

What Is Homework For When a Machine Can Do It?



Built from *Homework in the Age of the Answer Machine* by Isaac Kim, Education Editor

Grades 4–8 · About 45 minutes · ★ everyone · ★★ older readers

Name _____

Date _____

1. Before You Read

★ What do you think homework is for? Write one reason teachers give it.

★ If an AI tool could finish your homework in seconds, what rule do you think your school should have about it? Why?

2. The Short Version

Read this first. Older readers: read the full article too.

AI tools can now write a homework essay in seconds. So schools everywhere are writing rules, called **AI policies**, about when students may use them. Many schools are writing these rules in a hurry, and the rules often change.

Isaac Kim collects school AI policies and compares them. He found that every policy in his stack fits into one of **three families**.

The first family is prohibition. It bans the machines and treats using them as cheating. This family is shrinking, because the software meant to catch AI writing does not work reliably. Schools that promised to catch cheaters ended up with false accusations, appeals, and even lawyers.

The second family is containment. It allows AI for some jobs, like brainstorming, but not others, like writing a draft. It is the biggest family. Its problem is that nobody can really see where a student stopped using the machine.

The third family is redesign, the smallest one. These schools decided the problem was the assignment, not the student. Work moves into the classroom: writing on paper, explaining answers out loud, giving presentations, and doing projects with check-ins. This takes the most work from teachers.

Surveys show most older students already use AI regularly. So Isaac says the real question is whether schoolwork will still show what each student can do alone. He believes only redesign will still make sense in five years.

3. Word Bank

Word	What it means
policy	a set of rules a school or group decides to follow
plagiarism	passing off someone else's work as your own
prohibition	a rule that says something is not allowed at all
containment	keeping something inside limits, like a fence around it
proxy	something that stands in for something else

★ Use **policy** in a sentence of your own.

4. Check Your Understanding

★ 1. Name the three families of school AI policies that Isaac found.

★ 2. Why is the prohibition family shrinking?

★ 3. Which family is the biggest in Isaac's stack of policies?

☐ prohibition ☐ containment ☐ redesign

★ 4. Name two ways that redesign schools changed how students show their learning.

★★ 5. Isaac says every containment rule is "an honor system in disguise." What does he mean? Why is that a problem for the rule?

5. Isaac's Side by Side

Isaac compares school systems the way an archivist compares documents: filed side by side, with the details on the record. Fill in each column using the article. In the last column, file your own school's approach.

	Prohibition	Containment	Redesign	My school
What it does				
What it gets right				
What it misses				
What it thinks homework is for				

★ Which family is your school's approach closest to?

☐ prohibition ☐ containment ☐ redesign ☐ a mix

6. Think Deeper

★ Isaac writes that "a rule that cannot be enforced is not a rule." What do you think he means? Do you agree?

★★ Isaac says the machine "did not break homework." Instead, it showed which schools were grading the thinking and which were grading the finished product. Explain the difference. Which kind of grading do you think tells a teacher more about you?

7. Write Your Report

Write a short report answering this question: **Which kind of AI policy should your school have: prohibition, containment, or redesign?**

- My answer:
- Reason 1 (from the article):
- Reason 2 (from the article):
- One thing the other side would say:
- My conclusion:

For Teachers and Parents: Answer Key

Word bank sentence: Answers vary; check that the student uses policy to mean a set of rules a school or group follows.

1. Prohibition, containment, and redesign.
2. The software meant to detect AI writing does not work reliably. Schools that promised to catch cheating could not deliver, and ended up with appeals, false accusations, and lawyers.
3. Containment.
4. Any two: moving work into the classroom, writing on paper, oral defenses (explaining answers out loud), presentations, supervised drafting, projects with checkpoints, or bringing back exams.
5. The rules depend on students being honest, because nobody can actually see whether a student stopped using AI where the rule says to stop (for example, after brainstorming). A rule no one can check is hard to enforce.

Side by side (sample answers): Prohibition: bans AI and treats it as cheating or plagiarism; gets right that students should do their own work; misses that detection software is unreliable, so the rule cannot be enforced; thinks homework proves effort. Containment: allows AI for some tasks or subjects and requires citing it like a source; gets right that the machines exist and are not going away; misses that no one can see where the allowed use ended; thinks homework is for practicing skills. Redesign: moves work into class, onto paper, into talks, presentations, and projects with checkpoints; gets right that it shows what a student can do alone; misses that it costs a lot of teacher time and money, and is slow; thinks homework was always a stand-in for thinking. My school: answers vary; check that the student describes a real rule and judges it fairly.

Think deeper: Open answers. For the first, strong answers explain that if a school cannot catch people breaking a rule, the rule does not really work; Isaac calls it "a mood." For the second, grading the thinking means checking how a student reasons and what they can do themselves; grading the finished product means checking only the essay or worksheet handed in, which a machine could have made. Strong answers explain which shows a teacher more about the student and why.

Report: Look for a clear choice of one family, two reasons taken from the article, a fair statement of the other side (for example, that redesign takes the most teacher work, or that prohibition cannot be enforced), and a conclusion that matches the answer.