

# Does Homework Still Have Value?

We all remember complaining as kids about homework. Those of us who are parents have had it repeated by our own kids, as will you, too, if you become a parent.

So it would be wonderful if research were to discover that homework doesn't do much good. Then we could convince educators to drop the idea and spare us all the headaches.

A new [Salon article](#) by Heather Shumaker reports that research by Prof. Harris Cooper, a Duke University educational expert, has discovered just that. In the middle of the article we even find this bit of academic chest-thumping:

*“Before going further, let’s dispel the myth that these research results are due to a handful of poorly constructed studies. In fact, it’s the opposite. Cooper compiled 120 studies in 1989 and another 60 studies in 2006. This comprehensive analysis of multiple research studies found no evidence of academic benefit at the elementary level. It did, however, find a negative impact on children’s attitudes toward school.”*

Oddly, though, the article contains no links to the studies it cites. So I went hunting for them. It didn't take me long to find an [article](#) on the same topic from *Duke Today*, dated March 2006.

It begins:

*“It turns out that parents are right to nag: To succeed in school, kids should do their homework.*

*Duke University researchers have reviewed more than 60*

*research studies on homework between 1987 and 2003 and concluded that homework does have a positive effect on student achievement.*

*Harris Cooper, a professor of psychology and director of Duke's Program in Education, said the research synthesis that he led showed the positive correlation was much stronger for secondary students – those in grades 7 through 12 – than those in elementary school.”*

So there we have it. *Salon* presents a conclusion almost the opposite of what was actually found and publicly reported. It even gets the sequence of dates a bit off.

It's easy to understand why such journalistic irresponsibility got past *Salon's* editors: the error is particularly seductive because it tells most of us what we'd love to hear. But it's an error all the same. Looks like Shumaker didn't do her homework. If she did, she's being dishonest.

We've all seen howlers like this before. Often, of course, honest errors and even lies are corrected. Chances are *Salon* will correct its error. But sometimes errors are never retracted. That's how urban legends get started. That's why we need sites such as [Snopes](#), [FactCheck](#), and even [Politifact](#)—the last of which is a for-profit site that still manages to retain a reputation for accuracy.

The good news, though, is that all the suffering associated with homework is not for naught. Prof. Harris urges that teachers observe “the 10-minute rule”: ten more nightly minutes of homework for each grade, until about the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. More homework than that doesn't appear to do any good. And we're all glad to hear that.