

7 Secrets to Finding the Best Homeschool Curriculum

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 4 |
| Secret 1 – Determine Your Family’s Goals | 5 |
| Secret 2 – Determine Your Family’s Needs | 6 |
| Secret 3 – Identify Your Child’s Learning Style | 7 |
| Auditory Learners | 8 |
| Visual Learners | 8 |
| Kinesthetic/Tactile Learners | 8 |
| Working with Your Child’s Learning Style | 9 |
| Secret 4 – Learn About Different Homeschooling Methods | 9 |
| Charlotte Mason Homeschooling | 10 |
| Classical Homeschooling | 12 |
| Literature-Based Homeschooling | 14 |
| Montessori Homeschooling | 16 |
| Online Homeschooling | 19 |
| Relaxed Homeschooling | 21 |
| Unit Studies | 24 |
| Unschooling | 27 |
| Secret 5 – Eclectic Homeschooling | 30 |
| Reading Curriculum | 31 |
| Writing Curriculum | 32 |
| Math Curriculum | 32 |
| History Curriculum | 33 |
| Science Curriculum | 34 |
| Secret 6 – Look Before You Buy | 35 |
| Secret 7 – Beware of Buyer’s Remorse | 35 |

[Appendix](#)..... 36

[Preschool](#)..... 36

[Kindergarten](#) 37

[High School](#) 38

[Special Needs](#) 40

[Gifted Education](#) 43

[Thank You!](#) 46

Introduction

As a new homeschooler, I was overwhelmed by the mere thought of choosing a homeschool curriculum from the hundreds that were available. I asked questions on home school forums, went to curriculum fairs, and read online reviews – it seemed everyone was either trying to sell me something or tell me about the great program they were using. Nobody told me how to choose for myself.

I eventually discovered a simple, step by step process for finding the best homeschooling curriculum, and I've written this e-book to share that process with you.

How to Use this E-book

In *7 Secrets to Finding the Best Homeschool Curriculum*, I'll share:

- Strategies for determining your family's needs and goals,
- Information from experts in popular homeschooling philosophies,
- Tips for choosing programs for specific subjects,
- Bonus information on choosing curriculum for preschool, kindergarten, high school, gifted students and children with special needs, and
- Links to resources that provide more detailed information.

Although the steps in this e-book are simple, following them will take time. You'll be exposed to new concepts, and you'll have to think carefully about your family's wants and needs. However, your personal investment in the process is worth it because the end result is finding the best curriculum for your children!

Share this E-book

Please do me a favor and share this guide with your friends and homeschool group members. Simply post the following link on your blog, website, yahoo group or favorite forum:

www.successful-homeschooling.com/best-homeschool-curriculum.html

Or, save this e-book to your computer and attach it to an e-mail.

Are you ready to find the best curriculum for your children? Good... Let's get started!

Secret 1 – Determine Your Family’s Goals

Think of the last time your family travelled away from home. Before deciding *how* you were going to travel, you had to determine the purpose of your trip and consider *where* you wanted to go.

If your goal was to cruise across country, taking in the scenery and making stops along the way, you probably chose to drive. If relaxation and entertainment were your main goals, you may have taken a cruise. If you needed to visit a sick relative who lived overseas, you probably decided to fly. Your trip would have been a disaster had you chosen a method of transportation without first considering your goals.

The same principle holds true when choosing curriculum. Before deciding what tools you want to use to teach your children, you have to identify the purpose of your journey, and decide where you want to go.

Begin by thinking about *why* you decided to home school.

- Did you want to provide academic instruction superior to that provided by public schools?
- Did you want to develop deeper relationships with your children and spend more time bonding as a family?
- Did you want to have more of an opportunity to pass on your morals, values and beliefs?
- Did you want to remove your children from a situation that was intellectually, physically or emotionally harmful?
- Did you simply want to go off the beaten trail and take your family on an exciting adventure?

Now, think about what you want to achieve. What do you consider a successful outcome for your children in the areas of academics, vocation, religion, character and life-skills?

Take time to write down your reasons for homeschooling and your vision for your adult children. When choosing materials for your homeschool, make sure they will move you towards your goals.

For example, parents who want to nurture adventure and creativity may prefer programs that promote discovery and contain many hands-on projects and activities. Parents who want to prepare their children for entry into prestigious universities may want highly-structured, academically-challenging programs.

Setting goals for your family will not only help you find the best homeschool curriculum; it will help you keep homeschooling when the going gets tough.

Secret 2 – Determine Your Family’s Needs

Let’s go back, for a moment, to the analogy of taking a family trip. Once you have decided *why* you are travelling and *where* you are going, you have to think about what you *need* to get there.

For example, if you have decided to take a cross-country drive, you have to determine what type of vehicle you need to get there. Your journey would be quite uncomfortable if you stuff your family of six into a two-door hatchback. And you might spend more time touring gas stations than historic sites if you choose a vehicle that gets poor gas mileage.

When choosing curriculum, don’t just buy a program that will get you where you are going. Find one that meets your family’s needs. Before looking at specific homeschool programs, consider your family’s needs in the following areas:

- What subjects will you teach? Some families focus on the 3 R’s, and teach other subjects informally. Others want a full program, including electives like foreign language and fine arts.
- Do you want a program that is secular or religious? Both religious and nonreligious families should carefully consider the religious approach of science and history programs.
- Are you willing to use different curriculum providers for different subjects or do you want to purchase from one supplier? Picking and choosing materials from different providers takes time, but it is sometimes the best way to meet your family’s needs.
- Do you need a program that easily lends itself to grading and record-keeping? Keeping records is especially important if you live in a state that requires reporting or if you need to make transcripts for the high school years.
- Do you want a program with pre-planned lessons and a set schedule or do you want to plan your own lessons? Planning your own lessons provides greater flexibility and control, but it can also be time consuming.
- Do you want a program that promotes independent study or one that relies heavily on parent interaction? If you have limited time available or multiple children to teach, you may want a program that allows older children to work independently.

- How much time do you want to spend each day on formal lessons and direct instruction? Some families want school time to take up the bulk of their days. Others want to finish academic work quickly and move on to other activities.
- Do you need to combine children of different ages into one program in certain subjects? Combining children in subjects like Bible, science and history can save both time and money.
- Do you need a program that addresses learning difficulties or caters to a specific learning style? Look for a program that instructs using a pace and techniques that are appropriate for your child.
- Does your preferred program include worksheets, tests, hands-on projects or entertaining activities? There are many ways to learn. For example, some families enjoy projects, while others find them overwhelming.

Consider your family size, family obligations and personality when answering the above questions. Don't let your chosen curriculum dictate your family's lifestyle, choose a curriculum that fits your needs!

Secret 3 – Identify Your Child's Learning Style

A child's dominant learning style, or learning modality, determines how he or she best receives and processes information. Some children learn best by listening or talking, others by seeing, and others by doing.

There are few things that frustrate homeschoolers more than trying to teach a child who won't sit still, won't stop talking, or won't listen until the directions have been repeated twenty times. Much of this frustration can be relieved if we understand and choose a curriculum that fits our child's learning style.

The best way to determine your child's learning style is to study your child. What does your child enjoy? How does your child respond to new experiences and challenges?

Understanding your child's learning style will help you find ways to work with, not against, his or her natural strengths. Here are descriptions of the three types of learners:

Understanding your child's learning style will help you find ways to work with, not against, his or her natural strengths.

Auditory Learners

Auditory learners receive information by listening or talking. They may need to repeat information aloud or hear information repeated for accurate processing. This often takes the form of repeating directions to themselves, saying answers aloud as they write them, or moving their lips while reading.

These children may be vocal and dramatic, and typically enjoy storytelling, audio tapes, reading aloud, listening to music, and playing instruments. They have a good memory for conversation, and thrive on group discussions and question/answer sessions. They usually follow oral directions well, and may frequently whistle, talk or hum to themselves.

Visual Learners

Visual learners receive information by seeing and making mental images. They may think in words, such as reading and writing, or images, such as charts, graphs, maps and drawings. These children may move slowly because they are paying attention to details. They sometimes appear to be daydreaming, and prefer to watch an activity for a while before joining in.

Visual learners typically enjoy reading, math, art and visual stimulation in the form of television and computer games. They have a good memory for pictures and the written word, and are adept at noticing similarities and differences. They may determine whether or not an answer is correct by asking themselves the question, "Does it look right?"

Kinesthetic/Tactile Learners

Kinesthetic/tactile learners receive information by moving or touching. The term "kinesthetic" refers to large muscle movements such as those required for athletics or dance. "Tactile" refers to touch, or small motor movements such as those involved in sewing, typing or craftsmanship.

