

The New School Year

*Planning Your Course and Letting
the Lord Determine Your Steps*

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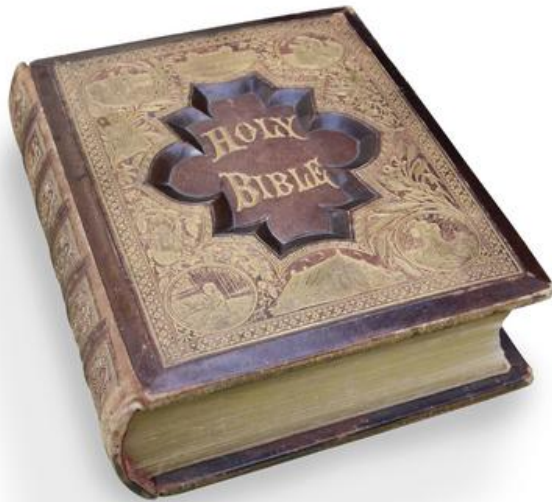


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The New School Year

Planning Your Course and Letting *the Lord* Determine Your Steps



A Compilation of Encouragement From:

Steve and Jane Lambert, Five in a Row

Malia Russell, Homemaking 911

Terri Johnson, Knowledge Quest

Amanda Bennett, Amanda Bennett Unit Studies

Cheryl Allin, The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine

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Project Manager: Charlotte McKinney, Stephanie Ruby

Project Editors: Karen Sargent, Elizabeth Brandt

Cover Design and Art Director: Christi Gifford, www.ArtDesignsbyChristi.com

Text Layout: Krystin Corneilson

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Introduction

Karen Sargent, *The Old Schoolhouse*® Magazine

In August 2009 I will begin my twentieth year of homeschooling. I have five children, all of whom I have taught from birth. Two were high achievers, one was average, and two are learning disabled. Four have graduated from high school, and the last one is beginning eleventh grade. Over the years I have been an active-duty Navy spouse, moving no fewer than thirteen times. I have run several businesses from home, including residential painting and childcare, and I currently work part-time editing. I am the primary bill payer and budgeter, the one who coordinates medical care, the cook, the teacher, the social director, and during long deployments, I even tried to be the dad. With all that, you would think I had my life together.

You would be wrong.

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You would be wrong.

I am not an organized person. I have a wad of sticky-notes on my desk that contain important data. When my husband, Ben, calls from the office in search of some tidbit of information, I sift through my wad until I find it. The to-be-filed pile on top of the filing cabinet is five inches thick and contains papers from four months ago. My budget is written in stenographer's notebooks. Somehow the bills get paid every month, but there is an occasional close call.

And school? Don't even ask. The extent of my plan is that I want the kids to graduate at the end of twelfth grade. Once a year I think about what each child needs to study the next year, and I write it in whatever notebook I happen to be using at the time. When it's time to update the plan the following year, I spend half a day searching for last year's notebook, if I even still have it. The last child's

educational plan is written in three different notebooks, and each version is slightly different.

And every year I vow to change. Somehow I never have learned to gracefully blend and balance the household, homeschool, part-time work, and relationship demands of my life. My motto is "Do one thing well." Of course, that means everything else falls by the wayside, and I'm still trying to figure out what one thing I do well. I often feel like a cartoon character spinning in high-speed circles, and every once in a while I reach out and grab something on my way past. Crisis management is how I live.

Occasionally, a woman comes along who has it all together. You know the type I'm talking about. She is perfectly clothed and has shoes to match every outfit. She carries one of those organizer-style purses and never fumbles around looking for her keys or the dry-cleaning receipt. Her children are well behaved, well groomed, and color coordinated. Their pigtails wouldn't dare sag. This picture-perfect homeschooler has planned each of her children's educational goals from birth through graduate school. She has daily lesson plans documented for this year (in 15-minute increments) and is currently working on next year's. Her students' artwork is framed and neatly displayed in the family gallery, and their schoolwork filed efficiently in personalized folders. Her school room includes an art corner, a reading

nook, and a computer station. Science equipment is stored handily in its own kitchen cabinet, and the music room contains a piano, three different-sized violins, a cello, a clarinet, and a flute. Her family is never late for co-op.

If you are this type of woman, stop right now. This is not an E-Book that you need to read.

However, if you are *not* this woman, but run your home and school a little more like the way I do, read on; this is the book for you.

• • •
**... if you are *not* this woman,
but run your home and school
a little more like the way I do, read on;
this is the book for you.**
• • •

Planning Your Homeschool Year— How to Cooperate with the Holy Spirit

Steve and Jane Lambert, *Five in a Row*

plan (verb): To formulate a program for a definite course of action.

For classroom teachers, the emphasis is on the verb "plan." By mid-August, they have 180 very precise daily plans completed. Barring snow days or a fire in the school building, they can tell you precisely what they're going to be doing on Wednesday, April 7, 2010. From 9:10 to 9:50 a.m., they'll be reading about plankton on pages 292-299 in the science text. They'll be reviewing compound fractions in chapter 33 in the math text from 11:40 a.m. to 12:10 p.m. for a test on Friday. They'll have students writing a 350-word short story in third person with extra credit for no spelling errors between 2:05 and 2:40 p.m. in English. And they'll be lecturing on the three

principal causes of the Spanish-American War in history from 2:50 until the final bell at 3:35 p.m.

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As homeschoolers, it's vitally important that we know how to plan our school year out in such a way that the Lord can have consistent input in our classroom.

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And if they've been teaching the same grade for a few years, they can tell you that this is precisely what they did on the first Wednesday in April in 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005, and 2004. Classroom teachers are masters of planning their school years with precision. Should they be our role models? Do we need to

become master planners?

Or does the liberty of homeschooling entitle us to wake up each morning and wonder what we're going to teach about today? Or if you're an unschooler, you don't even need to wonder about

what you should be teaching today. Instead, you just wonder what sorts of things your children are going to want to learn about today. Is that the joy of homeschooling—complete freedom to wander aimlessly through the world around us, randomly studying whatever we want whenever the notion strikes us?

I believe the answer is found in Proverbs 16:9 "*A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.*"

As homeschoolers, it's vitally important that we know how to plan our school year out in such a way that the Lord can have consistent input in our classroom.

It is essential that we have a clear mission statement for our homeschool. And I would suggest that at least part of that mission statement should focus on raising disciples and glorifying God. In the end, education is about disciple making. Leave God out of the equation and teach that knowledge is the purpose of our instruction, and you'll end up with disciples of the spirit of this world—children who believe that achievement and success are the goals of a life well lived.

Never doubt that we are making disciples through the process of education. So are private schools and public schools. The only difference is which master each disciple will serve. We all serve a master—and so will our children.

We live in a world of three competing educational philosophies: Greek, Roman, and Hebrew. It's vital that you know the difference.

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Never doubt that we are making disciples through the process of education. So are private schools and public schools. The only difference is which master each disciple will serve. We all serve a master—and so will our children.
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In the Greek model, knowledge was the highest good. Socrates said, "There is only one good—knowledge, and only one evil—ignorance." One need not look far to see that model in popular homeschool curriculum choices, authors, and convention speakers.

In the Roman model, power and entertainment were the prizes that life had to offer. For Caesars and citizens

alike, to rule the world and then enjoy the spectacle of gladiators and lions in the Coliseum was the highest goal. One need only look at popular American culture to see that the Roman model is alive and well today.

The Hebrew model placed the highest value on the dual objectives expressed by Jesus when asked what was required to have eternal life.

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" and ". . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 22: 37, 39b)
In Hebrew thought, having a vital relationship with both God and our fellow man was the highest priority.

The Bible goes on to praise knowledge. Proverbs 18:15 exhorts us *"The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge."*

In Colossians 2:2-3 Paul says, *"That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."*

Did you follow that? God says if we're wise and discerning we will acquire knowledge; we will seek it out. But He also tells us that the treasures of all wisdom and all knowledge are hidden in Christ. If we're to acquire wisdom and knowledge, Christ *must be* a part of our homeschool planning process, because all wisdom and all knowledge

are hidden in Him. And if our ultimate goal is to produce disciples of Him, we must teach our children to love God and to love their neighbor.

• • •
If we're to acquire wisdom and knowledge, **Christ must be a part of our homeschool planning process**, because all wisdom and all knowledge are hidden in Him. And if our ultimate goal is to produce disciples of Him, we must teach our children to love God and to love their neighbor.
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Which philosophy are we to embrace: Greek? Roman? Hebrew? As Christians, I trust most of us can agree that the Hebrew model ought to be the basis of our educational philosophy. Power and entertainment are passing pleasures of this world which serve no eternal purpose. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge, the Bible says, simply makes us proud and arrogant. In 1 Corinthians 8:1 Paul says, *"Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth."* Both the Greek and Roman models are hollow.

