



eARTICLE

HOME WORK NOT HOMEWORK

Both a century of Montessori experience and the last thirty years of educational research agree that people learn best when they are learning something that personally interests them and that having some sense of control over one's learning is a prerequisite of personal interest. This means that coercing someone to "learn" something in which they have no personal interest is often worse than never introducing them to it at all. The negative emotion that accompanies being coerced to "learn" is likely to remain permanently attached to the subject of the "learning" and may obstruct all future attempts to learn that subject. Moreover, repeated experiences of this sort typically lead to passivity in the learner and frequently to the development of a negative self-image with regard to one's ability and fitness to learn a broad range of subjects and skills. These are among the main reasons why Montessorians do not give assignments and, in particular, why we do not assign traditional homework.

On the other hand, the freedom to choose one's work and to go as deeply as possible into a few subjects means that the learner must spend more time learning in order to get a well-rounded education. The school day is short, and there is simply not time for most children to accomplish enough during the school day. For this reason, primary teachers depend on their parent partners to provide at home a rich learning environment where the child can build on the work they began at school. Without this, the child's development will seem delayed, and the education will seem spotty or shallow.

In the absence of traditional homework assignments, it may seem that the parents of Montessori students are not as directly involved in their children's homework as parents of traditionally educated children. On the contrary, Montessori children have more work to do at home than anyone, and their parents must be highly involved and highly resourceful – but not in a traditional sense of helping children complete worksheets and assigned projects. It's hard work, but good work – just like guiding a primary class.

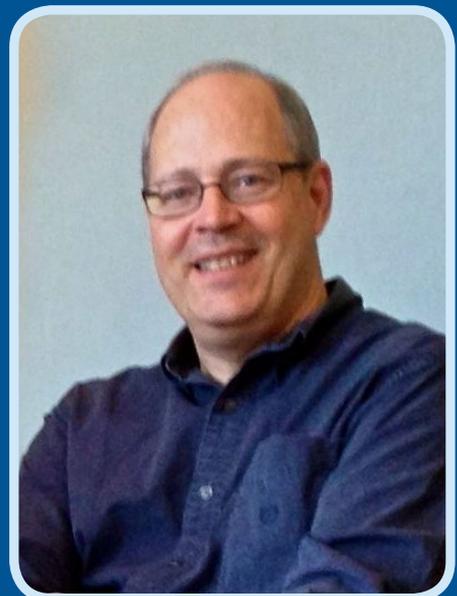
Home work is **not optional** for Montessori students.

The school day is **too short** for learning to end there.

The absence of screens and social phone calling on school nights creates the **time** for home work.

Assignments are not effective and may be harmful.

The home work list, to which the child and parent may propose additions, offers the important element of **choice**.



John R. Snyder is a retired Montessori educator with an AMI Elementary (6-12) diploma from the Washington Montessori Institute as well as degrees in music theory, computer science, and philosophy. John's former roles included Chair, AMI Elementary Alumni Association and Assistant to the Executive Director, Austin Montessori School, Texas. He is a prolific writer of articles on Montessori, education and the child, and is a Haiku poet.

Montessori Australia Foundation

3 Myoora Road
Terrey Hills NSW 2084 Australia
Phone: 61 2 9986 2282
Fax: 61 2 9986 2281
info@montessori.org.au montessori.org.au

Supporting the
Montessori Movement in Australia

What Home Work?

If home work is not assigned reading, worksheets, and projects with deadlines, what is it? What we are looking for are many opportunities for the children to both consolidate and expand the knowledge they are working with in the classroom. Inevitably, these real world experiences will also spark new questions and other interests which the child will bring back to the classroom, enriching both their own classroom work and that of the other children. We want to foster this sort of “virtuous feedback loop” between school and home to the benefit of both and to the great benefit of the child.

For learning to be assimilated and integrated, it must be repeated in another setting. It must go from school to home and be recalled, revisited, repeated. Recalling, revisiting, and repeating in the same setting is not as effective.

We are looking not for worksheets and assignments but for *learning as a way of life*, both at home and at school. And, of the two, the home will ultimately have a far greater influence on the child’s future way of life than will the school.

In the 9-12 primary classes, home work should consist mostly of the child’s active involvement with the practical, intellectual and artistic life of the family and of the child’s own projects in areas they are drawn to pursue.

Home work consists both of the child’s **active involvement in the life of the family** and in **personal projects** they undertake on their own.

The home work idea list, to which the child and parent may propose additions, offers the important element of **choice**.

Montessori home work seeks to inculcate **learning as a way of life**.

Guidelines for Home Work

In order to better support learning as a way of life, we are providing the following guidelines for the child’s work at home.

1. As a guide, a child should spend at least **three hours per day** on Montessori “home work”. Three hours a day of home work allows the child to spend time each day on a **wide variety of activities**: physical exercise, service, intellectual activity, household responsibilities, the arts, etc.
2. At least 30 minutes of that time should be spent **reading**.