Children who are kinesthetic/tactile learners may express themselves through gestures and body language. They need physical action, and can best remember information that

is learned while participating in activities that require movement. These children are typically coordinated and adept at building models and taking things apart.

Working with Your Child's Learning Style

As adults we have preferences as to how we receive or communicate information, and we often want to teach our children in ways that makes sense to us. However, it is counterproductive to tell a kinesthetic child to sit still and listen, or to tell an auditory learner not to hum while writing. In doing so, we take away the very tools the child needs to learn.

Many of us are teaching multiple children who each have different learning styles. Instead of purchasing different programs for each child in the family, look for a program that best fits your family, and find simple ways to adapt it to the needs of each child.

Here is some additional information about [determining your child's learning style](#), along with tips for tailoring any curriculum to meet your child's needs.

Secret 4 – Learn about Different Homeschooling Methods

When choosing a homeschool curriculum, most parents envision using workbooks and textbooks similar to the ones used in traditional classrooms. However, education in a home environment does not have to look anything like education that takes place in a traditional classroom setting. There are as many different ways to home school as there are homeschooling families.

We take a relaxed approach to homeschooling, while using workbooks in math and language arts because they are easy to use, they are thorough, and they provide us with the consistency we desire. Here is some additional information about the [advantages of homeschooling with textbooks](#).

I recently interviewed several prominent homeschool advocates who discussed the advantages of other popular homeschool methods, and shared tips for choosing curriculum. You can find excerpts from these interviews on the following pages.

As you read these excerpts, think about your family's goals, your family's needs and your children's learning styles, and consider how these philosophies may or may not be right for your home.

Charlotte Mason Homeschooling

Catherine Levison is a homeschool mom of five who has homeschooled since the 1980s. She began researching Charlotte Mason homeschooling over seventeen years ago, and has written 3 books about the Charlotte Mason method. In the following interview, she defines Charlotte Mason homeschooling, and shares information about the advantages of this homeschool method:

Who was Charlotte Mason?

Charlotte Mason was a British educator who was born in 1842. She was a prolific writer on the subject of education. However she did far more than write about this field – she lived an entire lifetime teaching children and observing how they learn.

How would you define Charlotte Mason homeschooling?

It's a generous education. One of the key points is to bring a lot of subjects to the children as if the topics we cover were a vast smorgasbord of variety. We avoid boredom and the method is very lively. Much of the method is based on the Liberal Arts which could have been named the Generous Arts. In that regard the CM method sometimes resembles the classical education that is also a very popular choice. On the other hand Charlotte Mason chose only the elements from that stricter method that she thought benefited children and she added many other great techniques such as narration and short lessons and being outside in nature quite a lot. We include the great masterpiece artwork and trips to museums as well.

There is a huge emphasis on reading the worthwhile books and never spending any time with boring books. There is another key element that is crucial and makes it different: The parent is to set a goal of helping the child to develop a love for learning, to become a lifelong learner. As parents we try to not kill that love with methods and materials. We believe strongly in knowledge for knowledge's sake rather than cramming information into the short-term portion of the human mind.

What type of families/students are well-suited to CM homeschooling?

I have personally seen families from all walks of life using the Charlotte Mason

homeschool method. I have seen veteran homeschooling moms become revitalized after years of workbooks and other methods. I have seen new homeschoolers take to the method without much preparation at all. I am always pleased when a classroom teacher comes to the method because they are really excited to let go of some of their prior training and trade that in for something that works.

That is another big aspect of Charlotte Mason philosophy and techniques: It is very universal. None of the methodology is based on a time era or a geographical area. She based her entire method on how children think and how they remember information. Simple. Observe children, take into account what all the other educators thought would work and then develop a method that works for the children. Mason's writings span decades of time. She was in this for the long-term and even after years and years of observing children she still believed the techniques worked and so do I.

"The parent is to set a goal of helping the child to develop a love for learning, to become a lifelong learner. As parents we try to not kill that love with methods and materials."

What type of families/students struggle when using this homeschool method?

Honestly, those who believe in the Charlotte Mason police. There is no such thing, of course. Since I began teaching parents how to use this method I have strongly suggested that they take the parts of this that they like and then meld it to whatever method they are already comfortable with. I have never once in over thirteen years of writing and speaking asked anyone to adopt the entire method as the only method to employ.

A family can use only the Charlotte Mason homeschool method and incorporate no other systems whatsoever, if they so chose. They will have well educated children, I promise. To use the entire method and only this method will result in a superior education but it is not necessary to do that. These are individuals we are talking about. Your children are just that, your children. There is no need to try to recreate the CM method perfectly in order to please me or Charlotte Mason. No one is going to know how much of the method you are using and to what degree you borrow from other methods. Make it your own method. It is very adaptable.

How do Charlotte Mason homeschoolers measure success?

We measure success on the knowledge that a child can exhibit when speaking or writing. We do not allow "cramming" and do not encourage that at all. The narration

process develops into the writing mode. From the age of ten until the age of eighteen we assign written narrations to the children where they get a chance to tell us what they know about any given topic. I am narrating right now. I am telling you what I know about Charlotte Mason homeschooling all without looking on-line or in a book or at any notes. All my answers have come from my knowledge that I have stored in my mind. That is exactly how our homeschools work.

Examinations at Charlotte Mason's schools were conducted using written and verbal narration and you can read some examples in the six-volume set of education books that Charlotte Mason wrote. They are very impressive. For a "paper trail" many parents keep the written narrations in files. These will cover government, literature, science, religious studies, history, etc., and they are very good practice for essay writing that will become a part of the child's college experience. Not to mention, life is a narration in the sense that all professions use it. Plumbers who explain to you the condition of your pipes are narrating. The doctor you visit is narrating when he summarizes your condition. Lastly, Charlotte Mason reminded us that we are raising a "person" and the more of a person we "turn out" the better the worker will be at any future occupation.

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Catherine Levison](#).

For more information about the Charlotte Mason Method, read Catherine's books *A Charlotte Mason Education*, *More Charlotte Mason Education* and *A Literary Education*. You can also visit her website at www.charlottemasoneducation.com.

Classical Homeschooling

Dennis Gunderson, owner Grace & Truth Books, homeschooled his four children through high school. In the following interview, he provides a general overview of classical homeschooling:

How would you define classical homeschooling?

An emphasis on what is known as the "trivium" – teaching in the sequence of grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

What is the trivium, and what role does it play in classical homeschooling?

The trivium is an emphasis on 1) grammar (learning the basics), 2) logic (learning to relate the facts to one another) and 3) rhetoric (learning to argue one's case and to answer opposing viewpoints). The trivium is central to homeschooling.

What makes classical homeschooling different from other methods of homeschooling?

A great deal of homeschooling merely takes the secular curriculum used in schools and brings it home, to be done at home. The classical method is decidedly better at training the mind to think, reason, and even to contend and argue one's case against contrary ideas.

What are the benefits of classical homeschooling over other homeschool methods?

It results in children who are more capable thinkers, able to stand for and defend their beliefs, and tends to give a far more well-rounded education, including vastly more exposure to great literature than other homeschool methods.

“The classical method is decidedly better at training the mind to think, reason, and even to contend and argue one’s case against contrary ideas.”

What type of families/students struggle when using this homeschool method?

Certainly, those who do not enjoy reading will greatly struggle. Those who addict their children early in life to video (via overuse of TV or computer) will have difficulties.

What advice do you have for parents who feel overwhelmed by the task of educating their children in a classical manner?

I would counsel them to do what they can and do not be disheartened or concern themselves about what they find they cannot do. Each family will find they are better at some facets of a classical education than they are at others; this is not problematic. It is merely capitalizing on your strengths and learning how to do it more and better as you go.

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Dennis Gunderson](#).

Grace and Truth Books is a treasure trove of Christian, character-building books. You can view its entire catalog at www.graceandtruthbooks.com.

Literature-Based Homeschooling

Sarita Holzmann is a homeschool mom of four, and founder of Sonlight, one of the leading publishers of literature-based curricula. In the following interview, she defines literature-rich homeschooling and discusses the benefits of homeschooling with great literature:

How would you define literature-based homeschooling?

Literature-rich curriculum uses great books as the centerpiece for learning. Where others choose to rely on textbooks and other educational media, we opt for outstanding books and delightful stories that will capture children's imaginations and instruct them at the same time. Carefully and strategically selected literature serves as the base of the core of a curriculum: history, literature and geography.

Discussion questions and activities centered on these books make for a complete learning experience. Families can use this "core" with children of multiple ages at the same time. They then add other key subjects (Language Arts, Math, Science, Bible and electives) as best suits each child. Some literature-based companies suggest or produce curriculum for these additional subjects that compliments the approach of the core curriculum.

What are the benefits of literature-based homeschooling over other homeschool methods?