Allowing our children to plan their own way through the educational jungle each year leaves God out of the plan. And planning our own way through the school year maze may leave God out if it's not built wisely.

So finally, then, we come to this question: How can we plan our year in such a way that we have a set of learning objectives and a deliberate "course," yet still allow room for the Lord to determine our steps? If it's in Christ that the treasures of all wisdom and knowledge have been hidden, we need to plan in such a way that He is part of our daily lesson plans.

I would submit that this sort of planning requires more than simply including "Bible" as a part of our daily curriculum. It even requires more than having daily devotions during our homeschool day. It requires purposefully *inviting* the Holy Spirit to have His way with our plans and then listening for the quiet, unobtrusive voice that offers to determine our steps.

Five in a Row was created with this very goal in mind—a loosely structured daily plan that allows for Divine intervention each day in unexpected

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I believe we set aside unplanned segments in our teaching day and then earnestly *ask the Lord to show us how He wants to fill that time.* We *invite* the Holy Spirit to come and determine our steps.
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ways. But regardless of which curriculum you've chosen this year, you can modify it in such a way as to invite the Lord's input into your classroom.

I've said for years that we often find that faith is spelled R-I-S-K. Every time we step out in faith we are taking a risk. We risk looking foolish. We risk being disappointed.

We risk having our hearts broken. Yet to live by faith requires a willingness to take risks and to work without a net.

So in practical terms, how do we develop faith-based lesson plans for our homeschool year?

I believe we set aside unplanned segments in our teaching day and then earnestly *ask* the Lord to show us how *He* wants to fill that time. We *invite* the Holy Spirit to come and determine our steps.

Most of us are guilty of over planning. We may think that we have six hours in our teaching day, for instance. And we plan accordingly. Yet in reality, between unexpected phone calls, cranky toddlers whose naptimes just didn't come together the way we'd hoped, and the myriad of other interruptions, we probably only have four

hours in our teaching day. And then we try to cram six hours of material into four hours of time and the results are predictable: stress, anxiety, anger, tears, and arguments.

In a national survey done several years ago, classroom teachers were asked, "How much time, on average, do you have available for each student in your classroom to answer individual questions and work with them on their individual learning needs?" The answer: less than two minutes per day. If a classroom teacher has 25 students in his room, he has, on average, less than 50 minutes of available time each day to work with students individually. You have more than that—even if you have seven or eight children. And if you're just beginning the journey and only have one or two students to work with, you have several hours each day to work with each of them. Even if you're not very good at homeschooling yet, the odds are stacked in your favor. Your kids should do just fine.

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Do an experiment right now. Go to the kitchen and get a glass from the cupboard. Now fill it with water. (I'd suggest you fill it with sticky fruit punch for a more dramatic lesson, but I'm not that mischievous!) Now fill it to the very top. Make maximum use of every available milliliter of space available in your glass. If it's a 6-ounce glass, by golly, fill up all 6 ounces. If you've chosen an 8-ounce glass, make absolutely SURE you've gotten all 8 ounces of water into your glass.

Now begin walking while carrying the glass. Okay, walk a little faster. Now begin jogging as you would have to in your teaching day as unexpected delays come up and you have to hurry to catch up. Continue running down the hall toward the living room as fast as you can while carrying your full glass.

Well, how did that work for you? Do you still have all 6 ounces in your glass? Probably not. In fact, you've got a great sense of balance if you've got even 3 ounces left. Unexpected interruptions cause us to have to move faster throughout our

teaching day. And while each individual, unique interruption may be "unexpected," we need to *expect* interruptions—every day. Life is never neat. And certain seasons in our life are *very* messy.

If you expect to have six hours in your teaching day and you plan accordingly, where does the Lord have any opportunity to direct your steps?

I submit that planning is important. It's important to plan for learning—and it's important to plan for extra time. If you think you have six hours in your teaching day, plan for three. You'll probably discover you have four, and that leaves a full hour during the day for the Lord's interaction in your classroom.

Leave intentional gaps for the Lord to "breathe" on a discussion you were having and for your children to want to do more reading than you had planned. Leave gaps for unexpected "interruptions" that may be a great opportunity the Lord has just dropped in your lap. Perhaps you see your elderly next-door neighbor out working in the backyard. Use the available

minutes in your teaching plan to take the children and go offer to help rake leaves. It just may be that this elderly neighbor will talk with your children about the great depression, or the

Korean War, or what it was like to live in Europe in the 1950s or maybe he will teach them about the various types of flowers they cultivate in their garden.

Use those "gaps" to pray silently: "Lord, I planned this break in our teaching day because I want you to be a part of our plan. I open up my classroom to you, Lord. Please come and have your way with us. Make me sensitive to your gentle whisperings. Help me hear

you as you provide unexpected opportunities to gain wisdom and knowledge. Show me ways we can love you more, and love others the way we love ourselves. I'm believing in you, God. Amen."

Then sit quietly for a moment and "listen." Think about what you've been reading today. Think about people you know and what's going on in their lives. Think about your individual children and what they've been talking about lately. Then

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If you think you have six hours in your teaching day, plan for three. You'll probably discover you have four, and that leaves a full hour during the day for the Lord's interaction in your classroom. . . . Leave gaps for unexpected "interruptions" that may be a great opportunity the Lord has just dropped in your lap.
• • •

begin to act by faith: Take a R-I-S-K and do something spontaneous.

You'll discover that the Lord's yoke is easy. His burden is light. The rhythm of homeschooling in His grace is a gentle rhythm that you can maintain mile after mile. Homeschooling is a marathon—not a sprint. The prize doesn't go to the one who gets out of the starting blocks fastest. Rather, it goes to the one who can pace herself at a sustainable rhythm. That requires "margin." Too often homeschoolers plan their school year or teaching day with absolutely no margin! If anything unexpected happens, (and it always does!) their plans fall apart. They become anxious, angry, and discouraged.

We need margin in every area of our lives. We need margin for rest. We need margin for prayer. We need margin for intimacy with our spouse. We need margin in our classroom. We need margin in our finances. If we plan a budget that accounts for every available dollar in our paycheck, there will rarely ever be a month that we don't have unexpected expenses come up which leave us strapped for cash at the end of the month and

angry. We need margin. If your paycheck is \$3000, develop a budget that only accounts for \$2200 each month in pre-determined expenses. I can almost guarantee that you'll have several hundred dollars in "unexpected" expenses come up this month when the lawn mower breaks, the car needs a new battery, and your daughter ends up with two cavities that cost \$180 to have filled. If, by God's mercy, you *do* end up with several hundred dollars left over at month's end for your depleted savings account or to share with someone in need, hallelujah!

Plan your school year exactly the same way. Plan for unexpected interruptions.

Plan for fewer than the maximum number of hours you expect to have available. Plan for quiet times when the Lord can determine your steps in unexpected ways. And then *ask Him* and *trust Him* to use those minutes wisely.

My guess is this: At the end of the year, you'll look back and discover that most of the very best experiences you had were during those quiet moments when you took a risk and God answered. Maybe you were talking about how many people died during World War II in a history discussion. And suddenly, during the quiet time

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• • •

when you invited the Lord to direct your school day, your daughter sat quietly for several minutes and then asked, "Why did Granddaddy have to die last year?" What happens during the next 30 minutes as you talk about life and death issues that have been troubling a young mind will be of far more eternal value than if you had crammed in an extra half hour of grammar that day.

Or maybe you've just finished reading about frogs in science class and now you come to a planned "God timeout." You suddenly find yourself wondering if there might be any frogs in the small pond behind your house. Is that God? Or was it your imagination? By faith, you take a risk and say, "I have an idea. Let's go out to the pond and see if we can find a frog." Perhaps you won't find a frog. Instead you find a baby bird that's fallen from its nest. Frogs suddenly forgotten, your son carefully picks the bird up, cradling it in his hands. "Can we keep it momma? Can we?" You may be about to go on a remarkable God-directed detour that will be far more meaningful than reading one additional reference work on frogs in your science lesson plan.

Planning is an important part of being a responsible homeschool teacher. So is knowing what NOT to plan. It's the gaps in the day that give our lives margin—and give God the chance to direct our paths. Plan accordingly. Act accordingly. Believe accordingly. Ask Him to meet you during those times. He is faithful.

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It's the gaps in the day that give our lives margin—and **give God the chance to direct our paths.** Plan accordingly. Act accordingly. Believe accordingly. Ask Him to meet you during those times. He is faithful.

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Managing a Multi-Level Homeschool

An excerpt from our workshop: [Managing the Multi-Level Homeschool](#)
Malia Russell, Homemaking 911

When I started homeschooling with just one child in school and the rest in the preschool ages, I had to manage teaching time with a 6th grader while keeping the toddlers from destroying the house. As each additional child became school aged (and we still have a preschooler), I had to learn many techniques to make sure we could get it all done. The days of the one-room school houses kept coming to mind for me, and I thought, "It should be pretty simple to school just four children." But what I have now come to understand is that the teachers in those one-room school houses were not trying to make all the meals, do the laundry, answer the phone, embark on field trips, and do all the behavior and character training for all the children while

keeping toddlers under a careful and loving eye. Instead of just looking at the academic needs of the children, homeschool parents need to examine the big picture of what we are really

being called to do and find a way to make it work for our families.

