

# Choosing Curriculum



is pleased to offer this free e-booklet  
to help you start homeschooling with confidence!

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“The most important work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own home.”

-Harold B. Lee



**W**ith hundreds of choices available, choosing a curriculum can be mind-boggling. How does a parent choose with so many options?

First, *give yourself time* to explore what’s available. You may feel you have to choose quickly for fear of getting behind, but we encourage you to give yourself *a week or longer* to read about your options, watch helpful online videos, and talk with other homeschoolers. If you’re not starting to homeschool until next fall, take even longer! It’s smart to take time to understand the choices available and make a wise decision based on what’s best for you and your family.

One of the biggest strengths of homeschooling is that your education can be tailored to each child’s needs. This may sound overwhelming at first, but before long, you’ll start to see how your children respond to visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), and kinesthetic (doing) experiences.

Even before you start thinking about curriculum, you can begin observing how your child engages with the world. How do they respond when playing games? Do they enjoy listening to books and stories read aloud? How do they engage in conversation? Do they notice details they see on the page? These types of learning tidbits will be your first introduction to each of your children’s learning style. You probably already know how active your children are or how prone they are to enjoy “book learning”!

Let’s explore learning styles a bit more. Jot down the names of your children, and as you read the next section, make brief notes about each one.

# Learning Styles

## **Visual**

Some students remember best what they see. They need to look at colorful pages, diagrams, or pictures. Talk if you want, but this learner will want something that engages them visually to help them retain what you're saying. Let these students color the parts of the flowers or watch an experiment. These are the children who often describe things by what they look like: "Oh, I think that's in the green book with the yellow sun on the cover!"

## **Auditory**

By contrast, some students learn primarily by hearing. They absorb best the words they hear and remember what they've been told. These are the children who need you to explain things to them – out loud. Chances are you know them as your talkers. They process through both hearing and talking. Auditory learners thrive with a variety of auditory resources such as documentaries, videos, and plenty of discussion.

## **Kinesthetic**

The kids who learn by doing are often the ones who are the most fidgety and active. Don't assume these students are trying to avoid learning! They may actually love to learn – which is why they want to build the tower, explore the woods, and take apart the chain. They figure things out as they do them. Surely we wouldn't have many technicians, mechanics, or surgeons without kinesthetic learners! Yet these students are least likely to be "successful" in traditional school, since it often requires sitting still for long periods of time and being offered only auditory and visual input.

## **The Take-Away**

While your children may not fit neatly into just one category, understanding their primary learning styles will help you take advantage of their strengths to maximize learning. For example, once you know why your visual learner tends to doodle on his or her paper, you may allow that within reason to aid retention. Alternatively, once you realize you have an auditory learner, it will make more sense that she gets frustrated if you require her to work quietly in her room. You can even use learning styles to make your schoolwork more efficient – and to boost academic success. On the other hand, you will gradually want to expand your child’s abilities by introducing other styles of learning to them. This will help them be successful in a variety of learning situations!

Now that we’ve introduced learning styles and you’ve considered each of your children’s needs, let’s turn our attention to curriculum options.

# The Flavors of Homeschooling

It would be both exhausting and time-killing to browse through the hundreds of curriculum choices, or textbooks, that are available. However, you can eliminate many that won't work well for your individual family by first learning about the broader "styles" (or flavors) of homeschooling.

A fun way to do this is by watching this fabulous [25-minute "workshop"](#). Before watching, print the handout from the link provided and be ready for a simple "test" to help you find your own curriculum style. Once you've completed that, you can limit your search to the curriculum options that fit into your particular style. That's much more doable!

In the video linked above, you'll learn about several "flavors" of homeschooling, including:

1. Traditional
2. Classical
3. Charlotte Mason
4. Unit Studies
5. Delight-Directed or Unschooling

If you haven't done it already, stop reading right now and hop on over to <https://simplycharlottemason.com/five-homeschooling-styles/> to watch the *5 Flavors of Homeschooling*.