Literature-based homeschooling invites children into a more engaged, interactive and connected style of learning than other methods. For example, if you're studying the American Revolutionary War with your children and you rely primarily on textbooks and worksheets, your kids will probably be able to spout off facts and dates about the war, but they may not understand the fuller context of that time period or have a grasp of what it was like to live then.

But when you approach the Revolutionary War from a literature-based perspective, your kids will identify with people living at that time and understand the social climate of Colonial America. They may not know exact dates, but they will grasp the larger context of what was happening in the world at that time and what factors led to and influenced the war. They'll have a bigger picture that will stick with them and be useful throughout life.

What's more is that children approaching the Revolutionary War through great books are much more likely to enjoy learning about it. Children like stories. And when they encounter facts and figures not as dry, abstract slices of information, but rather in the

context of a story ... all of a sudden that information becomes relevant and easy to remember! Stories serve as anchors for facts and figures that would otherwise be lost in the great sea of information. Think about how much you remember about the Revolutionary War from the charts and timelines you studied in school. Now think about the story of Paul Revere. Chances are that Revere's story alone allows you to remember much more context and relevant information about the war.

Finally, a literature-based program facilitates positive, engaging interaction with your kids. When you use literature as the foundation of your curriculum, you'll find it's much easier to spark conversations. Good conversations. Significant conversations. And this helps your children develop a true love of learning and the confidence to explore whatever captures their imagination. All this adds up to you being able to guide your children in their discoveries as they eagerly engage in deep learning. And we all want that, don't we?

What type of families/students are well-suited to literature-based homeschooling?

Parents who are eager to play a large role in their children's education and formation tend to be particularly pleased with literature-based programs. These parents find that a literature-based curriculum allows for the lively conversations, family-bonding and opportunities for discipleship that they crave.

While textbook-based curriculums tend to teach the curriculum company's strict specific doctrines, literature-based programs give parents freedom to use the general approach of the company (e.g. Sonlight is an Evangelical Christian program), while helping their children understand their family's particular beliefs and manner of interacting with the world. Families who highly value spending time together and learning together will appreciate the opportunities such a program creates.

"Where others choose to rely on textbooks and other educational media, we opt for outstanding books and delightful stories that will capture children's imaginations and instruct them at the same time."

What type of families/students struggle when using this homeschool method?

Families who want a straightforward, facts-and-figures based approach to education tend to be frustrated with literature-based education. Literature presents all sorts of real-life quandaries that parents will want to discuss with their children. Parents who prefer to carefully control everything their children experience (e.g. they don't want their children reading any sad stories) may find that they have to discuss more with their children than they'd like.

Also, parents who want every component of their curriculum to center around Biblical texts will also find a literature-based curriculum disappointing. While some literature-based curriculum companies (such as Sonlight) believe that academics ought to be based on and intentionally related to Scripture, most do not believe that everything children read must be accompanied by a reference to or quotation from Scripture. Instead, literature-based Christian approaches tend to help students develop a broad worldview rooted in Scripture and aware of the world around them.

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Sarita Holzmann](#).

Sonlight offers complete, literature-based home school programs for grades pre-K through 12. For more information about Sonlight curriculum, visit www.sonlight.com.

Montessori Homeschooling

Larry Shiller is an MIT graduate, and founder of the Montessori-based math program, ShillerMath. In the following interview, Larry discusses the benefits of Montessori homeschooling and shares tips for choosing a Montessori curriculum for your home school:

What is the Montessori home school method?

The Montessori philosophy calls for students to learn at their own pace, to use all of their brain power by using all the senses and their bodies to learn, and to be in an environment that respects their unique capabilities and is developmentally – and physically – appropriate. For example, in a Montessori classroom a grownup's first impression is that of a little world, with little furniture, toilets, and so on, made for little but growing children.

How does the Montessori home school method differ from other methods of instruction?

There are many:

- It recognizes the unique capabilities of each student.
- It allows students to grow and work at their own pace.
- It results in positive lesson outcomes regardless of learning style.
- It builds self-confidence.
- It is multi-sensorial.
- It teaches children how to detect and correct their own mistakes.

The ShillerMath implementation also includes prescriptive answer guides that help parents prepare customized lesson plans for each child. Such a personalized learning approach is typically not available in a “one size fits all” curriculum that is so common today.

What is the role of hands-on activities in a Montessori home school program?

To be most effective, learning activities should use every part of the brain. Visual activities stimulate one part of the brain; tactile activities that use the nerve endings in the skin stimulate another; kinesthetic activities that use the nerves within large muscle group stimulate another; and auditory activities stimulate yet another.

Most math curricula use only 30% of the brain because they don't include significant auditory and kinesthetic components. Try to erect a tall building on 30% of its foundation and it will soon topple over. We don't want to see that with our children's education: With ShillerMath every concept is covered from all the learning styles to insure that virtually all brain and muscle cells are used and connected.

How do parents who use the Montessori home school method make sure their children remain on grade-level?

Let me make a provocative statement: At ShillerMath we really don't care about grade level. We do care about each student's individual potential and providing the student – and parent – with every possible tool to maximize the degree to which a child reaches his or her own individual potential. Regardless of age, grade, or standards, you simply cannot do better than that.

This is America; we celebrate the individual and that's what makes us great. We are not interested in cookie-cutter factory solutions to education: Let's bring out each individual child's unique qualities and talents by providing an appropriate environment and curriculum – and let the chips fall where they may when it comes to age, grade, or standards.

“Let's bring out each individual child's unique qualities and talents by providing an appropriate environment and curriculum – and let the chips fall where they may when it comes to age, grade, or standards.”

What type of families/students are well-suited to Montessori home school techniques?

A homeschooling family is well-suited to Montessori by the very fact that it is homeschooling. Whether a child is gifted, average, or learning disabled, the ShillerMath/Montessori approach respects who and what that child is, and provides the tools and advice to help that child advance to the greatest possible extent.

What type of families/students struggle with Montessori home school methods?

In our experience, when a parent wants to provide an education similar to that of the public schools, that parent may need the stiff structure and lack of choice/flexibility to feel comfortable. For example, if a parent is not comfortable with a curriculum that has variable times per lesson depending on the child, a Montessori-based instruction will probably not be advisable.

What should parents look for when choosing Montessori home school products?

First, find a product that has been edited by a reputable Montessori teacher training institute. For example, ShillerMath lesson books 1, 2, and 3 were edited by the Princeton Center for Teacher Education, a world-renowned AMS (American Montessori Society) teacher training and certification center; many of the world's best Montessori teachers were trained at PCTE.

Next, make sure the parent doesn't need to have attended the institute! If the curriculum requires lesson preparation the parent probably needs to know more about Montessori than he or she has time for. With ShillerMath there are no thick parent guides to read or boring videos to watch: We built the Montessori knowledge into the curriculum so that children are learning math within minutes of the kit's arrival in the home.

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Larry Shiller](#).

ShillerMath provides math programs for children ages 4 through 12 that are fun and effective for children of all learning styles. For more information about ShillerMath, visit www.shillermath.com.

Online Homeschooling

Jessica Parnell is President of Bridgeway Academy, a full service academy that provides provides homeschooling packages for students from Pre-School to Adult. In the following interview, Jessica discusses the pros and cons of online homeschooling and shares tips for choosing an online homeschool curriculum:

How do online homeschool programs work?

Bridgeway's online homeschooling is a fully online program that does not require additional textbooks. Students log on to the program and participate in engaging instructional activities. These include videos, interactive games, upbeat instruction and online practice activities, quizzes and tests. Students also have the opportunity to build writing skills and receive feedback through interaction with instructors as they submit writing assignments.

What are the benefits of online programs over other homeschooling methods?

I don't know that I would say online homeschooling is better than other homeschooling methods — it is simply a different method of homeschooling. If a family is seeking more accountability for their students or feeling inadequate to provide the instruction, then online homeschooling is a great option. If a parent has several children who have different academic needs and just cannot find the time to focus on each individual, then online homeschooling provides a way for students to stay on track and receive help without losing the freedom that homeschooling provides. And of course, for the student who needs the visual and auditory modes of instruction, online homeschooling hits the mark!

Are there any disadvantages to using online programs?

The main disadvantage is that parents are no longer fully engaged in the homeschooling process. In most cases, students will have to follow the requirements of the online courses rather than choose to dig deeper into a specific area or skip another one completely. This transition may be difficult for families who have provided a more eclectic approach to homeschooling. And of course, there is the fact that students in a fully online program are at a computer for several hours every day.

What type of families/students enjoy online homeschooling?

Bridgeway Academy's online homeschooling program is currently only available for high school students. Within that demographic we have found that families who homeschool online tend to have some common characteristics:

- The parent is not confident in the subjects they are teaching and want to ensure that their students are well prepared for college.
- Working families who are seeking a homeschool option for their children.
- Students who really enjoy the computer and have a "tech-y" bent.
- Students who would benefit from the combination of auditory and visual instruction.