... what I have now come to understand is that the teachers in those one-room school houses were not trying to make all the meals, do the laundry, answer the phone, embark on field trips, and do all the behavior and character training for all the children while keeping toddlers under a careful and loving eye.

Every homeschool is unique. We each have unique standards for what constitutes a good education, good behavior, a clean house, an acceptable meal, and what outside activities are important to our families. To break this into manageable chunks, we will use those six question words we all memorized in

grammar school: Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why.

Who

In your home, it is important to determine *who* makes the decisions for your family's day. From toddlers to college-aged students, it is important to establish very early *who* the authority in the home is. Who decides what assignments and chores will be completed and in what manner? In a healthy home, this will be the parents, and in a homeschool, it will be the primary home educator.

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• • •

There are some simple ways to see if you are truly the authority in your home. On Monday morning when you wake up, you tell the children that they may have oatmeal for breakfast. If you are the authority in your home, the children will

carry on and prepare their oatmeal cheerfully, eat, clean up, and move on with their day. If you are not the authority, you will be met with questions, comments, and complaints. Then, you tell your children the plan for the day by letting them know their assigned school work and the chores expected of them. If you are in charge of the home, the children may require some guidance and encouragement, but for the most part, they will simply do as you have told them. If you are not the authority in your home, you will be met with blank stares, blatant disobedience, arguing, or passive aggressive behaviors like agreeing but never following through on the work to be done.

If you go back in history and examine the one-room-school-house model, you can see clearly the teacher had a plan for the day and the children understood the plan was to be followed as the teacher described it. They did not whine and complain that work was not their favorite, or too hard, nor did they argue. That would have been very destructive in the school environment, yet many homeschool mothers deal with these exact behaviors every day. In order to have a successful multi-level school, you must establish that you have the authority and you will decide the plan for the day.

What

Once you have established that you are the authority in the home, you and your spouse need to examine *what* curriculum to use. To make handling multiple ages easier, there are a couple of things I have done:

Combine Grades for Some Subjects

For certain subjects, you can include multiple-aged children. Science, history, Bible, and art are some such subjects. I am fortunate in that two of my children are able to be in the same science and history as one another. In this way, I can teach both my middle girls these subjects at the same time, though I may not require all the same work from them. For example, my older daughter may have additional reading on her own or extra writing assignments. Since my girls are very strong readers, they may take turns reading the chapter aloud to one another while I am busy on another task.

Use the Electronic Tools of the Trade

Let unabridged audio books treat your children to a world of literature that you simply do not have time to read. Enjoy these books together in the car, during chores, and at bedtime. These are not meant to take place of you reading to them or of

them reading independently, but making good use of those times when you are busy but can listen can really enhance your children's education.

Some of our favorites are: [*The Chronicles of Narnia*](#), [*The Little House on the Prairie Series*](#) and just good, wholesome literature. This is a great way to increase your children's intellect and vocabulary as well, because they can often listen to and comprehend books that are far beyond their reading levels. We generally use the library for these, but if you do not live near a library that has a good audio book collection, I have included some online places to get audio books at no charge by downloading them onto your computer.

Use CDs, tapes, and computer games to do drill work with your children. Learning math facts, grammar facts, a foreign language, and any memory work can be done primarily or enhanced

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Enjoy these books together in the car, during chores, and at bedtime.
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with a few well-chosen resources. For example, we love the [Schoolhouse Rock DVD](#) or audio CD, and we use AWANA CDs to help with Scripture memory. We use [DIVE CDs to help with Saxon Math](#). We just started using an exercise video for children that reviews basic math facts.

Feel free to mix in educational videos when possible. We often borrow these from the library and use them to enhance history or science concepts or to learn about great composers.

Choose Curriculum Wisely

Look at the curriculum you have that you cannot currently combine, and see what is necessary, what is helpful and good, and what is user-friendly. If you need a two-hundred-page instruction manual to teach a fairly basic concept, it may not be the best choice. If you spend more time preparing for the subject than your child actually spends learning, it is probably not the best choice. Choose curriculum where children who can read can work independently. Then spend your time in the summer or on school breaks training them how to proceed through a subject

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Choose curriculum where children who can read can work independently. Then spend your time in the summer or on school breaks training them how to proceed through a subject without you having to sit next to them.

• • •

without you having to sit next to them. You may need to train them to use [timers](#), to give themselves goals, to circle a problem they need help with, and to follow up with you at the appointed time.

When

There are two parts to the *when*: when to introduce certain subjects and when to actually execute the class work each day.

When to Introduce Subjects

For our family, all avid readers, we actually want to teach our children to read as young as possible. As soon as our children show interest, we begin teaching them to read independently. Not every family agrees with this philosophy, but we love for our children to be able to read young. First, it helps pass the time in a productive way. When we are at doctor's appointments, on a long car ride, at bedtime, and when relaxing together, it is great for a child to be able to pick up a book and thus entertain himself. Another reason to teach reading early is that it empowers

the student to be adept at using the computer, doing workbook pages, and following directions with ease. Since all my children were early readers, by the time they were in first grade, they were reading on a much higher level. This does not mean you should always require them to read on their highest level. They can still delight in and enjoy books that are typical for their own ages. We have tried to keep a variety of children's books of all levels around. They can still laugh and read the book: *If You Give A Pig a Party*, even though they are capable of reading *Heidi*. Let them enjoy the books that are appropriate for their ages. This will also help eliminate the problem of only having a few books that are morally acceptable for them to read. My seven-year-old is not ready for sixth-grade-level literature, for while she could read it, she does not need to be exposed to those themes at such a tender age.

You can also decide to focus your primary attention on the absolutes. For us, those are: Bible, math, and reading. If we can only get a small amount done for some reason, I will choose those first. You can decide to skip science or history for a year and it will not really cause much of a problem. You can also

do a semester approach. For the first half of the year, you may complete all of your science and then do history during the second half. Each time you pick up and put away that book, you lose a little bit of time. By eliminating the subject, or condensing it to half the year, you reduce your starting and stopping time, which will be a benefit.

The second part of the *when* question is:

When Will You Do School?

Scheduling, though resisted by many, is a key part to a satisfactory one-room schoolhouse.

Imagine if the teacher showed up every day with no plan or purpose. The children would question everything, because they would quickly learn there were no absolutes. The teacher would spend her entire day making decisions, trying to figure out what was most important and when to make it happen. It is no different in your own home. If you start each day with no plan and you are continually reinventing the wheel, your children's education will suffer for it. They will take the path of least resistance, losing interest in

• • •
You can also decide to focus your primary attention on the absolutes. For us, those are: Bible, math, and reading. If we can only get a small amount done for some reason, I will choose those first.
• • •

educational subjects, and will spend their time trying to beg off of work and move on to play. If you start each day with a well-established plan, the children will move through the day with little effort and conflict, because they will assume the plan is an absolute part of their lives.

• • •

If you start each day with a well-established plan, the children will move through the day with little effort and conflict, because they will assume the plan is an absolute part of their lives.

• • •

Your schedule can be very structured (everything broken into 30-minute segments) or very loose (more like a “flow to the day” than a strict schedule). There may be a time and a place for both of these in your life, but making sure you have decided *when* to do school beforehand and sticking to it as much as is reasonable will help you go a long way toward having the full cooperation of your students.

Put yourself into their position. Imagine you get to work each day and your boss, who controls all

your work, has it locked up in his office. He tells you to sit at your desk and wait for him to decide what you should be doing. Then he gets distracted with all kinds of important things, and you are left to sit listlessly and roam the halls until he gets back to you. That is what it is like for your children when you have no plan. Make a plan for your day. If you have a hard time with making a schedule, at a minimum, make a schedule for your toddlers and babies. If you keep them structured and offer them plenty of guidance and things to do, they will be a blessing to your entire family and will not spend their days getting into trouble, getting scolded, and being a source of stress. They can, instead, be productive and busy and the blessing God intended them to be for your family. You can see our workshop: [Keeping Young Ones Happy and Occupied During School Time](#) for ideas to keep them busy and happy.

The next big question is:

Where

Where should you be? When you are managing a multi-level school, it is easy to get involved in many outside activities. You may wish to talk with your spouse and ask where you should physically be each day. Co-ops, support groups, outside field trips, sports, the computer, outside lessons, and doctor’s appointments all encroach upon the

precious hours you have to educate your children and keep your home. If you find that you are running out of the house every day, or even a few days a week, you may need to analyze whether the things you are doing away from your home are the best use of your time. You may also look for ways to carefully combine trips outside your home to be the most efficient, or share rides to classes and lessons with another mom so that you both do not carry the burden of transporting children to an event if you can take turns. When a new opportunity pops up, ask yourself: Where should I be?