Now that you're armed with a lot more knowledge about homeschooling curriculum and a bit more information about yourself, you might want to visit CHEWV's YouTube channel to watch "[A Peek into Five Homeschools.](#)" In this video, five West Virginia families share their homeschooling journeys and discuss their personal curriculum choices. You'll also find another helpful video snippet on CHEWV's channel titled, "[Choosing a Curriculum.](#)"

Finally, when you are ready to pursue curriculum within a particular style, flip to the Appendix of this e-book (starting on page 10) for a variety of specific curricula within the five main styles.

# Helpful Questions

Although learning styles do not dictate curriculum, they will help you envision a successful method. For example, if you imagine your children sitting quietly around a table reading their textbooks, that may not work if you have an auditory or kinesthetic learner.

The questions below will help you consider other planning aspects:

**Q: Are you the kind of person who enjoys creatively planning lessons? Or would you rather have it all laid out for you?**

A: Traditional and many classical choices will provide lesson plans for parents who are more comfortable with everything laid out in advance. But perhaps you are more comfortable using a bit of this style and a bit of that style to develop your own “eclectic” plan, personalized for your own family. In that case, unit studies, Charlotte Mason, and delight-directed methods may work better for your family because they invite more flexibility and creativity.

**Q: Do you see yourself personally involved in daily school? Is one of your goals to know exactly what your child is learning? Do you want to engage them in conversation about what they’re learning? And is it exciting to think that you can link other family experiences to your child’s “schooling?”**

A: Over the first three decades of modern homeschooling, most parents were personally involved with daily school with very successful results. However, online choices are now growing in popularity. Be aware that you don’t necessarily have to choose between one-on-one teaching versus online choices. A hybrid approach is also a viable option. It’s possible, for example, to do online lessons for 1-2 subjects and teach the others yourself.

Keep in mind, however, that one of the strengths of homeschooling your children personally is knowing them like you have never known them before. By personally teaching them, you will know what they have mastered, how well they understand concepts, and even identify their learning struggles/issues.

However, when jobs or other time constraints preclude that, there are wonderful online options you can use - either alone or as a supplement!

**Q: Do you need to homeschool on a shoestring? Or can you carve out funds for any curriculum option?**

A: Some curriculum choices are free or nearly so. For instance, Easy Peasy Homeschool is free online. Ambleside Online also has a wealth of free Charlotte Mason lesson plans and resources. On the other end of the spectrum, there are pricy online programs and curriculum communities that charge tuition fees. However, there is no evidence to date that curriculum alone makes a difference in how well homeschoolers do. Be assured that most research proves that the magic ingredient is parental involvement - which is possible with any type of homeschooling! With that in mind, choose the curriculum and style that resonates with you and suits your students best.

**Q: How many children do you have, and are you planning to teach them together in certain subjects?**

A: It's not only possible, but probably preferable, to teach certain subjects to multiple children, tweaking assignments according to age and ability. For example, if you will be teaching four students, you won't likely find enough hours in a day to teach each child five subjects separately. That means you may need to combine some classes!

Subjects that can easily be taught to multiple ages include history, geography, Bible, science, art, and music. The only subjects that need to be child-specific are math, reading, and language - and even those can sometimes be taught to multiple students depending on your children's age gaps and grade levels. If you have more than one or two students, take some time to learn about teaching multiple ages together. A quick Google search will provide hours of watching and reading on this subject!

**Other important considerations:**

- Will my child love learning if we use this curriculum?
- Will I love teaching this curriculum?
- Will this curriculum help my child understand that everything begins with God?
- Will this be a way to build our family relationships?
- Will this help my child become a life-long learner?

Think about why you didn't choose a school setting. Were you concerned about peer pressure or bullying? This may preclude options that heavily involve age-divided group settings.



Were you concerned about the one-size-fits-all classroom setting where all children move along at the same pace? Perhaps, then, video classrooms are not for you.

Are you concerned about worldview? Do you want your child to understand God and His Lordship over all things? Then you may want to consider only Christian curriculum and check out the denominational bent of the choices available.

