

Issue: **Students Who Come Unprepared to Class**

Strategies to Consider:

Before considering strategies to help students, we need to understand reasons a child may come to class unprepared. As a teacher, students who come unprepared likely upset you from the start. Coming unprepared doesn't just mean coming without homework. It can mean not bringing necessary books, notebooks, writing utensils or may even mean coming inexcusably late.

When thinking about students who come unprepared, consider a few reasons they may be unprepared:

- You likely want all students to show up on time, with all required materials or homework, and ready to learn. Is this expectation made clear to your students? Is there a consequence for coming unprepared?
- Perhaps a child is habitually tardy to school, causing them to be late to your class. Is this student's fault? How does the student get to school in the morning? Many times, students may come late or unprepared because of a reason beyond their control.
- Perhaps the student is not consistently turning in homework. This may be a sign that the student does not understand the homework, and may not have assistance at home to complete homework that he doesn't understand.

Regardless of the reason, you are probably frustrated. As a teacher, you need to give students the tools they need to help them succeed in the classroom.

First, consider how you convey your expectations to students. If students are not told of your expectation for them to come prepared, they cannot be expected to comply. Consider [posting your expectations](#) for coming to class prepared on a large poster in front of the class. Explain this to students at the beginning of the school year, including consequences for coming unprepared. If you tell students about a consequence, you must consistently follow through on giving this consequence when students come unprepared. If not, the behavior will not change.

Give students an incentive for coming to class prepared. This can be done class-wide, or as an intervention for those students who are struggling to come prepared. Incentives do not have to be something you buy. One easy example to implement is a class-wide intervention. Here is an example: *If all students can come to class on time and prepared for two days in a row, all students receive 5-10 minutes of free time at the end of the class period.* As students begin to comply consistently, you can increase the amount of days between earning the incentive.

For students who are not consistently bringing their homework, consider their struggles. Students need to understand that there is a reason for doing homework. If a child does not understand this, they are less likely to complete and return their homework. Explain to children the reasons behind the homework. If a child is having trouble completing the homework, break the homework down into simpler steps. *If you never look at homework, do not expect students to return it.* Before class is over, complete one or two of the problems or questions with the student to check for understanding. Allow different options for completing homework. Instead of completing worksheets, allow students to show their understanding through projects, pictures, other formats. Research has shown that when students have choices, they're more likely to complete homework. Even a choice, such as doing the odd or even problems, can help. When students are completing homework in a format they are interested in, they will be more likely to complete and return their homework.

According to research¹, homework can be beneficial for successful academic success, but it must be used appropriately. Homework should have a meaning, whether it is to apply a new (or still developing) skill or strategy or to give students a better understanding of a concept learned. If you want homework to be completed, you need to make it likely that students will do so. You can do this by making sure the homework isn't too easy or hard to cause students to become disinterested, but is difficult enough to challenge their skills. *This might mean that homework will be different for different students.* Keep in mind that if children are relying on their parents as "teachers" for their homework, the homework is likely inappropriate. Make sure that you give an appropriate amount (and not too much) of homework for the level and age of the students. Children are often very busy with other activities, and we want to make sure students *will* complete the homework assigned.

¹ Marzano, R. J. & Pickering, D. J. (2007) Special topic / The case for and against homework. *Educational Leadership*, 64(6), 74-79

Also consider:

[Posting classroom expectations](#)

[Non-compliance](#)

[Self-monitoring](#)

[The dog ate my homework: How to deal With unprepared students](#)

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