We are going to skip the *how* for now and jump right into *why*.

Why

Ask yourself regularly *why* you are doing things the way you do them. Why are you homeschooling? Why are you teaching certain subjects? Why are things working well or working poorly? Why do you like a particular curriculum? Why is your child excelling or struggling with certain material? The answers to these questions will often help reveal answers to how to make things better.

Finally, we are going to talk about *how*.

How

How do you take all the responsibilities you have and accomplish them in the amount of time you actually have?

First, systematically work on simplifying or batching your work to gain efficiency and speed. [Decluttering](#), eliminating, and organizing will do much to make the running of your household smooth. Make it a summer goal to teach your children to simply do as they are told and to do their work diligently. Coach them in the skill of working well together and separately. Spend time out of school to teach them to regard one another's feelings above their own. These are all things that I really try to focus on during summer and winter breaks so that when our heavier school season rolls around, we can have some of these basic issues already at rest, and we can focus more fully on academics.

Finally, look at batching and simplifying in other areas of your life. Combine similar tasks to keep a flow about your day and reduce your stop and start time. Use timers liberally to help you keep track of what is supposed to be happening.

... you may need to analyze whether the things you are doing away from your home are the best use of your time.

Timers are a great mental signal. I bring one with me to remind me to switch laundry. I always use them when I cook. The children use them for math quizzes and reading time. They use them for practice time for piano.

Remember that our heavenly Father knows your frame and knows your limitations. He will never ask you to do more than you are physically capable of doing. He may supernaturally intercede for you at times and help you accomplish far more than a normal person could accomplish given the same gifts and talents, but for the day-to-day running of your life, He does not ask the impossible. If you feel like you have more on your plate than you can possibly do well, then you are very likely doing some things He never intended for you to do. There is a time and place and season for all kinds of activities under heaven, but they are not always right *now*. If you are overwhelmed, prayerfully consider what are some things you need to set aside temporarily or permanently to accomplish the good work He intends for you.

• • •

There is a time and place and season for all kinds of activities under heaven, **but they are not always right now.**

• • •

Here are some examples of things I have had to forego for now in order to accomplish the tasks the Lord is calling me to do:

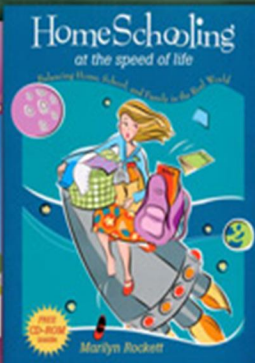
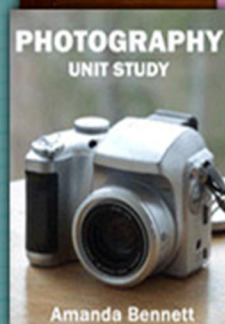
1. Television.
2. Listening to any music that is not Godly or classical.
3. Excessive numbers of trips outside the home for things like sports, clubs, classes, Bible studies, and extra grocery runs.
4. Reading anything ungodly. If it does not build my faith or help me in my role as a Godly wife, mother, and home educator, I do not currently have time for it.
5. Long phone calls with friends; phone calls during school time.
6. Shopping.
7. Excessive computer time.
8. Hobbies.
9. Retreats.
10. Some volunteer activities.
11. Long baths.
12. Perfection in housework.
13. Saying yes to requests for my time, money, or resources that my family actually needs.
14. Extensive curriculums that take longer in planning than the child spends learning.

All of these are things that we may be called to do, but we cannot do all of them, and it may be that we should really be doing none of them if it means our ability to serve our family suffer.

HAPPY HOMESCHOOLING!

HOMESCHOOL MALL
ALPHA OMEGA
SAXON MATH
APOLOGIA SCIENCE
BJU PRESS
SHURLEY ENGLISH
TEACHING TEXTBOOKS
EASY GRAMMAR

EXPLODE THE CODE
WORDLY WISE
ROSETTA STONE
MYSTERY OF HISTORY
SINGAPORE MATH
DRIVE THRU HISTORY
BLUESTOCKING PRESS
NOTGRASS COMPANY



DISCOVER YOUR FAVORITE HOMESCHOOL CURRICULUM, BOOKS, RESOURCES, GAMES, AND SOFTWARE AT CHRISTIANBOOK.COM.

Organizing Your Schedule, Library, and Personal School Boxes

Terri Johnson, Knowledge Quest

Homeschooling and organization . . . these two words do not necessarily go hand in hand, and yet a disorganized homeschool environment can lead to stress on the part of the kids and burn-out on the part of the parent. Does this mean that you have to become a “type-A” personality that has every minute scheduled, every shelf labeled, and every surface clean at all times? No, certainly not. (If that were true, then I wouldn’t qualify!)

Some of us are more naturally organized than others, but all of us can enjoy the benefits of having a schedule in place and a system for organizing school books and supplies. So, let’s jump in and get started.

• • •
... all of us can enjoy the benefits of
having a schedule in place ...
• • •

A. Scheduling the Easy Way! A 5-Step Plan

Step 1: Plan Your Subjects

Consider the ages and grades of your school children, and decide which subjects they need to study this year. Obviously, you want to cover the basics primarily when your kids are still young—reading, writing, and [arithmetic](#). As they get older, you will eventually drop formal reading lessons and even handwriting assignments and begin to focus more on what they are reading and how they express themselves. Most students are ready for grammar and spelling by third grade, if not earlier. Arithmetic will one day be replaced by algebra and higher math, and science and history will become of greater significance to their studies as they progress through the years. At some point during your children's education, you may want to add other subjects such as foreign language, logic, fine arts, debate, and [geography](#). Did I miss anything?

I hope that it is obvious that you do not want to try to cover all of these subjects with all of your students every year. It is just too overwhelming. Pick five or six subjects that your students are most in need of and let the rest go. These are the subjects that my children study at these grade levels:

- **Grades K-2:** Reading, handwriting, math, and history (w/narration)
- **Grades 3-6:** Math, grammar, spelling, history, and science
- **Grades 7-8:** Math, grammar, spelling, history, science, and logic
- **Grades 9-12:** Well, let's just say that it gets to be quite a bit more! We'll cover higher math, literature, grammar, history, science, health, fine arts, debate, government, foreign language, and various electives. But not all in one year!

• • •
... I would encourage you not to be in so much of a hurry that you fail to consider the learning styles of your children and your philosophy of education.
• • •

Note: At the Johnson house, we do our writing assignments across the curriculum, so writing is not a separate subject (meaning we write about history, literature, and science as we study them). You can certainly add writing to your list of subjects to cover. Also, we study geography alongside history, which makes sense and keeps down the number of subjects to cover. You can read more about this concept at www.bramleybooks.com/Geography.html.

Step 2: Gather Your Materials

Collect all of the materials that you have purchased for this school year so that you can look through them and make some planning decisions.

If you have not decided on which curricula you want to use, that's okay. In fact, I would encourage you not to be in so much of a hurry that you fail to consider the learning styles of your children and your philosophy of education. You can certainly make your curriculum decisions without considering these aspects of learning, but you may make better choices armed with this knowledge and waste less money on curricula that don't fit well for your family.

Also, now is a great time to pick up any freebies that you can find online. Many companies will offer you samples of their curriculum if you sign up for their newsletter, or sometimes even with entirely no strings attached. However, if you think you may be interested in purchasing their curriculum (which is why you downloaded the freebie in the first place) then you might want to sign up for their [newsletter](#) for a time to see if their information helps you in making your purchasing decisions for this year or perhaps as a possibility for a future year. Also, bookmark these sites in a designated folder so that you can find them again when you need to.

When searching for curricula, you can use both online and offline methods for researching a good fit for your child or family. Your online research includes checking out the Web sites of the curriculum providers that you are considering (do a Google search), reading reviews that have been posted online, and asking questions on homeschool chat boards. Your offline research will include asking your friends' opinions, visiting your

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I would suggest that you find a weekend . . . to get away with your spouse and get your final preparations in order. **This is not exactly a cheap option, but it is priceless when it comes to the time that you will have to strategize with each other and get your goals and schedule out on paper.**
• • •

local homeschool bookstore, and browsing through your favorite catalogs. Some curriculum companies offer a "trial run," meaning if you don't like it after 30 or 60 days, then you can return it for a full refund. You may want to consider this if you are still unsure which program to use for your children.

Step 3: Set Aside Some Time

Ideally, I would suggest that you find a weekend between now and when you start school to get away with your spouse and get your final preparations in order. This is not exactly a cheap option, but it is priceless when it comes to the time that you will have to strategize with each other and get your goals and schedule out on paper.