### **When it comes down to it, there is no *perfect* curriculum!**

Curriculum is merely a tool. If after watching the Five Flavors video, the CHEWV videos, and reading this booklet, you're still just plain confused, *merely begin with what seems like the best fit*, and eventually you'll adapt resources and methods that fit your unique homeschool needs and goals. It's not only okay to tweak as you go, but it's wise. Your child is not the only one embarking on a fabulous education journey - you are too! Give yourself time over the next couple years to learn through the process. Learning together may actually be the best part of your homeschool experience.

Most importantly, don't forget to have fun! Help your children love learning. This is the journey of a lifetime!

# Appendix: Curriculum Choices

## 1. Textbook/Traditional

This is what you know so well if you went to public school yourself. This curriculum separates subjects (e.g. math, science, English) into set class periods throughout the day, each using a different textbook or workbook. Students are annually divided into grade levels based on age.

Examples include:

- [Abeka](#)
- [BJU Press](#)
- [Seton](#)
- [Christian Liberty Press](#)
- [Rod and Staff](#)
- [Alpha Omega](#)

We're going to include [Masterbooks](#) here as well - it is similar to traditional curriculum, (perhaps with more flexibility) but based on a Charlotte Mason approach.

Familiar and comprehensive, one of the challenges of traditional curricula can be keeping up with several children in different grades. Plus it can be inefficient since it is based on filling up 50-minute time slots like those in a traditional classroom setting.

Lastly, it's usually book-oriented with little kinesthetic learning and more visual than auditory material. However, with some tweaking, traditional curricula has perhaps been the successful mainstay of homeschooling to date. It remains a popular choice and can be a good fit for the first year or two of homeschooling, if not longer. Many families thrive on this method of homeschooling as long as they are able to "let go" of their own public school expectations of "filling the time." Much of the curricula was written for private school classrooms and provides busywork that is usually unnecessary in a one-on-one homeschool setting.

## 2. Classical

Classical education is based on the Trivium, which includes three stages of learning/ cognitive development. The Grammar Stage (early grade school) centers on concrete learning, such as memorizing facts. The Dialectic Stage (late grade school/junior high years) applies logic and critical thinking to those facts, and the Rhetoric Stage (high school) centers on communicating in response to facts through verbal and written skills.

Perhaps the “bible” of classical education is *The Well-Trained Mind* by Susan Wise Bauer and Jesse Wise.

Classical education is based on practices that date back to Ancient Greece and Rome. Usually classical books (the “Great Books”) are emphasized as well as logic and critical thinking.

Curriculum examples include:

- [Veritas Press](#)
- [Classical Conversations](#)
- [Tapestry of Grace](#)

Advantages to this style include its popularity (and therefore support system) around the state as well as its organized foundation. Criticisms include the rigor and difficulty for some kinesthetic learners, the sheer volume of reading that is emphasized, and sometimes the expense.

## 3. Charlotte Mason

Based on the ideas of late 19th/early 20th century British educator Charlotte Mason, this method has been called “the gentle art of learning.” Charlotte Mason taught that children learn from their environment, from establishing good habits, and from “living books” instead of dumbed-down “twaddle.” She emphasized educating the whole child and naturally utilizing nature study, art/music appreciation, and physical activity – along with the usual academic subjects. Charlotte Mason plans can be found at these sites:

- [simplycharlottemason.com](#)
- [amblesideonline.com](#) (offers free curriculum)

You'll find that several curriculum approaches are either based on Charlotte Mason's philosophy of home education or allow you to easily incorporate her principles. Several of these are listed below:

- [My Father's World](#)
- [Heart of Dakota](#)
- [Sonlight](#)

The positives of CM include its emphasis on the love of learning, reading mentally nourishing books, and maintaining a natural approach to learning. Criticisms include its potential lack of rigor.

#### **4. Unit Study**

Unit studies take one topic for a period of time and study every subject in relation to it. For instance, a study of the Egyptian Empire might include reading historical fiction set in that time period, studying the geographical features of the Nile, making a salt map of Egypt, practicing hieroglyphics, studying the science of embalming, researching the Pharaohs, taking a field trip to a museum, and doing a Bible study on Exodus. Depending on the type of unit study, families often supplement with math and grammar studies.