What type of families/students tend not to want to homeschool online?

Families who tend to dislike the online homeschooling are those who prefer to have more control over their schooling. They enjoy the freedom of picking and choosing what aspects of each course they prefer to use and designing their own courses. Many of these families tend to be very confident and independent. Others who tend to dislike homeschooling online are those who like to get their hands on a textbook or to curl up with a book. In many situations they are not as computer literate or see so many hours on a computer as a problem. Many families who dislike the idea of online homeschooling also have several children and cannot realistically allow enough computer time for each child without purchasing a separate computer for each.

"If a family is seeking more accountability for their students or feeling inadequate to provide the instruction, then online homeschooling is a great option."

How much parental involvement do online homeschool programs require?

With fully online homeschooling, day to day parental involvement is reduced considerably. A parent is still the first choice when the student gets stuck on a concept. However, due to the nature of the program, it is usually much easier for the parent to help.

How do families who homeschool online make sure they remain involved in their children's schooling?

The best way to ensure a strong connection with your child's schooling is take a few minutes each day or week to log in to the parent screen and view the lessons your child has completed. There you can see if there are areas where your child may need

additional help or input from you and you can check progress to ensure that he or she is staying on track with the lessons.

Best of all, because you are not the primary instructor, you have the freedom to develop enrichment activities (i.e. field trips, projects, books to read, etc.) that relate to what they are studying and allow them to use their gifts and talents to supplement core instruction.

How should parents go about choosing an online home school for their children?

- Be sure you check into the history of the company. You do not want to sign on with a start up that may not have their systems fully functioning.
- Ensure that there is a level of flexibility that will allow your child to take the time he or she needs to succeed.
- Verify that you can work to mastery in each subject. If your child fails a quiz or test and cannot go back to review the material and firm up those skills, you are not meeting his or her academic needs and could very well see them begin to struggle as they move on to more difficult concepts.
- If you have an advanced student, verify that he or she can take honors level, AP or Dual Enrollment courses (college level courses where students earn both high school and college credits).
- Choose a program that provides teacher/academic interaction and support.

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Jessica Parnell](#).

Bridgeway Academy provides traditional textbook/workbook, CD ROM, online high school and college level dual enrollment programs for ages pre-K through adult. For more information, visit www.homeschoolacademy.com.

Relaxed Homeschooling

Mary Hood homeschooled her five children through high school graduation. She is the author of several books about relaxed homeschooling, and founder of the Association of Relaxed Christian Home Educators. In the following interview, Mary discusses the benefits of relaxed homeschooling and shares tips for choosing curriculum for your home:

How would you define relaxed homeschooling?

Relaxed homeschooling, to me, is a mindset, not a philosophy. It is the idea that you are a family, not a school; a dad/head of the household, not a principal, a mom, not a

teacher, and you have individual relationships with your kids, not a school. This helps you learn to leave the school trappings behind, set your own goals, and live life in a relaxed and joyful manner, not taking the whole thing quite so seriously.

Describe the average day in a relaxed homeschool.

There is no average day in a relaxed homeschool! I will say that when my kids were little, we always started with some Bible study (reading *The Story Bible* by Pearl Buck over and over while they made their own little booklets/pictures to go along with it), and some other unit study at the breakfast table...then the morning was considered “productive time”. That might mean sitting under an apple tree thinking about the universe or playing with legos, but it would not be computer games/ipods/television/neighbor kids, etc. Afternoons were looser... grocery shopping, park, library, personal free time, etc. One day a week, usually Fridays, we tried to go someplace interesting, like a zoo or a museum.

What type of families/students are well-suited to relaxed homeschooling?

Anyone who wants to enjoy their homeschooling and maintain control over their kid’s education.

What type of families/students struggle with relaxed homeschooling approach?

People who can’t leave the old wineskins of institutional education behind.

What is the role of textbooks and formal curriculum in relaxed homeschooling?

I don’t believe in textbooks or formal curricula in the elementary grades unless they are used as a guideline for the teacher or unless the request is coming from the student. I have used formal textbooks in science and math after about seventh grade. We personally have used Apologia science and math from Chalk Dust. I still prefer using real library books and experiences in most other subjects in high school.

How does a parent go about teaching without textbooks and curriculum in a relaxed homeschooling environment?

Well, this might seem radical, but I don’t think anyone can really teach anything to anyone else, unless they really want to learn it. (To me, it doesn’t count as learning if you learn it to spit it out on a test and then forget it.) I’d concentrate on doing a lot of

“Help a child grow into an adult who loves to learn and has the tools to do so, and they can learn whatever they need to learn when it becomes important in their lives.”

reading, having a loose, but consistent structure to the day, and following interests as best as you can, while also letting your own goals for the kids guide you. Trust yourself, trust your instincts, pray a lot and trust God to give you the answers as you need them. Then chill out a little.

How do relaxed homeschoolers make sure they aren't leaving any gaps in their child's education?

We all have gaps in our education. Nobody can make sure of that! Even if we plugged up every gap we could think of, new knowledge would spring up the next day. More important is focusing on character and developing a self-motivated, self-directed learner. I personally focus on skill development more, especially in the high school years. Help a child grow into an adult who loves to learn and has the tools to do so, and they can learn whatever they need to learn when it becomes important in their lives.

How can relaxed homeschoolers make sure their children are prepared for college?

Focus on skills, especially the four communication skills, reading, writing, speaking, and listening. (Most of these will develop more or less naturally in a home where communication is prized.) Add in computer skills, computational ability, test-taking skills, research skills (internet and library-based), and if you want to walk in the front door, make sure you are aware of the requirements the colleges have for specific subjects before you start high school.

I've had a rash lately of people who want me to help them get into college, but they "forgot to take a foreign language" or "didn't take any math past geometry"... makes it harder, although not impossible, to get in. However, do not buy the lie that accreditation is important or necessary to get into college....that is the educational establishment trying to regain a foothold to take over our kid's schooling. If enough people do it willingly, someday we will lose our freedoms. There is a free downloadable article on that on our website, Archers for the Lord.

How should parents who are interested in relaxed homeschooling go about designing a homeschool program for their children?

Don't feel like you have to do it all up front... pick out some goals to start, get a "flow" going to your days, read a lot, go to the library, live an interesting life. If you feel clueless, take out a textbook and get some ideas from the table of contents. Again, in high school, it becomes more important to declare subjects, but you can still be creative in the way you cover them.

For example, a biology lab could be done the usual way, or maybe instead you could do a marine mammal apprenticeship at Sea World, or a greenhouse/botany lab. Foreign language could be learned the usual school-like way, or on cds in the car, or through travel or missions work. Just keep good records when you get to high school, and make sure your kids are involved at that point in designing their programs and maintaining their own records.

What advice do you have for parents when choosing homeschool materials?

Most people buy way too much these days. Don't feel like you have to have all your ducks in a row before September even starts. Use a lot of library/free materials, and stop saying you can't do it, because you can! "Favorite quote: All you can do is all you can do but all you can do is enough." Don't feel like you have to pick everything from one source, either... nothing wrong with being eclectic.(Again, in high school, we do usually have a science and math textbook picked out at the start of the year.)

What advice do you have for new homeschoolers?

Enjoy your life with your kids. Sometimes it's hard but you'll miss them when they finally leave home. Also, keep your own growth part of the equation, or you'll wind up with the biggest empty nest syndrome in the history of the world. For those of you who are close to that, contact us... we'll put you to work!

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Mary Hood](#).

Mary Hood is the author of *The Relaxed Home School*, *The Joyful Home Schooler* and *The Enthusiastic Home Schooler*. You can learn more about relaxed homeschooling and order Mary's books on her website, www.archersforthe lord.com.

Unit Studies

Valerie Bendt is a homeschool mom of six, and author of 4 books about unit studies. In the following interview, she discusses homeschooling with the unit study method, and shares tips for using unit studies in your homeschool:

What are homeschool unit studies?

They are simply studies that focus on one topic at a time. As this topic is examined, a variety of subject areas are explored. A unit study is what each person makes it. It can be a brief topical study or a life-long quest.

What do you like about homeschool unit studies?

With unit studies, the entire family can study a topic together. Furthermore, they can be tailored to meet the needs and desires of individual families. Unit studies broaden our horizons. The integration of multiple subjects into one topic allows us to make vital connections.

What are the benefits of unit studies over other homeschooling methods?

They encourage creativity, higher level thinking skills, research skills, and cooperative learning. Unit studies encourage a student to delve deeply into a topic, whereas many other curricular methods merely provide an overview of a topic. Students are often “handed” the material which has already been digested by someone else. This inhibits a student’s natural sense of wonder.