Examples: Some goals that you have for your child might include working through a phonics book so that she can read independently; developing better reading comprehension skills; working up to a sentence of legible handwriting; learning sums to 10+10; run a mile; etc. Your

goals will vary from child to child, grade to grade, and subject to subject.

The place you would choose to get away would need to fall somewhere between boring and exciting. Let me explain: if you just pick a motel down the road to "get away," most likely the view will not inspire you nor the surroundings intrigue you when you need to take a break and get out for a walk.

On the other hand, if you choose to head for the lake with your ski boat in tow, you might not get anything accomplished, because who wants to think and strategize about your school schedule when you can be out water skiing? My husband and I often head for a quaint inn on the Oregon coast which has breathtaking views, fantastic restaurants, and not a whole lot to do but sit on the beach or take a walk through the foaming surf. It's an ideal place for us to talk, to dream, to set goals, and to get our thoughts out on paper.

If you absolutely cannot get away for a weekend or even an overnigher, then consider scheduling an afternoon or two at the library. This will give you the time you need to focus without the

• • •
The tools that you have chosen for your children's education will help you to determine your daily and weekly schedules.
• • •

constant interruptions of family life (as charming as those interruptions can be!).

Step 4: Open the Books

If you have already purchased some curriculum, bring all of

the core books that you will be using this year with you on your scheduling day or weekend, as well as any teacher's manuals that came with your chosen programs. Also bring any books that you will be using for the first month or so of school. The tools that you have chosen for your children's education will help you to determine your daily and weekly schedules. Here's how:

Note: If you have not ordered any curriculum yet, don't worry. You can still create your schedule without it. Skim down the page and check out the suggested schedule outlined there. If you have no reason to choose a different plan, this is a good one to get you started.

Let's use a grammar book for our example. Let's say that there are 120 lessons in the grammar book. Take 120 and divide that by 36 weeks in the school year. Your answer is 3.33 and that means that your student will have to cover 3 1/3

lessons per week to finish the book in one school year. What this means to me is that I will need to schedule grammar for this child at least 3 times per week. Perhaps a goal that you have for this child is that she catch up from last year. Then you might want to schedule 4 lessons per week. Or maybe you honestly don't care if you finish every last lesson in the book; then 3 days should suffice. You get the idea. You are the teacher, and you get to make this decision.

How about math? Let's say that the book only has 90 lessons. Well, 2½ lessons per week may not be enough mathematical stimulation for this particular child. You may decide that you do not mind if your student gets ahead in this subject, so you bump it up to 4 lessons per week. These are decisions you will want to make for each student and each subject as you look through each of the core books and teacher's manuals that you will be using with your children this year.

Here are some suggestions for how many lessons to cover each week, but by no means are these hard-and-fast rules, so make your own decisions and feel confident about them based on your own goals that

you have set for your children and the books that you have chosen to use this year.

- [Math](#)—4-5 days per week
- Reading/phonics—5 days per week
- Handwriting/copywork—4-5 days per week
- Grammar—3-4 days per week
- Spelling—2-3 days per week
- Writing—2-3 days per week
- History—3-5 days per week
- Science —2-3 days per week
- Foreign language—2-4 days per week
- Logic—1-2 days per week

Step 5: Write it Out!

On a piece of paper, draw out boxes for a typical school week. You may not want to schedule your subjects for specific times of the day but prefer to simply schedule the order of the subjects. Either way is fine. Personally, I choose a start time for school, but after that we just keep plugging along until all of the scheduled subjects are completed for the day. We take breaks when necessary.

You may not want to schedule your subjects for specific times of the day but prefer to simply schedule the order of the subjects. . . . You can keep this schedule solely for school subjects or you may want to include chores and other weekly events . . .

• • •
... I set aside time every Sunday evening to look ahead at the schedule and through the books we are working through to **determine exactly what each child will be doing during those time slots in the upcoming week.**
• • •

You can keep this schedule solely for school subjects or you may want to include chores and other weekly events on your schedule as well. Rework the schedule until you are satisfied with it and then type it up on the computer. (We've included a schedule template in an Excel file that you are free to use, that is, if you have this program on your computer. If you do not have Excel, you might want to look into the Open Office suite [www.openoffice.org] which includes free spreadsheet software.) Once completed, post your schedule in a prominent place, and place one in each child's school notebook as well. You can't follow a schedule that you don't see!

Here are some examples of schedules from a couple of our previous homeschooling years. These will give you an idea of how you can

schedule and plan your days, using the template that is included here.

- [Schedule Template](#)—MS Excel file
- [General School Schedule](#)—list of subjects and order to be tackled. This is a simpler format for a family with just a couple of children perhaps even studying at the same level.
- [Single Child Schedule](#)—for one child only. It has been helpful for us to give each child his own schedule to place in his notebook or school box to refer to.
- [Specific Time Schedule](#)—initials represent different children. This schedule is definitely more involved as there were more children involved in our school studies at this point in our lives. We still didn't follow the exact times to the letter, but rather we made sure that we followed the order.

Although not written on these schedules, I set aside time every Sunday evening to look ahead at the schedule and through the books we are working through to determine exactly what each child will be doing during those time slots in the upcoming week. When I take the time to look ahead each Sunday, I can decide if I'll need any supplies, library books, etc.

Scheduling is definitely the toughest part of school organization, because it requires the most brain power. The next two areas of school organization will just require some time and attention, but won't be as consuming as the scheduling tasks that you will do as you prepare for school.

B. Set up Your Own Personal Library

Invest in bookshelves to house all of the books that you will be collecting and to hold the library books that you will be bringing home every couple of weeks.

In our living room, we have one whole wall that is lined with bookshelves. Of course, that is nothing compared to the "libraries" I have seen in other people's homes, but you have to start somewhere. You might start with just a small 2- or 4-shelf bookcase, and that is just fine. Expand as necessary.

If you have a significant collection of books, you may want to set up a library such as we have. We categorize our books and use a labeler to label the shelves. We have categories such as

reference, science, ancient history, medieval history, chapter books, picture books, Christian living, etc. You can go so far as to catalogue your books with a numbering system (such as the Dewey Decimal System), but I have never found the time or the inclination to do so. I find that simple categorizing works well.

If you have kids who like to unload the bookshelves or at least take multiple books off the shelf at once, you may want to implement a "check-out" system as well. Take a short stack of

3" x 5" cards and print your children's names on them (include yourself and your spouse as well, if you wish). When a child wants to take a book off the bookshelf, he inserts a card with his name on it in the place where the book was removed. When he is finished with the book, he returns it and then returns his

card to the card stack. You can allot only one book per child at a time, or perhaps three to five if you think one is too stingy. That's up to you and what works best for your family.

Another way to deal with the unpleasant reality of books spread all throughout the house and the bookshelves spiraling down into utter disarray is to designate one of your children as the "book

• • •
Scheduling is definitely the toughest part of school organization, because it requires the most brain power.
• • •

master” for the week. This is something that my dear friend implements in her home, and it works really well for them. The book master is responsible for the home library and makes sure that all books are returned to their proper place on the bookshelf.

C. School Boxes Keep School Work From Spreading all Over the House!

Purchase a plastic tote with snap lid for each child of school age in your home. If you have preschoolers, you might as well get one for them too. Make sure that these totes are large enough to hold notebooks, textbooks, paper, pens/pencils, pencil sharpener, erasers, etc. and still small enough to fit into a cabinet or closet.

Clean out a couple of shelves inside a closed cabinet or closet in your home and stack the boxes neatly within. You can mark these totes with their names or have a different color designated for each child. Put everything that they need to accomplish their schoolwork within the box, with the possible exception of literature, [family read-alouds](#), or books that they share with each other.

This way, no matter where your child works on his schoolwork, whether it is the desk in his room, the kitchen table, or the backyard picnic table, his schoolwork is ready to go and easy to transport. It is also well contained and easy to store. This makes getting schoolwork out and putting it away a snap. Literally!

These are my tricks for keeping school clutter at bay. Now my charge to you is this: Prepare your home for learning this week—create a schedule, assemble school boxes for each student, and tackle those bookshelves (if necessary). If school has already officially begun in your home, enjoy those learning moments—they are priceless!

• • •
... Prepare your home for learning this week—create a schedule, assemble school boxes for each student, and tackle those bookshelves (if necessary).
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Organizing the School Year With Unit Studies

Amanda Bennett, Amanda Bennett Unit Studies

Unit studies can be a great curriculum choice for many families, opening up all kinds of learning and experiences as the year progresses. However, the organization of a school year around unit studies can sometimes be a bit intimidating. Perhaps a new baby has arrived or the once-happy-and-quiet infant has learned to walk and run, or grandma has moved in with you, or there is a big move coming up this year. These are all events that we can plan for and around when organizing the school year, as difficult as they might be at the time.