Montessori Home Work Ideas for Children

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO TO GET SMARTER & STRONGER

- Whenever you feel like turning on the TV or playing computer games, first come get this list of ideas and pick something from it to do **before you spend any time in front of a screen**. Then, if you still want to sit in front of a screen, set a timer for 30 minutes and make yourself turn off the electronics when the timer goes off. Be sure to limit yourself to no more than one hour of combined screen time per day.
- If you really want to get smarter and stronger, turn off the TV and computer for a month. Yes, you can do it. You won't die. I promise. After the initial shock, most people find they even like it.
- If you do use the computer, use it as a tool for making yourself smarter and stronger: write with it, do math with it, do art with it, or explore educational based websites with your parents. So far nobody has ever gotten smarter and stronger playing computer or video games, and you're probably not going to be the first.

CREATIVE ARTS/CONSTRUCTION

- Knit, crochet, spin, weave, sew, quilt, hook rugs, embroider, tie-dye, beadwork, paint, sculpt.
- Make pottery at a pottery studio or workshop.
- Learn new art projects by reading in books or taking an art class. Prepare an art project to teach to the class.
- Take weaving or sewing classes.
- Work with a knowledgeable adult to build a fence, a doghouse, a bike ramp, a bookcase, a bench, etc.
- Find an adult who has a lot of tools and likes to build or repair things. Learn the names of all the tools the adult has. Learn to write the names as well as say them. Learn what each tool is used for.
- Learn photography – how to take a really good picture.
- Learn how to operate a video camera. Make your own movies. Document a week in the life of your family using a cam-corder or camera. Write a paragraph about each family member and what they will be doing for the summer. Mail the package to your grandparents or some other relative or friend who would like to receive the update.
- Practice your musical instrument or learn new songs to sing. If possible, take private music lessons on your musical instrument.

- Learn a new song to teach the class. Bring a copy of the words when you teach it to us.
- Learn to dance.
- Visit an art museum. Visit the gift shop after you've toured the museum. Buy postcards of your favourite works, and try to copy them at home with coloured pencils or watercolours.
- Take art classes.

LANGUAGE/WORDS/LITERATURE

- Schedule a weekly trip to the public library. Plan to spend at least an hour looking through books, looking up things in the catalogue, reading magazines, etc.
- Take regular trips to bookstores. Make a list of all the good bookstores in town and try to visit each one at least once so you can learn what sorts of book each store offers.
- Consider joining a summer reading program at the public library.
- Write a description of a friend, a friend's house, a pet, a favourite place, a vacation spot, etc.
- Interview your family and relatives. Start a family newsletter.
- Enter an essay, story, or poetry contest. Submit your work to magazines that publish student work.
- Practice telling stories. At the library, look for books of folktales from around the world. Pick a few to learn by heart. Start a storytelling club for younger students at school.
- Find a newspaper article you want to read and discuss with your family. Set aside a specific time and place for the discussion.
- Have a family reading time. Everybody reads whatever they want in the same room. Start small: perhaps for 15 minutes after dinner. Gradually increase the time.
- Have a read-aloud time. One person could read while the others clean up from dinner or do some other simple task. Family members take turns being the reader.
- At the bookstore, look for books of crossword puzzles, anagrams, and other word games. Keep a book of word puzzles in the car to work on whenever you are riding around.

- Play great board games such as Scrabble, UpWords, Boggle, or Word Thief.
- Write with your family. Start a family journal. In the journal, keep lists of things to do around the house, descriptions of special events such as hosting house guests, notes about phone calls to family friends and relatives, anything you want to record from your everyday life. See Peter Stillman's book *Families Writing* for more ideas and inspiration.
- Listen to audio books while driving around on errands or on vacation. You can download audio books from iTunes or buy them at ABC stores.
- Read and write poetry. Memorise a poem a week.
- Choose a story to practice reading aloud. Practice the pronunciations of all the words. Try giving each character a different voice when you read. Try to use your voice to make the story more interesting to your audience.
- Put on some calming music (Bach, Mozart, Satie, Gregorian chants are nice) and practice making the most beautiful cursive or italic letters you can.
- Instead of phoning, write letters to your friends and relatives. Try starting a round robin letter to your friends or relatives. First, make up a list of 3 – 5 people and their addresses; put your name and address last on the list. Write a letter to the first person on the list, and enclose a copy of the list of addresses. The person you wrote to writes a letter and sends it, your original letter, and the list of addresses to the next person on the list, and so forth. Eventually, all the letters will come back to you!
- Write a review of a book you read or a movie you saw. Tell the basic idea of the book or movie and what you liked and didn't like about it. What did the author do well? What did they not do so well? Ask your school if they can publish it in their newsletter.
- Learn to touch type (that is, type without looking at the keys or your fingers). You might want to use a software package.

