

# Sharp organization skills

By Nanci Hellmich  
USA TODAY

For years, when Ida Watson's sixth-graders sauntered into class, they were walking disasters of disorder.

Their pencils weren't sharp. Their folders were a mess. They often had the wrong textbooks with them. And if they remembered their homework assignments, they were crumpled up in their backpacks.

A few years ago, Watson and her fellow sixth-grade teachers of Poca (W.Va.) Middle School created a special program to help students get organized and ready to learn.

Now, Watson's students are trained to file into her math class in an orderly fashion. They have three to five minutes to sharpen their pencils, put their homework assignments out on their desks, open textbooks to the right page, copy that night's homework assignment in their organization planners and get their blank paper ready for that day's class assignment. Watson also gives students guidance on getting organized to do homework.

She says all this saves her having to repeat the same instructions daily, and it teaches the middle school students critical organization skills that will help them through the school year and probably last a lifetime.

As students launch into the school year, many will struggle with the same problems they had last year: How to get organized so they can get their work finished.

Teachers tear their hair out when kids forget assignments or have them crumpled up in folders. Parents get upset when children get bad grades simply because they can't locate the homework they did.

Educational experts say it's never too early to hone organization skills. It's easier the younger you start, says LouAnne Johnson, whose autobiographical book was turned into the movie *Dangerous Minds*. The former teacher also wrote *School Is Not a Four-Letter Word: How to Help Your Child Make the Grade* (Hyperion, \$19.95). You don't want to turn elementary kids into little executives carrying briefcases, but you can begin teaching them basic organizational skills by putting up a calendar and identifying important dates such as when projects or reports are due.

For big projects, the kids can make a time line. For instance, if a project is due in a month, then the child needs to figure out how much will be done in two weeks, three weeks and so on. "Some kids say they work better under deadline, but I don't think that's a



Photos by Jeffrey Aaronson, AP, for USA TODAY

**Well-trained:** Erin Marcum, above, a student in Ida Watson's sixth-grade math class at Poca (W.Va.) Middle School, uses her organizer. Watson, below, helped create a program to get kids organized.

## Let kids select the tools that will boost efficiency

If your children are having a difficult time getting organized to do homework, time management expert Jeff Davidson suggests taking them to an office supply store to buy a few items.

Davidson recommends letting the children figure out what will help them get organized at home.

They might consider three-ring notebooks, file folders, pencil holders or stacking trays for the top of their desks.

He says a few stacking trays may be helpful to organize work that needs to be done, but there don't need to be too many.

Often people use the tops of their desks for storing items that belong inside their desks or in filing cabinets.

He says not to buy too many supplies so that you have to work to keep track and organize them. "You can overdo it with organizational tools."

good thing to teach," Johnson says.

Some kids will never be organizational wizards. "You can't change a child's natural personality," Johnson says. "But if their natural personality is making it difficult for them to be successful in school, then they need to

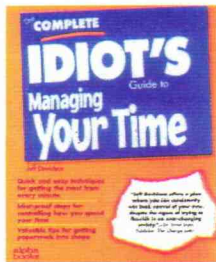
learn at least a minimum amount of organizational skills."

Jeff Davidson, author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Managing Your Time* (Macmillan, \$14.95), believes that anyone can be taught some basic organizational skills. He says one trick

is to realize that you have to work at it a little bit every day.

When it comes to homework, both Johnson and Davidson recommend having kids do it as soon they get home from school with the condition that no TV or games are allowed until the homework is complete. "Homework should come first if parents value education, and if they expect their kids to go to college," she says.

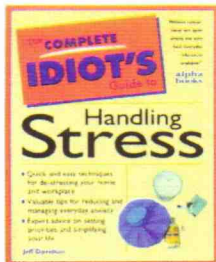




*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Managing Your Time*  
Jeff Davidson

Just because you're pressed for time doesn't mean you're not intelligent. But it can make you feel like an idiot! Jeff Davidson has a bookful of solutions to help you get your daily timetable back on track. Tips include ways to leave work on time, whittle your priorities, trade money for time, organize your office, and make relaxation a must.

**Alpha Books/Macmillan, \$14.95** paperback



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Jeff Davidson

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