Expect the Unexpected

Lesson one in planning for the upcoming school year: *expect the unexpected!* Go ahead and plan and organize, but please remember to expect the unexpected. Realize that once you develop a plan

for the upcoming school year, things are subject to change. For example, your child's soccer team might make it to the state finals, or a bout of the flu might derail things for a week or two. If you are ready to be flexible, these variations from your well-planned school year will not radically disrupt your homeschooling. One of the advantages of using unit studies is that they are a great curriculum choice for "flexible" family learning and can be adjusted to fit changing situations.

Do the Math

Now that we have established the fact that our well-planned school year will not likely be implemented exactly as we design it, let's jump in and start planning. Putting first things first, get a monthly calendar for the upcoming school year (August/September through May/June), tear out

Lesson one in planning for the upcoming school year: *expect the unexpected!*

each monthly page, and spread the months out on the table. To make things easier for planning and putting into action, number each week, starting with Week 1, from the start of this school year to the last week of the school year. For a state that requires 180 days of school in a year, this translates to 36 weeks of school, so your weeks would be numbered 1–36.

*“So teach us to number our days,
that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”
Psalm 90:12*

Now, take the time to enter important family events on these pages. These will include family birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, church events, reunions, vacation, and other special occasions. Next, gather up appointment cards and enter these dates on your calendar—doctor visits, dental appointments, orthodontic visits, surgery dates, academic testing, etc. You might not know exact dates for all of these, but probably have a good idea of the months that they will occur in—just note these in the top margin of the page so that you can remember them as you plan.

• • •
**Many times your visitors will
enjoy participating in field trips
and other unit study
adventures, and might have
experience and wisdom to offer on
the particular topics.**
• • •

For many families, visitors will be coming to visit throughout the year, and we need to make sure to include these visits when we plan. Their visits can be incorporated into the school plan in a meaningful way, making it more enjoyable for everyone. Many times your visitors will enjoy participating in field trips and other unit study adventures, and might have

experience and wisdom to offer on the particular topics. For example, grandparents might have experience as military veterans or pilots, perfect for a Veterans Day unit study or perhaps a unit study on flight. If your visitor has a yearly garden, she might be able to help plan your family garden when working on a gardens unit study.

Seasons of Change and Adventure

Take some time now to see what the upcoming year is going to look like with your noted events on the calendar. You can probably begin to see how some times of the year will be shaping up to be much busier than others, making your job as school year planner a bit easier. The hectic times will be great candidates for shorter unit studies

that take less focused daily time, while the slower times will be great for in-depth studies of more complex topics.

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1

One of the first things to look at as you begin to plan for the upcoming school year are the seasons themselves and how you can include them in your schedule. With each season come wonderful learning opportunities—chances to go outside to observe and learn about the world around us. Seasons are becoming hazier in the busyness of life, and many students miss the opportunity to study the amazing changes that take place with each passing season. With unit studies, you can plan a seasonal unit study for the week that each new season begins. For example, the first week of autumn begins in late September here in the northern hemisphere. Pencil in an outdoor unit study

• • •

With each season come wonderful learning opportunities—chances to go outside to observe and learn about the world around us. . . . you can plan a seasonal unit study for the week that each new season begins. . . . By including the seasons in your unit studies, you keep your students active, involved, and aware of the world outside of the homeschool window.

• • •

of autumn for that week and add things like an apple orchard visit, a day of apple butter and pie making adventure, daily nature walks to see what is changing with the approach of the new season, and a day to map out the travels and life story of Johnny Appleseed (John Chapman).

By including the seasons in your unit studies, you keep your students active, involved, and aware of the world outside of the homeschool window.

There have been days when our children spent time writing in the tree house or outside working on homeschool projects, watching the changes of the seasons move through our lives. Sometimes you would hear the kids shouting that the geese were honking overhead on their autumn journey south, or come running in with the first flowers of spring.

Along with the seasons come holidays—days that are looked forward to, prepared for, and celebrated by the whole family. Whatever your family holidays are, including them in your unit study plans for the year can be very

rewarding for the whole clan and creates memories that will last a lifetime—perhaps to generations yet unborn. The holidays with their meaning and traditions—these are carried from generation to generation and can explain and reinforce your family values and beliefs in a way that nothing else can.

To give you an example of this, our family would begin a unit study on [Thanksgiving](#) during the last week of October. Lasting for four weeks, it would culminate on Thanksgiving Day, giving the children the opportunity to show off all of their hard work for family and friends gathered around the Thanksgiving dinner table. With Thanksgiving complete, we would move on to a four-week study of the real meaning of [Christmas](#). Studying and preparing for this special celebration allowed us to deepen our faith, work on projects for neighbors and community, and learn so much

• • •
That is part of our job as a parent—to help them discover and develop these special, God-given gifts and talents.

With unit studies, the world of their interests can be investigated and developed.
• • •

Biblical history and prophecy fulfillment. As a result of these special holiday studies and times spent together, our family's faith and beliefs have been strengthened. Whatever holidays your family chooses to celebrate, include them in your unit study planning, and enjoy the lessons and family-building that can result.

Items of Interest

"Just as eating against one's will is injurious to health, so studying without a liking for it spoils the memory, and it retains nothing it takes in."

Leonardo Da Vinci

After including some seasonal unit studies, next it is time to include studies on topics that have captured your child's interest. These interests will help you and your children eventually understand their God-given gifts and talents. That is part of our job as a parent—to help them discover and develop these special, God-given gifts and talents. With unit studies, the world of their interests can be investigated and developed. What are your children interested in these days? Dogs, ballet, dinosaurs, baseball, dolls, or the beach? The list is endless, and now is the time to pencil in some of these for pursuit with unit studies this school year.

Don't overlook the opportunity to pursue these interests in ways that work well with everything else happening on your family calendar. For example, the time to pursue an interest in [baseball](#) might be the four weeks leading up to Opening Day or the start of the World Series. For those with children who love sports and winter athletics, the Winter Olympics 2010 begin in February 2010, and what a great chance to learn about the sports and athletes as well as world history and geography.

Whether your child is a gifted artist, talented dancer, or budding astronaut, you can give him the time to pursue these things under your watchful observation and guidance. If you have a child who is interested in [space](#), you can take the time to focus on this interest with special studies, experiments, books, or even a trip to NASA to talk to astronauts and investigate opportunities for the future. From taking advantage of volunteer opportunities to helping them develop their own business that showcases their creations, you can open the world for your children as they continue to grow in wisdom and stature.

Your unit study topics can include room for creativity and investigation in so many ways. For children interested in art, plan studies that coincide with regional art museum and gallery displays. Include some of the great masters of

art, and open their eyes to this area of interest as you walk through museums and other displays.

Study the history of the world that was occurring when particular masters were painting or sculpting, as well as the geography of the events that were occurring at the time. You can do the same thing with music, writing, and many other areas of interest.

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One of the fun memories that I hold dear is that of the time when our children learned how to make piñatas from a balloon—what amazing creativity they showed. All because we took the time to investigate just how piñatas were made. Of course, it didn't hurt that they loved candy and swinging at things!

*“Thank goodness I was never sent to school;
it would have rubbed off some of the originality.”*

Beatrix Potter

Thoughtful Progression

Of course, as you are now filling in the weeks of your school year plan, don't overlook opportunities to include logical topic progression. In other words, if your child is interested in dolphins and sailing ships and photography, you might want to study [photography](#) first to give him the tools to capture some of the hands-on learning adventures that might unfold while studying sea life and sailing ships. In all of your planning, make sure to get the tools in place when you can before progressing to the next topic.

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Instead of a state-approved standardized curriculum developed to prepare students for standardized tests, **give them an education that will last a lifetime. . .**

• • •

Another example of this would be to study the human body first, then perhaps ice skating or snow skiing before moving on to the Winter Olympics. I call it building a logical tree of knowledge, building knowledge along with thought connections so that the information is connected instead of existing in their minds in all kinds of random patterns. That was the problem with my own textbook education: I could memorize tidbits of knowledge, dates, names, places, and ideas, but none of them were connected. This was not a problem during my early education, but it made college studies much more difficult.

Instead of a state-approved standardized curriculum developed to prepare students for standardized tests, give them an education that will last a lifetime, not just through an end-of-year test. Use real books, real people, and lifetime adventures with your unit studies to teach your children lessons that will help them for the rest of their lives. Get back to the basics of learning, and help them develop a love of learning. Using the wealth of learning materials available today, along with your time and commitment to help them learn, you will be surprised at the difference in how much your child can learn and just how far this approach to education will take your child.

The Best Laid Plans

Plan this school year, and introduce your children to the world while you are there to smooth the way. From mission trips to volunteer work at the nursing home, from canoe trips down the local river to beach walks full of sunshine—you can give them the world and be there to help them grow in it.

As I shared in the beginning, please expect the unexpected and always make your school year plans in pencil instead of permanent ink. Sometimes our best years are those when the school year record of study did not closely resemble what I had planned for at the beginning of the year. Yet these were often the best years of learning and homeschooling.