Are there any disadvantages to using unit studies?

At the high school level, an exclusive unit study approach might not provide a student with the necessary credits required by most states for graduation. At this point a combination of textbook studies and unit studies would prove useful.

What type of families/students enjoy this method of homeschooling?

Families who enjoy projects and learning together tend to enjoy using a unit study approach. These families are usually confident that they are providing their children with a quality education.

What type of families/students tend to dislike this way of homeschooling?

Families who are worried about education standards and achievement test scores may shy away from homeschool unit studies because they fear their children will be academically deficient. These families find comfort in completing a textbook or workbook. They feel they have sufficiently covered the required material. Unit studies are more open ended.

How do families who use homeschool unit studies teach upper level math, science, language arts and writing?

“The important thing for parents to remember when choosing a prepared curriculum is that they are free to make adjustments and changes as the need arises. Curriculum is our servant, not our task master.”

Although basic skills are enhanced in a meaningful way through unit studies, concentrated work in these skills areas is often needed to attain mastery. Phonics and math are sequential and require individual attention. Language and writing skills can be taught and then applied in the unit study setting.

For example, I suggest doing “skills units” throughout the year to sharpen basic skills. My children used a math curriculum/textbook in addition to the unit studies we conducted. I also used a phonics program with my beginning/early readers. Through the years we used various writing programs to develop writing skills. These skills were then developed as the children wrote about topics related to our studies.

What is the best way to introduce homeschool unit studies into an existing homeschool program?

The best way to integrate unit studies into an existing homeschool program is to choose topics from either the student’s language arts, social studies, or science curriculum and build a unit around those topics. In other words, use the student’s textbook as a springboard for a unit study.

Once the study is complete the student can return to the regular textbook material. In this way, units can be sprinkled in throughout the year to enhance the textbook approach. Developing a unit study from each applicable textbook in a given year would prove educationally advantageous.

How should parents go about choosing unit study programs for their children?

As mentioned above, textbooks can be a springboard for unit studies. Also, children and parents can brainstorm topics together.

If parents choose a prepared unit study curriculum, they should look for materials that are consistent with their educational philosophy. Some programs are activity based while others focus more on reading. Some have a Christian world view while others take a secular approach. The important thing for parents to remember when choosing a prepared curriculum is that they are free to make adjustments and changes as the need arises. Curriculum is our servant, not our task master.

What tips do you have for parents who want to create their own homeschool unit studies?

First, read my book! (Just kidding, of course.) The key is to remember to have fun with your children. We all learn best when we enjoy the journey. Pick a topic that will allow the entire family to participate in the study. Choose a topic that naturally inspires

wonder.

When preparing for a unit of study, I always try to find at least one biography of an individual that somehow relates to our topic of study. As we study real people in real space and time, history comes alive. History is the interacting of individuals with individuals, and biographies allow us to traverse in another person's footsteps.

Next try to locate materials that relate to your study that offer insights from multiple perspectives. In other words, how do art, music, science, history, language arts and so on relate to the topic of study? What activities can you do that will make the study relative to your family? Choose an interesting book related to your topic for Dad to read aloud from each evening. This allows him to be included in the unit study. It also acts as a catalyst for discussion about the material the children have investigated earlier in the day.

What advice do you have for new homeschoolers?

Relax! If you only complete half of what you set out to do in a day, a week, a month, or a year, then you are doing great! We often set unrealistic expectations for ourselves. Goals are important, but the journey to attain those goals is equally important.

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Valerie Bendt](#).

Valerie is the author of four books about unit studies, as well as Reading Made Easy: A Guide to Teach Your Child to Read, Creating Books with Children, Making the Most of the Preschool Years, Successful Puppet Making, Easy-to-Make Bible Story Puppets, and The Frances Study Guide. For more information about her products, visit www.valeriebendt.com

Unschooling

Sandra Dodd is a mother of three who unschooled her children through graduation. In the following interview, Sandra defines unschooling and shares tips for living a lifestyle of learning:

How would you define unschooling?

Even people who really want to understand unschooling have a hard time getting it. No one definition will cover all the angles, but recently I've been saying that unschooling is arranging for natural learning to thrive.

What type of families/students struggle with the unschool approach?

When a family is more concerned with obedience than with learning, sometimes they struggle mightily to achieve either, and the children are unhappy. If the parents love the idea of predicting and controlling and deciding what their children will know and do and be, unschooling will not be easy.

Unschooling is easy for children, once parents relax into it and come to understand it. It's a way of living with children in a life based on sharing a joyous exploration of the world.

What is the role of textbooks and formal curriculum in an unschool environment?

Using a formal curriculum would negate unschooling. Some families might use textbooks as reference books, but there are better reference materials available. Textbooks are of very limited scope and range, as they're designed for one school-year's-worth of one grade, sometimes of a simplified reading level.

“Turn away from the school and look directly at your children. Look at them as individuals, rather than as students, or third graders or eight-year-olds.”

In some jurisdictions, families are required to submit a study plan, and I have a collection of such writings, from unschooling families in Ohio, California, New Zealand and Italy [here](#), which can be adapted to other areas' requirements if a family feels the need.

What is the role of grading and testing in an unschool environment?

Unschooling doesn't involve testing or grading. Some families living in states where tests are required just file the test scores without even looking at them. Some might look, but they don't work toward or in response to test scores. When unschooling works well and the parents are fully committed and involved, everyone in the family learns all the time, day and night. There's no failure. There's no "average." There's just learning.

How do unschoolers make sure they aren't leaving any gaps in their children's education?

There is no single body of knowledge that can be learned gaplessly and then the person knows everything there is to know. No two people have the same body of knowledge, not even identical twins who were in school together their whole lives. No one can predict what any five year old will eventually need to know as an adult. The world is changing too quickly to plan ahead fifteen or twenty years with any reliability.

My children have the expectation that they will continue to learn their whole lives, so once "a gap" is noticed, it's filled in as they look at what it is they don't know, or they accept the lack and figure out how to live without it. I can't fix toilets; my husband can. I can sew; some people can't.

Many adults don't know how to explain how semi-colons should be used, but unless they're editors or proofreaders or English teachers, it doesn't matter. They could ask me, or someone else who understands it, if they ever need to know. I don't know the rules of cricket. I don't even know the rules of American football, but it doesn't matter. If I do need to know, I'll look it up in a book or on the internet, or I'll know which friends of mine could help me understand. The internet has many clear explanations of semi-colon use, too, in case that's "a gap" for anyone reading here.

What advice do you have for parents who are intimidated by the idea of homeschooling without use of textbooks, formal curriculum, and a traditional scope and sequence?

Turn away from the school and look directly at your children. Look at them as individuals, rather than as students, or third graders or eight-year-olds. Look at their potential, their interests, their sweetness, and find ways to preserve and nurture those. If you don't think you can do it forever, try it for one year, and summers don't count.

A child who has "done schoolwork" for a school year has earned the vacation. But when "school year" comes back around, don't do school. Do life as though school didn't exist. Live to learn; learn to live. If after really trying it as hard and as honestly and fully as you can for an extended period of time you can't get it to work, then you can always go back to a curriculum.

School has already taken twelve or more years of your freedom and individuality. You don't have to let it take your adult life as well. You don't have to let it have your child.

School doesn't own learning. Textbooks, formal curriculum and a traditional scope and sequence are a small dot in a sea of life and learning. They have done more to "teach" children to avoid learning than anything else. Most of the adults around you are damaged in one way or another by their school years.

[Here](#) are some longer answers to similar questions, from when my children were in their middle-of-childhood years. Nothing changed for me after that except my convictions deepened, my theories were borne out, and my expectations were surpassed

What if a child decides not to study math or grammar? How do parents make sure their children are obtaining all of the skills they will need for the future?

My children didn't "study" math or grammar, but they can all write well and are great at taking care of money and paying their bills. There is a misconception that unschooling involves kids "deciding to study" something, but they learn in little bits and bites all the time, and make their own connections.

Math is in music, art, architecture, and nature. Grammar is in song lyrics and rhymes, in puns and jokes, in understanding accents and dialects and collecting trivia on the history of English. My granny used to say "If I had my druthers..." I figured out on my own that "druther" was a contraction of "I'd rather." I've always helped my kids see the base and history of words when I can. Sometimes Holly has puzzled one out that I'd missed my whole life.

I have written a great deal of how my children learned, and collected the accounts and suggestions of other families.

What advice do you have for families who are new to homeschooling?

Don't spend money at first. Read, meet other families, let your children have time to do what they're interested in, or what they weren't allowed to do before because of school. If they want to read or play in the yard or ride bikes or watch movies or draw or paint or play games, make that possible for them.