While Google searches alone will yield many ideas, also check out this list:

- [Five in a Row](#)
- [Konos](#)
- [Weaver](#)
- [Amanda Bennett](#)

Benefits of this style include how the various subjects are studied in tandem with coordination. The active learning also tends to make schooling fun. Criticisms include the prep work required by the parent and the possibility of learning gaps.

#### **5. Unschooling**

Also called Delight-Directed study, this style has little to no curriculum in the traditional sense. John Holt first coined the term "unschooling" back in the 1970s before the

modern homeschooling movement of the 1980s. Patrick Farenga, who worked with Holt, defines unschooling as allowing children as much freedom to explore the world around them in their own ways as parents can comfortably bear. He considers unschooling as a partnership between parents and their children. He believed that “the freedom for anyone, young or old, to choose why, what, when, how, and from whom to learn is a key element.”

Essentially, subjects in unschooling are studied as a child has interest or motivation in them. How they are studied also varies depending on the child’s interests.

This method is the least like brick-and-mortar school methods, and probably has the least structure. Instead of looking for a curriculum provider, parents interested in this approach should do online searches about unschooling or begin by reading Holt’s writings.

Criticisms of this curriculum include its lack of structure as well as concern that all subjects may not be mastered adequately.

Below are three other “styles” that overlap with the ones above:

### **Pre-Packaged or Boxed**

Many companies provide pre-selected texts for each subject, boxed together for each grade or year. The “boxed” approach makes sense when a parent feels overwhelmed with making curriculum choices. We’ve all been there!

Examples include:

- [My Father’s World](#)
- [Sonlight](#)
- [Tapestry of Grace](#)
- [Heart of Dakota](#)
- [Abeka](#)

[Christian Liberty Press](#) is similar, since they also choose the texts for each subject from various curriculum providers.

For the motivated parent, boxed curriculum can be used across grade levels, enabling you to homeschool children of multiple ages in areas of history, nature and Bible, with individual grade-level options for math, science and grammar.

## **DVD/Online**

Not to be confused with “Public School at Home” programs, many companies provide computer or DVD teaching options. For instance, both [Abeka](#) and [Bob Jones University Press](#) (see section for traditional curriculum above) have virtual classroom options. [Teaching Textbooks](#) offers DVD teachers for each math lesson. And [Switched On Schoolhouse](#) is an example of a computer-based program that covers every subject. [Easy Peasy](#) offers an online free curriculum for each year utilizing many online resources and easily-found library items. Other popular choices include [schoolhouseteachers.com](#) and [Power Homeschool](#).

## **Eclectic**

As the name implies, eclectic homeschoolers take an idea here and an idea there – whatever resonates with a particular mom or dad – to build a personalized learning path for their family. Perhaps they use the unit study idea to mix history and writing, choose Charlotte Mason “living books” for literature, pick a traditional math course, but then use online virtual tools for anatomy. They may borrow classical ideas to emphasize fact-learning in the early years while adding critical thinking in later grades. If one-size education does not fit every child, one educational style may not fit every parent!

This list is certainly not exhaustive. We haven’t included Montessori-based or the [Principle Approach](#) for example. A more exhaustive list of resources for each of these styles can be found at [Cathy Duffy Reviews](#).

For an overview of texts for individual subjects from a variety of curriculum publishers, visit [rainbowresource.com](#) or [christianbook.com](#)'s homeschool section (both of which include secular as well as Christian selections). There, you can see the myriad choices in each subject, read a short synopsis about them, and even purchase at a discount - although used curriculum is also a solid option for buying on a budget. To find used options, you can ask local homeschoolers about used curriculum fairs or try e-commerce sites like eBay.

One seasoned homeschool mom shared that when she struggles to choose curriculum, her husband gently reminds her of their ultimate goal: not to merely teach material, but to develop learners. Your homeschooling journey will be challenging, but it will also be incredibly rewarding. Don't let a fear of "making the wrong decision" stop you from getting started!

### Additional Help:

If you have not yet taken it, our Start Strong West Virginia course can help you establish your "why" for homeschooling. This 14-day mega course from Homeschool University covers everything from the WV law to graduation, including a bonus day for special needs.

Or start with our shorter Homeschooling 101 course.

Visit [CHEWV.org](http://CHEWV.org) for more information.

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