

How to Choose the Right Homeschool Curriculum

As homeschooling has become more popular, there are seemingly endless programs available in every color, shape, and style. You're not alone if you feel overwhelmed by all of the choices! Fortunately, a wide array of curriculum options also means that with a little bit of effort, you can find what will be the perfect fit for your family.

There are six factors that make each family unique: your *faith* (or philosophy), what *approach* you take to education, the *money* available to spend, the *individuals* who make up your family, your *life* circumstances, and finally *you*, the homeschooling parent.

We like to call these important considerations the "FAMILY factors." In this article, we will walk through each one to help you choose the right homeschool curriculum!

Why am I homeschooling?

F is for FAITH

Before you get caught in the weeds of which program, level, and edition you want, consider backing up and asking yourself some big-picture questions. *Why am I even doing this?* For many of us, our faith in God is the starting point for many of our big decisions. And even if you aren't religious, you likely have foundational beliefs for how you want to raise your children and what your priorities are for your family. A good starting point is: **What is it I want my children to learn and who do I want them to become?**

For many families, the *why* often stems from the desire to know what their kids are learning and to protect them from content that conflicts with their values. For others, it's about providing a more positive environment for their child's mental health. Maybe your reason is wanting something different for your kids than you had growing up. There are many paths that lead families to choose homeschooling!

If you're just starting out, don't worry if you don't have your homeschool philosophy outlined and typed out like some kind of doctoral dissertation. You can scribble a few notes on your napkin for now! You will figure out more of the "why" as you go. And sometimes, your values and "why" may change over the years, and that's okay too!

This is a conversation you may have as a family—not just with a spouse, but with your older homeschooled children as well. **Students who know your reason for homeschooling are more likely to get on board with what you plan.** This also gives you something to fall back on when you hit the hard days and feel like giving up. Keep your end goal in mind!

How do I begin? Is there a "right way" to homeschool?

A is for APPROACH

Once you know *why* you want to home educate, the next question is: *how?* Every family will answer this question differently. And just like with your "why," you don't have to have the "how" all planned out for the next ten years. Some parents start by thinking back to when they were in school, and what methods helped them to learn (or not learn!) new things.

There are a few different homeschooling approaches to consider as you begin. Some of these approaches overlap, so don't feel like you need to pick just one. They are great starting points as you think about what you want your day-to-day instruction to look like!

The Traditional Approach

Some families use a traditional approach, which is often recreating a “school-at-home” environment. Your materials may be the same as what is used in a traditional classroom, with the teacher leading most of the instruction. Programs like [Abeka](#) and [Discover!](#) fall into the traditional category. Many homeschoolers start with a traditional method that has more structure and support until they feel confident adding in different “outside the box” elements.

The Classical Approach

The classical approach focuses on the three stages of learning (grammar, logic, rhetoric) and teaching students how to think. Many of these programs will offer curriculum in a three- or four-year cycle of topics. They also often include studies in Latin and making connections across disciplines. [The Well-Trained Mind Essential Edition](#) is an excellent resource for classical education at home. [Memoria Press](#) also publishes classical education materials in all subject areas, including resources for children with special needs.

The Charlotte Mason Approach

Charlotte Mason was a British educator from the 19th century whose educational methods have made a comeback among homeschoolers. Her low-key and hands-on approach relies on living books rather than textbooks and integrates reading in all subjects. In these types of programs, you’ll see a lot of narration, nature study, and short yet meaningful lessons. [Learning Language Arts Through Literature](#) and Apologia’s [Exploring Creation](#) elementary science series use a Charlotte Mason approach.

The Unit Study Approach

[Unit studies](#) organize subjects around a theme and use books and hands-on activities rather than textbooks. Since life is rarely organized into neat subjects, doing unit studies allows your student to integrate learning as it happens in real life. If you’re studying the Wright Brothers, doesn’t it also make sense to study the physics of flight? And then maybe do a spelling lesson on the difference between “right,” “write,” “rite,” and “wright”? If it’s connected in real life, it can be connected in your curriculum!

Examples of popular programs using the unit study (or thematic approach) include [Layers of Learning](#) and the literature-based [Five in a Row](#).

The Montessori Approach

Montessori is a methodology based on the work of 20th century educator Maria Montessori. She emphasized sensory-driven discovery learning and hands-on, real-life applications in a prepared learning environment. [Miquon Math](#) uses a Montessori approach.

The Unschooling Approach

Unschooling may sound like “not schooling”, but this approach focuses on letting children learn naturally rather than using artificial “school-y” methods.

In families with kids who are very creative and self-motivated and parents who are highly attuned to their kids’ interests, unschooling can work very well! Even though it is often considered unstructured, there often is a higher level of parental involvement, so it’s not necessarily easier. Some families use a more traditional method for core subjects, then allow a child to do some self-directed unschooling in other subject areas. When your child has an unquenchable interest to learn a certain subject or skill, this is where unschooling often happens without you even realizing it! The [Thinking Tree Fun Schooling Journals](#) offer a unique opportunity to guide independent learning for families that want to incorporate more natural learning but aren’t sure how to start.

The Eclectic Approach

Do all these approaches sound so interesting that you can't decide which you like best? Then the eclectic approach might be right for you. Go ahead and mix and match programs and curricula that work best for your family (assuming it also falls within the requirements of your [state laws](#)).

