), you might consider raising the required percentage to 90 or more. If the youngster's work is about 80 percent [Continued on page 2](#)



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neat, correct and complete, use the PNP procedure. You don't have to tell the child that it's perfect, just that it's good enough. Some perfectionists may squirm at this suggestion, but they should try to stay in touch with the emotional realities of childhood.

5. Charting

Charting lends itself very well to homework. Here's an easy system that can be used.

Since it's usually the older kids who have trouble with homework, a five-point scale can be used for them instead of stickers. Five is a high mark and one is a low mark. A child can earn one point for each of the following things:

- Neat - 1 point
- Correct - 1 point
- Thorough - 1 point
- No complaining - 1 point
- Starting on his/her own - 1 point



The kids can get each of the first three points by doing better than whatever approximate percentage of neatness, correctness and completeness you have required. The last point is the crucial one: if you can get a child to start on his own, the battle is half won. You can set up friendly incentive games with this last point. For example, three days in a row of starting on your own at the proper time earn a bonus point. Or starting more than fifteen minutes early and finishing in a reasonable amount of time earn a bonus point. Put on your thinking cap and see what other schemes you can come up with.

Remember that for many kids with academic handicaps, you may very well have to use artificial reinforcers to help motivate the child over the homework hurdle.

Also, don't forget that kitchen timer. Sometimes it can be used to help break up the work into smaller, manageable pieces. If the child complains that the ticking bothers him (most don't), use some kind of sand hourglass or a quiet electric timer.

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QUICK TIP: Charting

Charting is a very friendly motivational technique. With charting you use something like a calendar to keep track of how well a child is doing with different behaviors. The days of the week usually go across the top of the chart, and down the side is a list of the tasks the child is working on, such as homework and household chores. If the child completes the task to your satisfaction, you indicate this on the chart with stickers for the little kids and grades or points for the older children. With charting, positive reinforcement comes, we hope, from three things: the chart itself, parental praise and the inherent satisfaction of doing a good job. In some cases, however, artificial rewards may be necessary.

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