



# Homework Help: Effective Breaks

What's the difference between taking an effective break from work and one that puts the brakes on your child's momentum? Effective breaks share 4 attributes:

- ✓ They recharge mental and physical energy
- ✓ They are time-limited
- ✓ They are part of the overall work plan
- ✓ They include a plan for exactly what to tackle once work resumes

This worksheet will help you and your child **brainstorm and plan for effective homework breaks**. It's a great opportunity to test some assumptions about how long specific activities take. **Have a digital timer handy!**

First, let's break it down into 5, 10, and 15 minute increments. As a general guideline, a break that extends longer than 15 minutes can drag out homework time to an endless crawl. (Of course, natural work breaks such as dinner time or a music lesson are exceptions to the 15 minute guideline.) Write down your ideas, test them out by timing them, and make notes about the results to help guide your child's best choices.

## 5 Minute Break Activities

| What are some things you can do in 5 minutes?                                    | What happened when you tested your idea?   |
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| <p><b>Example</b></p> <p>guess: 20 free throws</p> <p>Actual: 10 free throws</p> | <p>Took 8 minutes, including putting shoes on and finding basketball. Better decrease it to 10 free throws and make sure ball is handy</p> |
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## 10 Minute Break Activities

| What are some things you can do in 10 minutes?   | What happened when you tested your idea?  |
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| <b>Example</b><br>Guess: Practice one song on piano 3 times<br>Actual: Practice one short song 4 times | Took a little over 2 minutes for a short song so could fit another one into the 10 minute break |
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## 15 Minute Break Activities

| What are some things you can do in 15 minutes?                                       | What happened when you tested your idea?            |
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| <b>Example</b><br>guess: Make and eat a bowl of ramen noodles.<br>Actual: Nailed it! | Took a little over 14 minutes from start to finish. |
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So, now you've discovered **specific activities that your child can select for breaks** from homework. That takes care of the first two attributes of effective breaks:

- ✓ They recharge mental and physical energy
- ✓ They are time-limited

Next, is the "how". Work breaks are most effective when they are **part of the overall work plan**. We teach students to make a game plan for the afternoon/evening that specifies **what will be done when, including planning for breaks**. Here's an example:

4:00-5:30pm Biology: Read pages 215-220 and complete worksheet,  
Spanish: workbook pages 110-112,  
Start Math: Page 42, problems 5-15

5:30-6:00pm Dinner

6:00-7:00pm Finish Math, if necessary  
English: start reading and annotating pages 30-45 in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

7:00- 7:15pm Break: 30 free throws outside

7:15-8:00pm Complete English,  
History work on project due Friday

With this plan in place, at any given moment, a parent could ask "How's the plan going?" and the answer is pretty straightforward. Either it's an "on time arrival" or "I need to decrease my break to 5 minutes because I'm behind schedule." This approach helps your child build important Executive Function skills such as time management, planning, and prioritizing.

Finally, breaks tend to be most effective **when a student has a clear sense of what he or she will do upon resuming work**. In the example above, the student has created a prioritized list that helps him or her ramp up and get back in the groove of working after taking a break from the action.

And that takes care of the final two attributes of effective breaks:

- ✓ They are part of the overall work plan
- ✓ They include a plan for exactly what to tackle once work resumes

Now, when you and your child create a plan for homework completion, your child has a choice of time-tested 5, 10, or 15 minute breaks to include in the plan. Instead of vague, endless breaks that bring productivity to a screeching halt, breaks become part of a strategic approach to energize and refocus your child.

### **Coaches' Tip**

*What's the difference between asking a typical parent question, "Is your homework done?" and a different question, "How's your plan going?" The first one focuses on an **outcome** and invites a yes/no (and maybe a less than truthful) answer, the second one places emphasis on the **process** and invites an analytical or reflective response. We know from working with hundreds of students that when they learn an effective process for completing homework, they gain insight into their habits and ownership of their academic performance.*