As you go forward into this new year of homeschooling, remember that unit studies can provide an excellent curriculum for your children. They can offer improved retention, more involved and hands-on learning, and connected thought processes and learning patterns. Whatever your topic choices and plan details, proceed boldly into the arena of learning, and don't look back. As we say around here, always forward—today is a gift from God.

• • •

From mission trips to volunteer work at the nursing home, from canoe trips down the local river to beach walks full of sunshine—you can give them the world and be there to help them grow in it.

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Organizing and Planning Your School: Your "Special OPS" Mission

Cheryl Allin, *The Old Schoolhouse*® Magazine

August is here, and it's time to gear up for a new school year. Once again you begin to explore new ideas to organize and plan so that this year will be even more efficiently run than last year. What worked well? What can I do differently? With the kids a year older, and perhaps a new one on board, adjustments need to be made. Or perhaps this is your first year. Whatever your situation, we have a mission for you!

Your mission: a three-phase plan to get you and your family off to a great start.

• • •
Your mission: a three-phase plan to get you and your family off to a great start.
• • •

Phase One: Organizing Your Space

It will take some time to organize your space, but spending a little time now will save you a ton of time later.

Materials needed:

- Home and school [planner](#)
- Three empty bins or laundry baskets labeled: keep, donate, and sell
- Trash can
- Different-sized totes, boxes, bins, or baskets, some with lids
- One pencil box per child and one for you
- Masking tape and a permanent marker for labeling bins
- Paper and pen to inventory supplies
- Blank, colored circle stickers (yard sale stickers)

- Cleaning supplies—rags or paper towels and soap or furniture polish


Optional:

- File cabinet
- [Plastic drawer organizer](#)
- Recycling bin
- Bookshelves
- Wrapping paper, brown paper sack, or newspaper comics
- 1"x 3" x 4' piece of wood
- Wood clothespins
- Wood stain
- Clothesline
- [Labeler](#)
- [Manila folder](#)
- [Hanging file folder](#)
- Timer

Step I: Organize Your Equipment and Papers

Organize important information: Place all important information like Web passwords, budget records, and car maintenance schedules in a home management folder or planner. Organize your address book by updating addresses and phone numbers and add this information to your planner. Immediately open all mail when you

receive it and throw junk mail in the trash, file important paperwork, and place current items (bills, coupons, letters) in a manila folder labeled "pending." Check this folder daily. ¹



... Place all important information ...
in a home management
folder or planner.

Computers: Start by organizing your computer favorites and files. Dedicate folders to homeschooling and the subfolders to subjects in both your bookmarked Internet sites and all computer documents. By doing this you can easily access a Web site or file that you need.

For E-Book (and other large file) storage, you may want to use a USB flash drive. An excerpt from the [E-Homeschooling: Embracing the E-Book Revolution](#) (a free TOS E-Book) explains:

"Once the (computer) subdirectory gets too full, I remove it to a plug-in flash drive . . . devoted to homeschooling resources, and only plug the flash drive into my computer when I need an E-Book, want to peruse my E-Books, or add E-Books. It's

a really quick process since the flash drive acts as a mapped drive. I keep a directory printout of all of my E-Books for easy reference (and because I like paper directories)."

File cabinets: This is a great organization tool to systemize *all* important papers both school- and home-related. Contemplate what your needs are to determine the cabinet size. There are many types of cabinets from an [inexpensive, portable plastic one](#) to the large, traditional, office file cabinet. Purchase manila folders and hanging file folders and label each by topic. If you already own a cabinet, start at the top drawer and go through each folder, throwing out, recycling, or shredding unwanted papers.

Make your own manila folder by folding large pieces of construction paper in half. If you do use manila folders, write on the tab using a pencil instead of pen (that way you can erase and reuse the folders when you are done with them) and set them in a 14" x 12" cardboard box. Cover the box with wrapping paper, brown paper sack (the children can decorate), or comics from the newspaper for a fun decorative touch. ²

If you need to keep an item but will not use it until next year, put it in an empty tote with a lid. Label the outside of the tote with the item name and store in your garage, closet, or attic.

Teacher's materials: Place all teachers' guides, planners, and [workbooks](#) in a school bag, crate, small box, or a spot in your teacher workspace. Make a pencil box of your own and fill with pens, pencils, hole punch, scissors, and other daily-needed items.

Instead of buying pencil boxes, wash and reuse plastic containers like sour cream, butter, whipped cream, or baby wipes containers. Each can be labeled and decorated with a permanent marker. ³

Step 2: Organize Your School Room

Bookshelves: Homeschoolers usually have more than one bookshelf, even with the [E-Book](#) craze! It's time to organize them.

Empty each bookshelf by sorting items into the correct bins, and clean the shelves. If you need to keep an item but will not use it until next year, put it in an empty tote with a lid. Label the outside of the tote with the item name and store in your garage, closet, or attic.

Separate magazines by title and place each title in

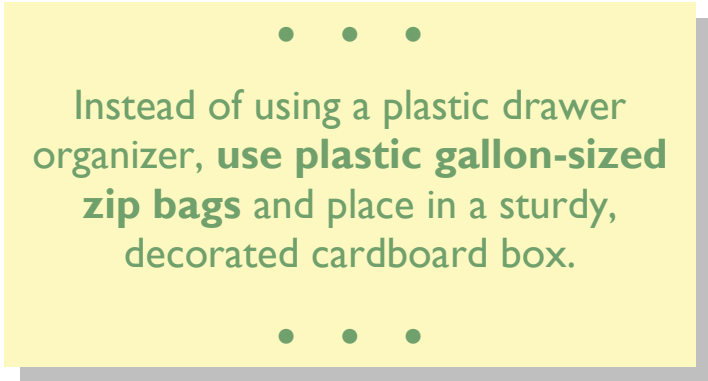
a separate [magazine holder](#) and return them to the bookshelf.

Use cereal and pancake mix boxes for magazine holders. First, cut off the top flaps. Next, cut half way down one small side, and place your magazines inside! ⁴

Group [books](#) by genre and use the color dots to catalogue the books. For example, blue stickers for non-fiction, red for fiction, and green for reference books. Also, label curriculum items the same way, red for math, green for spelling, and write the grade level on the sticker. Replace them on the shelf spine-out by color, grouping as needed. Take this time to make note of what you have and what you will need to purchase for the new school year.

Drawers, cubbies, and desks in the school area: This can be an overwhelming task, so empty one drawer at a time, placing items in the appropriate bin or trash. Wipe the drawers clean. Check that all pens, markers, and art supplies are usable, and throw out what isn't working. (This is a great job for the kids!) Find a special place or consider buying plastic drawer organizers for supplies, and label each drawer with scissors, pencils, lined

paper, white paper, crayons, markers, construction paper, glue, stickers, paints, and brushes. As you work, write a list of school supplies you need for the school year. Situate children's curricula and pencil box, globes, microscopes, computers, and charts close by their work station.



Instead of using a plastic drawer organizer, use plastic gallon-sized zip bags and place in a sturdy, decorated cardboard box.

Watch the sale ads for back-to-school specials, and stock up. Instead of using a plastic drawer organizer, use plastic gallon-sized zip bags and place in a sturdy, decorated cardboard box. ⁵

Last year's school work: File the papers and projects you need for your records in the file cabinet or tote. Throw away or recycle the rest.

If you find yourself wanting to save everything, consider taking a digital picture of the item and download it on your computer in a file labeled (Child's name) schoolwork. Dispose of the item. ⁶

Step 3: Organize Children's supplies

Make an area for each child's supplies: a bookshelf, a drawer, or a book bag. Include a pencil box with 3 sharpened pencils (who likes to

hear the electric pencil sharpener when instructing!), eraser, calculator, markers and colored pencils, and crayons. Any workbooks, textbooks, and manipulatives they use daily will go in this area. Organize by color coding. Each child gets one color for all their folders and notebooks.

Group manipulatives in see-through containers, such as clear plastic bags or plastic sandwich meat containers, so children can easily identify the contents.⁷

If you don't school in just one area during the day, you might also consider mobile storage carts for moving your school supplies to other areas of the house. In the E-Book [Dreams and Designs](#), you will find details on how to do this:

"Narrow computer desks with an upright CD storage area, built in shelves, and a roll-out keyboard space . . . are ideal to convert to rolling storage carts because of their narrow style; they can roll through halls and doorways more easily . . . "

• • •
Consider keeping only a digital picture of school paperwork.
• • •

Step 4: Keep Clutter Away

What to do with all the paperwork: At the end of every school day, take any papers and projects and either file them in the

child's portfolio, display them on the wall (see next note on how to display work), take a digital picture, and throw it away, or recycle.

Display your child's work: Make an inexpensive display wall for art projects and special papers out of a piece of 1" by 3" by 4' wood board with clothespins glued every few feet. Your children can color the clothespins with their assigned color and use them to hang their work. Stain the wood and secure on an empty wall with screws and wall anchors. Remember to rotate out work as the year progresses, filing what you need to keep and throwing away or recycling the rest.