While the children are recovering, the parents can learn about what they want to do and why, and how. There is more online about homeschooling than anyone could ever read. Find the writers and ideas that make sense to you, and pursue that. Don't rush into anything. Parents should learn to be calm and thoughtful instead of panicky and reactionary. It's better for health and decision-making, and it sets a good example for the children. Don't live in fear when you can live in joy.

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Sandra Dodd](#).

One of my favorite reads this fall was *Sandra Dodd's Big Book of Unschooling*. For articles, personal essays, and information about ordering Sandra's book, visit her website, www.sandradodd.com.

Secret 5 - Eclectic Homeschooling

You don't have to limit yourself to materials that fit a specific style of homeschooling or come from one supplier. Eclectic homeschooling involves picking and choosing from different homeschool methods and programs in order to meet your family's needs.

For example, my children use workbooks for math and language arts, we take a relaxed approach to the study of history and science, and we participate in a weekly co-op based on the classical model of education.

If you are thinking about purchasing materials from different providers, the following information will help you understand the differences between the many programs that are available, and determine what products will best meet your needs.

Reading Curriculum

Before beginning a formal reading program, your child should have plenty of exposure to books and other reading materials. Don't be afraid to wait until you see signs of readiness to begin formal reading instruction. Children generally learn to read between ages 5 and 8, although some will learn earlier and some will learn later.

Although many parents find it helpful to purchase formal reading programs, you don't have to use one in order to teach your child to read. Some parents teach their children to read using picture books and homemade flashcards. Others find it helpful to use alphabet magnets, DVD's, games and computer software to teach reading.

I taught my children to read using a simple phonics-based program that moved incrementally from teaching letter sounds, to blending sounds into words, to reading words and sentences.

When choosing a homeschool reading curriculum, ask yourself the following:

- Do you want a strict phonics program, or are you comfortable with a combination of a phonics and whole-language instruction?
- Do you want a program with colorful text and drawings, or one with black and white text?
- Do you want a multi-sensory program that includes flashcards, games, songs and movement or a simple book format?
- How much time do you want to spend on each lesson?
- Do you want the program to teach writing and spelling, as well?

Follow this link to find additional information that will help you choose a [homeschool reading curriculum](#), along with links to reviews of some popular reading programs.

Writing Curriculum

A good homeschool writing curriculum will help your child learn to communicate clearly and effectively in written format. Look for programs that provide instruction in different types of writing, teach writing mechanics, and promote understanding of the writing process.

As home educators, we can teach writing without making our children afraid of putting pen to paper. When choosing a writing curriculum think about your needs and desires in the following areas:

- Do you want a program that focuses on inspiring creativity, or a program that focuses on structure and mechanics?
- Do you want a program centered around a particular writing project such as a novel, or one that provides a variety of writing assignments?
- Do you want a program that integrates the study of other subjects such as history and science? Would you like writing assignments to correlate with other subjects you are studying?
- Do you want a homeschool writing curriculum that teaches your child to write by studying and imitating famous writers?
- Do you want a program that directly teaches the student or one that will teach you how to teach your child?
- Do you feel comfortable evaluating your student's progress? Do you want your child to receive feedback from teachers outside of your home?
- Do you need a program that caters to students of a wide range of ages?
- What type of program fits your child's learning style? Will he or she perform better with a workbook, DVD or online writing curriculum?

Follow this link to find additional information that will help you choose a [homeschool writing curriculum](#), along with links to reviews of some popular writing programs.

Math Curriculum

The thought of teaching math fills many parents with anxiety. However, the right homeschool math curriculum, can make the subject simple and fun.

Your children will need to know math in order to perform everyday activities like shopping, budgeting, balancing a bank account and understanding credit. Great math

skills are also necessary for higher level science and mathematics courses that students need for degrees in fields such as medicine and engineering.

Consider the following when choosing a home school math program:

- Do you want a spiral math program that introduces a variety of concepts up front and incorporates frequent review? Or do you want a mastery math program that requires children to fully understand a concept before introducing others?
- Do you want a concrete mathematics program that mainly teaches children how to perform mathematical functions? Or do you want a more abstract program, that helps children understand why math works the way it does?
- Do you want a book that is colorful and contains illustrations or one with simple, black and white text? Will pictures serve as a distraction or make the assignments more fun?
- Do you prefer to use a consumable workbook that your child can write in or a textbook that can be reused or sold?
- Is your child a hands-on learner who needs to use manipulatives to act out problems or will numerous hands-on activities frustrate your child?
- How much drill and review do you want the program to contain? Does your child find repetition helpful or boring?
- Is your child an auditory or visual learner who will appreciate video demonstrations? Would you like an outside teacher to help explain concepts to your child?
- How much time do you have to spend instructing your child? Would you prefer a program with self-explanatory lessons or one that involves detailed lesson plans?

Follow this link to find additional information that will help you choose a [homeschool math curriculum](#), along with links to reviews of some popular math programs.

History Curriculum

The study of history isn't limited to learning about the people and events of the past. Many programs also include the study of geography, economics, government and culture.

You can teach history using a variety of methods, such as textbooks and encyclopedias, living books and biographies, time lines, unit studies, hands-on projects or everyday activities. When choosing a homeschool history program, consider the following:

- Do you want a program that follows a chronological timeline of events from creation to present time?
- Do you want a program that follows a regional approach by teaching the history, geography and culture of specific countries?
- Would you like to study history according to your family's interest in a particular location, culture, event, activity or topic?
- Do you want a program that approaches history from a religious perspective by weaving Bible history, biblical figures, and church history throughout the text?
- Do you want a program that avoids discussion of myths, fables and world religions?
- Would you like a program that primarily teaches children about the history, heroes, founding documents, songs, symbols and traditions of the United States?

Follow this link to find additional information that will help you choose a [homeschool history curriculum](#), along with links to reviews of some popular history programs.

Science Curriculum

Homeschool science instruction during the elementary and middle school years typically focuses on the areas of life science, physical science and earth science. During the latter middle school and high school years, most children move on to advanced courses like biology, chemistry and physics.

You can successfully homeschool science, even if you don't have an extensive scientific background. When evaluating home school science programs, consider the following:

- Does the program contain hands-on projects and experiments that use inexpensive, readily available materials?
- Does the program contain lesson plans and step by step instructions for activities?
- Are experiments designed in a manner that is safe and age-appropriate?
- Do experiments compliment information taught in lessons and encourage critical thinking?
- Does the program include books that contain vibrant photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and informative, engaging text?
- Does the program approach science from a creationist, evolutionary or neutral perspective?

Follow this link to find additional information that will help you choose a [homeschool science curriculum](#), along with links to reviews of some popular science programs.

Secret 6 – Look Before You Buy

Once you have a good idea of what you want to purchase, find a way to preview the materials. Ask a friend or fellow homeschool support group member if you can come take a look at her program. Find out whether or not the publisher hosts local meetings or attends a nearby home school curriculum fair where you can view products and ask questions.

Take time to learn from other homeschoolers who have used the materials by asking questions in online forums and reading homeschool curriculum reviews. You can find one of the largest online collections of [homeschool curriculum reviews](#) on my website, Successful Homeschooling.

When reading reviews written by other homeschoolers, consider how their criticism or praise of the program pertains to the needs of your family. For example, a program that moves too rapidly for one child may be a good fit for a child who learns quickly. A program that doesn't contain enough hands-on activities may be a good fit for a family who prefers simple, textbook instruction.

In addition to looking before you buy, be careful not to overspend. You can save money on curriculum by combining children of different ages, purchasing from used book stores and discount stores, using free internet resources, making your own flashcards and manipulatives, and reusing materials.

For additional money-saving ideas, download my free e-book, [101 Ways to Save Money on Homeschooling](#). This book can save you hundreds of dollars by showing you what to buy, where to buy it, where to find freebies, how to have fun on a budget, and how to earn income without leaving your home!

Secret 7 – Beware of Buyer's Remorse

Once you purchase a curriculum, you'll inevitably start hearing about all of the great programs on the market that you should have purchased instead. Buyer's remorse is perfectly normal, but don't allow it to have too big of an impact on your decision to stick with your chosen program or try something new.

Give yourself time to feel comfortable using the program you've chosen. Make adjustments to help the program fit your needs. Avoid looking at and discussing other curricula for a while so you won't be distracted.

If your school days are consistently unpleasant, and you are certain your curriculum is the source of your problem, start looking for a new program. If the first program you chose for your family is not a good fit, it does not mean you are a failure – it means you are one step close to finding the curriculum that's right for your child!

Appendix

Preschool

Many parents choose to homeschool preschool in order to give their children a strong foundation in academics and social skills. Home is a wonderful place for children to learn to be kind to younger siblings, negotiate with older siblings, share, handle frustration and help others. It is also the perfect environment for teaching pre-reading and pre-math skills, and strengthening motor skills.