If you feel completely lost trying to understand all these theories, we have [a great selection of books](#) that will teach you how to teach your kids. Your willingness to learn something new is a great example for your children to see!

Approaches Within an Approach

Certain subjects also have approaches within an approach. Especially when looking at math programs, there are a few different ways that skills-based subjects are taught. Let's take a look at them!

Sequential: This curriculum progresses through well-defined learning objectives that build on previous lessons. These programs emphasize mastery before moving to the next topic. A popular highly sequential program is [Math-U-See](#).

Spiral: In spiral programs, topics and concepts are repeated from level to level, adding more depth at each pass and connecting with review. These are great for students who tend to forget concepts quickly and need frequent review. [Saxon Math](#) is a popular spiral-type program.

Conceptual: The conceptual approach focuses on the "why" behind the math. Often, this means one concept and skill mastered before moving on. [Singapore Math](#) uses a conceptual approach. But how much will all of this cost?

M is for MONEY

For many homeschooling families, the cost of materials is a significant factor in choosing curriculum. If spending less is a priority, you may want to choose non-consumable programs with reproducible pages that can be used with subsequent children. Examples include [The Story of the World](#) or [The Mystery of History](#) with downloadable PDFs that may be printed for all your children. Amish publishers often produce resources that are very affordable, like the [Pathway Reading](#) programs. Or you can choose digital curricula that offer discounted family plans, such as [CTC Math](#).

Think about how you already manage your home and go from there. Do you love DIYing things, or would you rather purchase something that's already pre-packaged and ready to go? If you have more money than time, you can choose programs that do a lot of the heavy lifting for you, including offering video instruction.

The good news is that successful homeschool students have come from families with varying financial resources. A smaller budget does not mean your kids can't get a rich education! Don't underestimate the value of your time, a strong community, a library card, and plenty of creativity and determination!

(If you are experiencing a financial hardship, please feel free to apply to our [First Fruits Scholarship fund](#)!)

What about the unique needs of my child?

I is for INDIVIDUAL

If you have more than one child, it doesn't take long to ask yourself, "how can they both be my kids, and yet be so very different from each other?" One of the main benefits of homeschooling is being able to customize your child's education based on their individual needs, abilities, and learning styles. Just like with other areas of parenting, what works for one child may not work for another. And as parent educators, we have an advantage in truly knowing our kids best and being the most invested in their success. As you look at curriculum, keep in mind the different ways your kids may learn!

If your child is an **auditory learner**, they need to hear what's being taught. These students benefit from hearing the words said out loud. Consider adding plenty of read-alouds and audiobooks!

Visual learners need to see the material and concepts they're learning. Curriculum that has lots of pictures, charts, and diagrams will help them grasp concepts easier. Many homeschooling families add a chalkboard or whiteboard to their homes to help children who are visual learners!

Kinesthetic learners need hands-on activities or body movement to learn. Sometimes this means keeping their hands and bodies busy while they learn. Maybe they need to sit on an exercise ball while they do seatwork. My kids loved to color or do fine-motor activities while I read aloud. They told me that they remembered the story better when they were coloring a picture!

Multi-sensory curriculum includes multiple styles of learning to accommodate different types of learners. These programs include bookwork as well as audiobooks, body-moving games, or building models of what students are learning about!

How will homeschooling fit into my already crazy life?

L is for LIFE

Maybe your family is like mine and you find yourself sighing, "It's always *something!*" Just when you think life will get back to normal, boom. An emergency, a broken appliance, a kid gets sick, a wrench in our plans. There are so many "somethings" that can affect our ability to execute our homeschool plan the way we want to. What are those somethings for you? Are you in the middle of home renovations? Are there family members with health issues? Is there a new baby in the family? **Be realistic about what your daily and weekly life looks like. What kind of curriculum will serve you best in the midst of your current situation?**

For example, if you are in a season where you spend a lot of time in the car with your kids, those programs that come with audiobooks will be a lifesaver! Or if you are taking school items with you on-the-go, thin workbooks may be a better choice than programs that use heavy textbooks.

Related to your lifestyle is the question of how long you see yourself homeschooling, and if or when your child will return to a traditional school. Some families take home educating year by year, but it is helpful to know where you think you'll be in the future as you choose curriculum. If you anticipate your child returning to a traditional school, you'll want to choose curricula that will prepare them to succeed in that new environment.

What if I'm not like the other homeschool moms I know?

Y is for YOU

This brings us to YOU. You are a key component to your home and homeschool. And that's good news! Every parent brings a unique set of strengths and weaknesses to their homeschool. Different curricula require [different levels of involvement](#) and energy, so be realistic about what you can and can't do. How much time and energy do you have for your kids, for their educational, physical, and emotional needs? How much structure do you need versus flexibility? Do you enjoy planning time or need something more open-and-go? How much outside support do you have? **Finding your teaching style and making that work with your children's learning styles takes time.** No matter what program you choose, be encouraged that you are the secret sauce. You can help a curriculum come alive, and most important, instill a love for learning in your child. Be patient with yourself—you've got this! Start by asking the right questions and you might be surprised at the answers you find!

Do you still have questions?

Check out [our videos](#) or download our [printable worksheet](#) as you think through your family's unique factors. And always feel free to call our friendly and FREE [curriculum consultants](#) to help you wade through all the choices, Monday-Friday, 8:30am-5pm CST.
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