You can also hang a clothesline across the wall and hang items on it with the clothespins.⁸

Step 5: Finish

Schedule a time in the next week to donate all items and a time to sell the others at a book sale or on [eBay](#). Follow through!

Step 6: Keep it That Way!

Clean up *every day*. At the end of the school day, set a timer on ten minutes and involve the whole family in a quick pick-up of the school area. File papers and put items in their assigned spot. Be consistent, and you will be amazed at how organized you stay.

• • •
Clean up every day. . . .
involve the whole family in
a quick pick-up of the
school area.
• • •

Step 3: Organizing Your Plan

Homeschool planner: Everything will be much easier to plan if you have all of your important papers, both home and school, in one folder or planner. When you need to reference something, you will have it all together. See a sample of one [here](#).

Phase Two: Planning the School Year

Time is something we can never get back, so planning ahead for a smooth school year is top priority.

Step 1: Your Mission Statement

Create or reevaluate your homeschool vision statement. This is a statement that you create as a family and is the foundation of your homeschool. It includes the purpose, mission, and goals of your school.

Step 2: Know the Law

Research that the laws have not changed in your state: Check the [HSLDA](#) Web site for any changes, as well as the number of days you school must be in session.

Develop a yearly plan: Jot down your thoughts on these questions:

- What do you want to accomplish this year?
- When do you want time off for birthdays, holidays, and vacations?
- When and where will you have field trips?
- What is the start and end date of the school year?
- What subjects do you want to teach this year?

You can get a rough idea of your school year by placing this information into monthly calendars from your planner. For example, you want to do a unit study on Thanksgiving in November and take some time off in May, write each in the appropriate month. Next, consider your curriculum. If your math curriculum has 36 chapters and you are schooling twelve months,

you should average three chapters a month, so write what chapters you should be working on during that month. Scheduling this way will give you a rough estimate of where you should be if you get off schedule due to unavoidable circumstances.

Phase Three: Implement the Mission!

Complete one or two chores a day for the next few days, and you will see how easy it is to organize and plan for the next school year!

¹ Save time making charts and forms by purchasing [The Schoolhouse Planner](#) from The Old Schoolhouse®. This planner has done all the work for you and **combines homeschool and homemaking**. It boasts four years' worth of calendar pages, countless informative articles and charts, mouth-watering recipes, and over [150 charts and forms](#) to aid you in planning your school year. Included are worksheets for keeping track of books on hand, teaching supplies, craft projects, field trips, repair projects, budget, and much, much more.

²⁻⁸ Ideas found at www.econobusters.com.

5 Simple Steps to Planning an Organized School Year!



1. Organize your equipment: computers, file cabinets, and teacher's materials.
2. Organize the school room: bookshelves, desks, drawers, curriculum, and children's things.
3. Create or reevaluate your mission statement.
4. Establish a [homeschool and homemaking planner](#): place all important information for school and home there.
5. Plan your school year: make a rough outline of the year. Make sure your older kids have a copy of the plan or that it is in a location where they can view it regularly.



Epilogue

Dr. Ruth Beechick, in association with Mott Media

Organizing for a school year? Other people can tell how to organize supplies and study space and books and time, but I'm not good at any of that. I can only say a little about curriculum for the year. And with the curriculum plan, it's a lot easier than many homeschoolers seem to think. You are tutoring one or more individual children and not writing a curriculum for a whole class. The writers must set out goals or lessons for every day or every week from end to end. Their emphasis is on the content and on some sort of average for the children. Your job is quite different from that.

In arithmetic or in any curriculum you are using, you know where you left off, so you can start about there this year. In subjects or topics where you are not following a curriculum, you probably have a general plan in mind—that you want to study ancient history or the human body or whatever. So maybe you have already gathered materials (or will quickly get some). Now laying out a semester of lesson plans, or even a month of plans, is for curriculum writers. You don't have to do that.

Jot down in a plan book any ideas that you or the children have for projects you want to do, books or videos you especially want to use, and so on. You can add ideas as you go along as they occur to you. A simple way to start the year on any topic is to begin reading a book on the topic. Discussions can follow, as may maps or art ideas, or topics for writing reports or something more imaginative. These grow out of the tutoring situation where you can follow a child's interest or try to spark interest. You can even change in midstream. If the book is too hard or other problems arise, you can decide to quit or delay that topic and do another for now. Curriculum writers do not have that advantage. They focus on the content, but you focus on your unique child.

Your work is one of the most important in our country just now. I pray for you and your children.

About the Authors



Married more than 38 years, **Steve and Jane Lambert** have been in full-time ministry since 1984. They began homeschooling in 1982, and today they have five grandchildren who are also being homeschooled. Jane is the author of the award-winning homeschool curriculum *Five in a Row*, and together Steve and Jane have spoken to more than 100,000 homeschool parents at state conventions over the past 15 years. They also are co-founders and directors of Real Life Marriages, a ministry aimed specifically at strengthening the many homeschool marriages which are under attack each year. They have authored scores of articles for popular homeschooling magazines and appeared on numerous radio programs. They are actively involved in a ministry of encouragement through their Web site: <http://www.fiarhq.com>. Jane and Steve's marriage ministry can

be found at www.reallifemarriages.com, and they each maintain popular blogs for homeschool encouragement: Steve at <http://homeschoolheaven.wordpress.com> and Jane at <http://janesnaturenotes.wordpress.com>. The Lamberts are privileged to be on the national board of directors for First Class Homeschool Ministries <http://www.firstclasshomeschool.org/pages>, an international ministry connecting local churches with homeschool families.



Malia Russell is the blessed wife of Duncan, thankful mother of four children, ages 4-19, and an author, conference speaker, and director of www.homemaking911.com. Visit her site for inspiration, encouragement, and practical help in your roles as a Godly wife, mother, homemaker, and home educator. Please visit the Homemaking 911 store for the following resources: [Managing the Multi-level Homeschool](#), [Chaos to Order: 25 Tools Bringing Organization to Your Home](#), [Teaching the Difficult Child](#), [Marriage 9-1-1](#), and [Keeping Young Ones Happy and Occupied During School Time](#).



Terri Johnson has been married to Todd for 20 years, home teaching their children for 12 years, and operating a publishing business for the past 8 years ([Knowledge Quest, Inc.](#)), which specializes in history and geography curricula for the homeschool marketplace. They are currently teaching two online classes: 1) [Homeschooling ABCs](#), providing guidance and instruction for new and/or overwhelmed homeschooling parents, and 2) [Upper Level Homeschool](#), a class providing guidance and insight for parents of middle and high school teens.

You can reach Bramley Books, a division of Knowledge Quest, Inc., (www.knowledgequestmaps.com) at 1.877.697.8611.

Homeschooling through High School? Grab your free special report at www.UpperLevelHomeschool.com.

Is this your first year homeschooling? Make it the best year possible with www.homeschoolingabcs.com.



Amanda Bennett has had quite a journey from obtaining her degree in engineering to working as an engineer and professional researcher, eventually going home to raise their three children. Her story is full of ups and downs—just like yours!

Her groundbreaking unit studies have become very popular with homeschool families around the world. As a result, Amanda travels and speaks at conferences and retreats, sharing tips, ideas, and encouragement to help others along the way. Her Web site, www.unitstudy.com, contains information about her books, along with a wealth of articles and other helpful information. You can contact Amanda through her Facebook page, www.Facebook.com/UnitStudies.



Cheryl Allin and husband Gregg stay busy homeschooling their two children in North Carolina and are always on the lookout for educational materials and opportunities supporting their faith and the “free or almost free” philosophy they have adopted. Check out their blog at www.homeschoolblogger.com/cherylallin.

Cheryl also serves as a Marketing Assistant for *The Old Schoolhouse*[®] Magazine. TOS is the leading Christian homeschool publication and a trusted source of information worldwide. This approximately 200-page quarterly magazine is packed with important, up-to-date news, useful information, and inspiring content for the enjoyment and interest of homeschooling families. TOS’ mission is to produce a high-quality, Biblically-based magazine that stands alone as a practical resource and introduces relevant products and services to the home educator. *The Old Schoolhouse*[®] Magazine can be found in Borders, Barnes and Noble, Books a Million stores, libraries across the nation, and requested from www.TheHomeschoolMagazine.com where an additional *digital* magazine is also available.



Dr. Ruth Beechick, a former teacher and professor and a curriculum specialist, says that homeschooling is the best education going on today. She has written a number of books that simplify teaching and help homeschoolers to feel like informed teachers themselves. No longer is education a mystery, with schools holding the hidden secrets. These books sweep all that away. Find them at Christianbook.com, Mott Media, or most any bookseller. For online help, put "Ruth Beechick books" into your search engine.