Here's a list of [skills your preschooler needs in order to be ready for kindergarten](#).

Your child can learn these skills easily and naturally if you do three things:

- Read to your child daily.
- Explore mathematical concepts that occur in everyday life.
- Engage in activities that encourage fine-motor development.

Some families decide to use a formal curriculum to teach their preschoolers. Consider the following when choosing a preschool curriculum for your home:

Choose a preschool program that is inexpensive, uses readily available materials, and requires a level of preparation that is comfortable for you.

If you have a busy schedule or have older children to teach, you may not have time for time-consuming projects. While these activities are fun for some families, you can successfully teach your preschooler in as little as 30 minutes per day.

Think about how much time you have for direct, one-on-one instruction and look for a program that meets those needs.

If your child will need to work independently at times, look for self-correcting games and activities that teach basic preschool skills. If you have several young children at home, consider using a multi-age program that will allow you to teach them as a group.

Look for a homeschool preschool curriculum that fits your child's learning style.

If your child loves being read to, use a literature-based program. If your child, likes movement consider lapbooks or unit studies. If your child is especially wiggly and resistant to formal work - skip the curriculum and send him or her outside!

Above all, make sure your chosen program is at your child's level of ability. If the program is repetitive and boring, move on. If the program causes anxiety or frustration, put it away. Don't force a curriculum on a child who is disinterested. Some preschoolers simply aren't ready for formal instruction.

Follow this link to find [additional information about homeschooling preschool](#), along with more tips for choosing a homeschool preschool curriculum.

Kindergarten

Parents choose to homeschool kindergarten for a variety of reasons. Some feel their children aren't ready for public school, and they want to give their children more time to mature. Others know their children have already mastered the information taught in public school, and they don't want their children to be bored. And some home school kindergarten as a trial year or gentle introduction to homeschooling.

When homeschooling kindergarten, you do not have to turn your home into a public school classroom. Keep lessons simple, and move as quickly or slowly as desired, according to your child's level of readiness. Some children will be ready to write, some won't. Some children will be ready to read, some won't. Your child may even be at different levels in different subjects, and that's okay.

I believe in using kindergarten as a gentle introduction to formal schooling. We spend 15-20 minutes on math and 15-20 minutes on reading using a simple math and phonics curriculum. We study science and social studies by reading, going on field trips and outings, and exploring concepts we encounter in everyday life.

Kindergarten is a great time to become familiar with your child's learning style and experiment with different homeschool methods.

Here's some information about [traditional kindergarten subjects](#).

Here are some of [my favorite kindergarten resources](#).

If you are looking for a complete kindergarten program, there are some great products out on the market for homeschoolers. You can read reviews of these programs in the kindergarten section of my collection of [homeschool curriculum reviews](#).

High School

We've not yet reached the high school years, so I asked Lee Binz, publisher of The Home Scholar, to share her expertise in homeschooling during the high school years.

Lee is a mom of two who homeschooled her children through high school. In the following interview, she discusses the benefits of homeschooling high school and shares tips for choosing curriculum:

Why do many homeschoolers choose not to home school high school, and instead put their children in public or private school at the high school level?

I think there are a few reasons. First, they are afraid of high school. Homeschool groups sometimes don't provide the support for high school parents the way they do parents with younger children. That's why I work to provide articles about homeschooling high school that all homeschool groups can use.

Second, they don't think they can provide something that a school can provide. There are a lot of myths about how different high school is. I think parents don't realize that there are limitless opportunities for homeschool kids, and they aren't limited to what is offered at a school.

And third, I think that parents feel insecure when kids start learning on their own. We work so many years trying to get our kids to become self-taught. For some reason when they achieve that goal, parents interpret that as a failure on their part.

What are the advantages of choosing to homeschool high school?

Too numerous to mention! Homeschooling is the best academic preparation, and you can provide every course your child needs along with a transcript, and a diploma. It is the best learning environment, because children are safe and secure. It provides true

socialization, where teenagers learn to interact with every age group, not just their own. It also provides the best career preparation, because kids have the time and ability to investigate any area of interest they develop. When you homeschool high school, you can teach every subject at the student's level in every situation all the time, with complete flexibility.

What are some challenges parents face when they homeschool high school?

It can be challenging to learn what you need to know about high school. It's not that there aren't plenty of resources out there, it's just that parents don't have a lot of time to spend learning about it. That's why I provide video and audio based classes about high school in my Gold Care Club, because I know that some parents don't have time to read a book cover to cover. You have to learn how to provide subjects you don't understand. You need to make accurate high school records that represent your homeschool.

How do children who homeschool high school obtain a diploma? Do they have to obtain a GED?

Getting a diploma is very easy, just go to HomeschoolDiploma.com. It's a little harder to make a transcript, because it has to accurately represent your homeschool. I have written an e-book called, "The Easy Truth About Homeschool Transcripts" that walks parents through creating a transcript step by step. The real work is providing the education that your child needs. There are very few situations that require a GED. Across the nation, there are public and private high schools that are not accredited. A homeschool is not any different or any less official than those schools.

What steps do children who homeschool high school have to take in order to attend college?

Children need to take college preparation courses, covering the basics of English, math, social studies, science, foreign language, PE, and fine arts. Children also need to have some elective classes that they enjoy. Beyond the classes, colleges want to see some outside documentation of learning. Usually that means SAT or ACT scores, recommendation letters, or perhaps an occasional class outside the home.

Do parents need to use an accredited program to homeschool high school?

No. There is a huge difference between "accredited" and "official." Homeschooling is legal in every state, and you don't have to be accredited in order to be official. It's important to note that there are public and private high schools across the nation that

"I think parents don't realize that there are limitless opportunities for homeschool kids, and they aren't limited to what is offered at a school."

are not accredited so don't be afraid. You will be treated by colleges in the same way those non-accredited public school programs are treated.

Is it necessary to employ a traditional textbook or online approach when homeschooling high school?

No. In fact, that is one of the biggest mistakes I see parents making at the high school level. You should continue to do the same homeschool approaches that have worked for you in the past, and only change when things aren't working. It can be a disaster to suddenly change your school into a highly structured, textbook driven. That can cause burn out for the child, and frustration for the parent.

How can parents teach advanced courses, especially in math and science?

Great news! You don't have to "teach" those things! You don't have to teach them, and you don't have to learn them yourself. You only have to make sure that your children learn. With an answer key and possibly a video tutorial, you can handle even those scary subjects. I was able to teach physics, Latin, French, and calculus without knowing ANY of them. After graduating from homeschool, my boys were very successful in all of those subjects at a college level, so it must have worked. And for the record, I still don't know anything about those subjects!

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Lee Binz](#).

At The Home Scholar, Lee provides support for parents who are homeschooling high school through her free monthly newsletter, free weekly office hours, free high school mini course, daily blog posts, articles, e-book, low cost audio and video courses, and Gold Care Club . For more information, visit TheHomeScholar.com.

Special Needs

Many parents are choosing to teach their special needs children at home instead of sending them to public school programs.

C.J. Rezak is the regional director of Little Giant Steps, and parent of a special needs child who found help through neurodevelopmental therapy. In the following interview, C.J. shares information about identifying and treating learning challenges, along with advice for homeschooling special needs children.

What type of challenges might a parent encounter when homeschooling children with special needs?

Here's a few of the things homeschooling parents report to us:

- He's smart, but he can't seem to integrate and recall information he knows.
- Every day is such a struggle. My child isn't retaining information and seems so disorganized.
- She can't follow directions and there are daily errors in all subjects, really seems careless, but I know she's trying to be conscientious – she and I are confused about what's going on.
- My child seems to lack the ability to learn phonics – we've worked for two years now and still it's a mystery.
- He's so frustrated, because he's a bright kid, and we can't figure out why his performance in his studies don't match up with his abilities – It doesn't make sense to him or his parents.
- We can't figure out whether our child has a behavior problem or a learning problem.
- There are so many quirky things – can't read, but can remember and tell us things he's heard. Has great difficulty settling down, seems to be distracted by the littlest things.

How do parents distinguish between a child who has a learning disability that needs special attention and a child who just needs more time to grow and develop?

Most parents know when they are seeing a deficit in their child. At first it seems like a fluke, then it keeps happening. I knew my son wasn't processing like his sibling by age 2. I waited until he was over 5 to have him tested, as each child is unique and observation of their development needs to be given time, as all experts will tell you. What they don't tell you are the things to avoid that could hamper their development. Like having your infant or toddler in seats, jumpers, walkers rather than on the floor on their tummy, and all the good activities that assures robust neuro-efficiency. My son was up and walking by 8 months. I didn't know he needed lots of encouragement to crawl in order to get the lower levels of his brain organized. The good news; is that you are never too late to capture those missed developmental moments. So, he crawled a lot at age ten.

