

Can your child be an athletic superstar and still get a good education? Homework is one element of educational training that is a must for success. Get the strategies for efficiently and effectively guiding your athlete in homework completion.

Homework and the Gym

By Rik Feeney

The bus ride home from school seems to be taking forever. While all the other kids are talking about what games they are going to play when they get home you find that all you can think about is what you are going to do in workout at the gym that night. You almost made your double full on the floor last night and the coach said if you can make it consistently, he may move you into the advanced optional workout squad with all the top gymnasts.

Rushing off the bus and into your house you plunk your books down in the kitchen as your mother asks the same old question, "How was school today dear?"

Automatically you answer, "Fine."

Quickly you try to exit the room before she asks the inevitable... oh no, too late! "Do you have any homework to do before you go to gym?"

You know perfectly well that you do, but you just don't feel like it at the moment so you answer, "I did it during study hall."

Did you know that it is a proven scientific fact that when you lie like that your tongue grows two millimeters longer? Keep this up and eventually you may have to wrap your tongue around your neck like a scarf to keep from stepping on it.

The world seems a much better place an hour or so later when you are at the gym working on your double twist. After giving it your best you are rewarded for the effort by standing up three double fulls in a row.

The coach claps you on the back and says, "Well, I guess it's time we moved you up into the advanced optional group. Will you be able to make workout on the additional days the advanced optional group works out?"

Of course you answer, "Yes!"

At the end of the workout you can't wait to tell your mom all about it. As you are changing into your clothes you notice the coach has already gone over to talk to your mom about the extra workout days and for some reason he does not look happy.

Your mother is showing the coach a note from your school teacher that says you may be on the verge of flunking a subject because you have handed in incomplete or poorly done homework assignments, and your test scores are slipping.

Shivers! You could just die of embarrassment as your coach takes your mother's side and tells you in no uncertain terms that your school work has to come before your involvement in gymnastics. Worse, you are not going to be allowed to workout with the advanced optional group until your grades have improved.

Homework can be an annoying fact of life, however, it is an important discipline to learn that will help you succeed later in life. Homework is like conditioning after workout. You might not like it, but you know it is necessary.

Homework conditions your mind to be stronger and at the same time flexible and open to new ideas which will help you with your school work and with understanding new and different techniques in the gym.

Here are some suggestions that will help make homework easier and more fun.

Suggestion #1: Do your homework when you first get home from school. That means right away, not after you watch some television, or talk to friends on the phone for an hour. Your mind will still be in the school work mode. It will be much easier to follow through and get the homework done than it will be to get back in the mood after you have started something else.

Suggestion #2: Keep all distractions to a minimum. Doing homework with the television on or your IPOD blasting your favorite tune divides your attention. Keep focused on the work at hand and it will be finished much sooner.

Suggestion #3: Pick a place where you will have access to all the materials you need to complete the assignment. Using the same place every day will also condition your brain to get right to work once you are settled in.

Suggestion #4: Keep a small pad or section of your notebook for accurately writing down exactly what your homework assignments are for each day. Check the pad before you leave school to be sure you have all the books or materials you need to complete your assignments. Many teachers now post homework assignments along with resources on a web site. Check with each of your teachers for the appropriate web address.

Suggestion #5: Use different techniques to review the important parts of your assignments or potential test questions. A couple of ideas are:

- Highlight the material with different color pens depending on the type of information. (I.E. historical dates in blue, famous names in yellow, etc.)

- Read important information aloud into a tape recorder while playing relaxing music in the background. Listen to the tape at night while you sleep.
- On many computers you can connect a microphone to make a digital file of your important class notes that you can download to an IPOD or MP3 player to listen to and review materials for tests on the way to school or during study periods.
- Use index cards. Write specific bits of information you need to know on one side of the card, and a question pertaining to the information on the other side. You now have a series of flash cards that you can shuffle randomly to quiz yourself on information that may come up on a test.

Each of these ideas will help you to get your homework done a little bit easier and quicker while remembering more of the information. Remember to pay extra close attention during class and ask as many questions as you need to understand the information from your teacher. The better you pay attention in class the more you will understand and the easier the homework assignments will be.

Don't wait to talk to your teacher, parents, or coach if you are having difficulty with homework or a subject in school. If necessary, your coach may be able to set up workout programs that will enable you to maintain your present physical condition while you get caught up on your school work.

Be warned that this is only a short-term measure. Higher level optional skills need to be practiced on a regular basis for safety and consistency, but if push comes to shove; education always comes first, which could result in a change of your competitive status.

Talk to your teacher at school and let her know that you are a competitive athlete and that you workout a few nights a week. The teacher may be able to suggest some ideas for better study habits, or she may revise your homework schedule. Do not expect to get out of homework because you are a competitive athlete.

Ask your teacher if she can set aside some time to help you before or after school with any subjects you may have a problem with. Many schools offer after school study groups to help with class and homework problems.

Around the country a number of "Homework Hotlines" are set up where you can call a teacher who will give you ideas on how to solve your homework problems. Contact your school for the phone numbers in your area. In addition, there are several online sites for help with homework issues.

Do You Have The Time?

How much time do you allow to get your homework done? Many gymnasts, by the very nature of the sport, are quite organized. They have learned to get a lot done in

the little time available to them. Make sure that you are providing yourself adequate time to get your work done.

A simple chart listing your daily activities should give you an idea of whether you are being more "active" than "productive." You may need to drop some of your other activities to enable yourself to effectively finish your schoolwork and still have time to workout at the gym.

Your education is more important than anything else - even gymnastics! Even your coaches must continue to study and keep informed of new developments in the sport.

Communicate with your coach, your parents, and your teachers when you are having a problem with your school work. Each will help you to learn how to solve your problems so you can get back in the gym and reach your gymnastic goals.

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Rik Feeney, author of *Gymnastics: A Guide for Parents and Athletes*, also former gymnast, coach, and private gymnastics club owner condenses over thirty years experience working with gymnasts from novice to elite level into easy to read books and reports for gymnasts, cheerleaders, parents, instructors, and coaches. His latest book, *Back Handsprings: The Secret Techniques* is available at: www.GymnasticsTrainingTips.com .

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