MATH/NUMBERS/GEOMETRY

- Shopping: When you shop at the grocery store, take along a pad and pencil; keep a running total of the cost of items you buy. Check your answer against the cash register receipt you get when you pay for your items.
- Read *The Number Devil* by H. M. Enzensberger. This is an especially good book for people who have not yet learned to love math, but those who have will enjoy the book, too. Every 9-12 student should read this book.
- Keep statistics. Graph when you go to bed, how many pages you read each day, how far you walk each day, how much water you drink per day, how often you have friends over, how long it takes you to eat breakfast, how many metres per day you swim, how fast you can jog around the block, how many multiplication facts you can do in a minute, etc.
- Measure things around the house and calculate their surface area and volume. Take trips to the park, etc., to measure things there.
- Help with the family budget. Record the family expenditures for a week.
- Play good "thinking" games such as chess. Learn how to notate chess games.
- Make up math problems for yourself to work. Consider making a "Math Workout" for yourself once a week. This will help keep your math skills strong and will allow you to spend your next school year on new, interesting math, instead of re-learning all the math you forgot over the summer!
- Work on memorising all your multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction facts, if you haven't already done so. Once you've mastered your math facts, work on speed.

NATURE/PLANTS/ANIMALS

- Check with your local council for walking tours in your neighbourhood or in bushlands near you.
- Whenever you travel to a new city, visit the local zoo and aquarium or the local natural history museum.
- Before you travel to another part of the country or to a different country, read about the biomes there. Read about their climate, animals, and plants. While you're there, look for things you read about.
- Go camping with your family or friends.
- Learn more about nutrition. For a week, keep a journal of what you eat then compare it to the recommended dietary intake for your age group. Pick one or two things you can do to start moving your diet closer to the recommendations.
- Make a botany map of your back yard. Place each plant in its place on the map and label each plant with its common name and scientific name.
- Go berry picking on a local farm.

HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY

- Help plan the family vacation. Research the landmarks, geography, culture, and special attractions of the area you'll be visiting. Map out the route you'll take.
- Make a map of your house and gardens. Make a detailed map of your room.
- Study world religions. Pick a religion you don't know much about. Read about it in books you check out from the public library. See if you can find a local group that practices that religion. Plan with your parents to visit their church, temple, synagogue, mosque, or other place of worship. Some religions to start with: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant), Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Unitarianism.
- Check out the classes and events in your area for other languages and cultures.
- Visit history or memorial museums in your area.
- Choose an ancient civilisation to research.
- Pick a continent you'd like to know more about. Using an atlas, make flash cards of all the countries in that continent. On one side of the card have the country's name; on the other side, the country's capital city. Memorise all the countries and capitals in that continent, then do the same for another continent.
- Interview someone from another country. Ask them about their country's history, landmarks, cities, agriculture, industries, religions, festivals, form of government, famous scientists, famous artists and writers, etc. Ask them for permission to tape the interview. From the tape, make notes. From the notes, write a summary of what you learned about the person's country.

SCIENCE

- Check out science museums or observatories in your area.
- At the library, look through the children books on science. Choose one that has experiments you can do at home. Try some experiments at home with your parents.
- Visit the ABC Science website, particularly *The Surfing Scientist*.
- Visit the CSIRO website, particularly *Do-it-yourself Science*.

SPORTS/EXERCISE

- Play on a team. Practice a sport or physical skill.
- Hiking, biking, skating, swimming, walking, caving, climbing, canoeing, snorkelling, running, gymnastics, basketball.
- Spend as much time outdoors as possible. If your body gets used to staying indoors in the air conditioning all the time, you will be at risk for heat stroke if you do need to do something physical outdoors.
- Work on developing the habit of drinking enough water each day. You'll need to drink more than that if you are exercising in the heat.
- Check out your local rock-climbing centre.

COMMUNITY SERVICE/ACTIVISM

- Keep a scrapbook of newspaper articles on issues you care about in the community or world. Write letters to your local, state or federal parliament member expressing your opinions about issues you've read about.
- Participate in an environmental clean up. This might be as simple as going to the park with your family or friends and filling up a big trash bag with all the trash you can pick up. Save recyclable bottles and plastic in a separate bag to recycle later. Visit the Clean Up Australia Day website www.cleanup.org.au to see how you can help.
- Help younger children learn to do something they want to do.
- Visit an elder. Look for opportunities to assist the elderly. Some children call out bingo at a retirement home every other week.
- Volunteer at a local animal shelter or zoo.
- Offer to help neighbours with pet sitting, picking up their newspaper when they're out of town, etc.

HOUSEHOLD SERVICE

- Help out more with the household chores since you have more time at home. Learn to do some new things such as washing clothes, ironing, folding laundry, polishing furniture, vacuuming, mowing the lawn (if your parents agree). Work alongside another family member whenever possible.
- Cook together with your family. It can be more fun than cooking by yourself.
- Be responsible for one or two meals per week. Plan the menu with your parents. Make a shopping list. Do the shopping. Cook the meal with your parents. Try not to use a microwave oven when you cook!

Originally published as "Upper Elementary Homework" with approved edits for an Australian audience.