There are so many things that we can do to assure our kids processing abilities are age appropriate. Engaging their tactile, visual and auditory systems in play, like skipping and alternating touching the opposite knee twice a day for two minutes. These kinds of things can turn into pure gold, as they develop mind-body connectivity at any age. So, it's never too late! We can always improve the situation. How much and how long it

takes is unique to each child. You do the activity until the function shows up. One day, suddenly, they'll have it and then they gain use of their full potential.

What are the academic advantages of homeschooling children with special needs?

Scientifically it has been proven that a child taught by the parent is the best-case scenario if the parent is willing to organize, mobilize and has embraced the teaching role. A parent is the best authority on their children. Especially if it is a special needs child. They understand the rhythm of that child, and I've always found the homeschool parent innovative in adapting what must be learned to serve the needs of their child. They will seek a solution and be persistent in their quest.

Also, the homeschool parent has a great advantage of being able to get course work out of the way in half the time of a traditional school. They can be a catalyst for true exploration of the world outside their home. They can teach toward high-interest areas, which is so valuable for a special needs child. The ability to teach family values is one aspect I feel will equip their children to be good citizens and happy within their own lives.

What challenges do parents face when homeschooling children with special needs?

In a word, I would say ignorance is a major challenge. When we don't have knowledge of what our child needs educationally, and when we don't know what's possible; then we can't do the best thing for any child. Children who struggle with symptoms of a learning problem, whether they are labeled as learning disabled or not, can find relief. We know that the brain is not static. It can be coaxed into repairing, creating and restoring improved function regardless of whether the child is gifted, typical, ADD, ADHD, PPD, autistic, down syndrome, or mentally challenged.

Our modality was first utilized on children with cerebral palsy. The results were so amazing; they found all children responded positively, because, it's a natural part of development. When developmental steps are missed, they can be picked up and that arrested or missing development is retrieved and set up, as was intended. We teach parents how to activate something our minds and bodies were created to do. We believe many child-rearing practices due to societal changes are a high contributing factor in learning disabilities. Sometimes we don't know the cause. The challenge for parents is finding the information that will teach or lead them to greater knowledge and understanding.

"No, we won't change some things, but we can improve many things significantly if we will read, study, and not take "NO" for an answer."

Little Giant Steps (LGS) offers both professional evaluation services, and home programs, but always we educate before we initiate anything with a family. We realize it must be right for them, because it requires a commitment to do the recommended activities for a period of time on a daily basis. The family needs to decide what model makes the most sense to them for their particular child.

What advice do you have for parents who feel unqualified or unequipped for homeschooling children with special needs?

You will never know what you can do without seeking what's available. Educate yourself. There are associations and help groups in abundance. Also, seek assistance from professionals. Now, I am not so naive to say you'll know exactly where to go, but I do know if you will seek with all your heart; you will find the right solution.

In my own personal case, I kept looking to teachers and educational professionals to help my son. I could see the vastness of the disparity between his intellectual capacity and his performance. It just didn't make any sense, because he was so smart, despite his severe learning disability, he managed to keep his grades above average. Therefore, he was dismissed by the school special educators as not needing help. It wasn't until I saw him crash emotionally due to the pressure of what his daily struggle cost him; did I look outside the box.

Putting your child on the road to reclaiming their God-given abilities with their own unique potential is very possible in this day and age. If you can't do the teaching by yourself to start off with, then seek those who can help and guide you. If you can't afford intervention by a professional, then find a sponsor who will help your child and family.

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with C.J. Rezak](#).

Little Giant Steps provides drug-free solutions for children who are struggling with Dyslexia, ADD, ADHD, Autism, Down Syndrome, and mental challenges. For more information, visit www.littlegiantsteps.com.

Gifted Education

Gifted children are often poorly served in public school classrooms.

Corin Barsily Goodwin is a homeschool mother of two, and the Executive Director of Gifted Homeschoolers Forum. In the following interview, she discusses the benefits of homeschooling gifted children and shares advice for choosing curriculum for gifted students:

How do parents determine whether or not their children are gifted?

Parents are generally pretty aware of when their child seems “different.” There are a number of behavioral checklists out there that they can peruse, although it's a rare child who meets every single criterion on any given checklist. That said, I would actually recommend that any parent with questions about giftedness or any other learning difference read enough to get a full picture. The best site out there on giftedness is [Hoagies Gifted](#), and of course I'd send anyone interested in educational options for kids who are gifted or are both gifted and LD to the [Gifted Homeschoolers Forum](#).

What challenges do parents face when homeschooling gifted children?

Well, there is the risk of a nervous breakdown! O.K., not really. I don't mean to make gifted children sound awful. However, they are often more challenging in so many ways: temperament, sensory processing, asynchronies and the frustrations inherent, emotional sensitivities, and more. Since the parents usually have many of the same issues, you get a household full of sensitive, intense people each with their own needs, and that can be a major challenge. Further, when you pick up a book on parenting, it's not generally applicable. When your child is different — and the more highly gifted, the more likely that the child stands out in some way — people notice and are more than happy to give well-meant advice intended to help you as a parent make your child into someone they are not. It can be discouraging.

“Homeschooling provides an educational environment tailored to meet the needs of the gifted child without the repetition of a modern, sequential curriculum; a focus on standards that do not support individual potential; or artificial social relations which are often poorly suited to gifted children.”

What are the academic advantages of homeschooling gifted children?

Homeschooling provides an educational environment tailored to meet the needs of the gifted child without the repetition of a modern, sequential curriculum; a focus on standards that do not support individual potential; or artificial social relations which are often poorly suited to gifted children. Flexibility is key, allowing the child to set the pace of learning and work from the educational materials best suited to them. The focus can be placed on individual strengths and interests while leaving room to work on any weaknesses. Homeschooled children also tend to have more time to pursue interests not covered in the classroom or to find experts willing to share their specialized knowledge.

What are the social advantages of homeschooling gifted children?

They often have greater access to like-minded people of all ages (intellectual peers rather than age peers) and to the many resources online, in the community, and at the library. There is more freedom to travel for education and social interaction. From a social-emotional standpoint, homeschooling parents can be more available to help their child navigate difficult situations as they occur.

What advice do you have for parents who feel unqualified or unequipped for homeschooling gifted children?

While it is unlikely that a highly gifted child would have parents of average intelligence (giftedness is genetic), many parents of gifted children worry that their child is smarter than they are, or are interested in advancing in a subject that the parent feels unqualified or unequipped to teach.

Fortunately, homeschoolers don't actually have to sit chained to the kitchen table with their children from 9am-3pm every weekday. Homeschool parents can guide their children by finding appropriate resources, mentors, teachers, or study groups. The library and the internet are excellent resources. Many gifted homeschoolers are also able to take occasional classes at a local school, or they take community college classes when they and their parents feel they are ready. It is not unusual to find gifted homeschoolers participating in a variety of activities (including a college class), each of which is geared toward a different age/grade level.

How should parents go about designing a program for homeschooling gifted children?

First they should get to understand how their child thinks, what their learning style is, and what interests them. Most packaged curriculum will not be a perfect fit for a child who whizzes through some subjects, couldn't care less about others, and refuses to do repetitious "practice" work once they understand the material. This is perfectly fine. The beauty of homeschooling these kids is that they don't have to wait for 30 other students to understand the material before they can move on. They can use non-standard materials, take topics "out of order" or with a multidisciplinary approach, and work at a pace (and during hours) that suits them.

What should parents who are homeschooling gifted children look for when choosing curriculum?

Parents should be aware that whatever they choose should be based on age-appropriate input from the child. If you want to avoid a power struggle, don't try to replicate school at home. Let the children have a say in the learning style and materials

that work for them, and don't invest a lot of money in something that they may be finished within just a few months. If you must use workbooks, there are plenty of decent stand-alone choices available in educational stores and online; a big, expensive package is probably not a good value.

Follow this link to read the [full transcript of my interview with Corin Barsily Goodwin](#).

Gifted Homeschoolers Forum is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization that works to educate and advocate for gifted homeschooling families. For more information about homeschooling gifted children, visit www.giftedhomeschoolers.org.

Thank You!

Your time is valuable, and I thank you for taking time to read *7 Secrets to Finding the Best Homeschool Curriculum*. I hope you've found this information helpful.

Please do me a favor and share this guide with friends and homeschool group members who may be looking for information about choosing curriculum.

Simply save this e-book to your computer and attach it to an e-mail, or post the following link on your website, blog, yahoo group or favorite homeschool forum:

www.successful-homeschooling.com/best-homeschool-curriculum.html

If you have questions about homeschooling, please visit www.successful-homeschooling.com.

Thanks again, and enjoy the journey!

Carletta