

How to Select Homeschool Curriculum: Common Approaches for Christian Education



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Homeschool Methods & Teaching Styles

Nowadays there are as many styles of homeschooling as there are homeschool families. When starting out, it can be easy to get overwhelmed by the wealth of information and resources out there. Where do we start?

One helpful way to begin planning your homeschool and choosing curriculum is to explore the homeschool methods or teaching styles available. Read below and see which methods resonate with you most and some Christian curriculum options that correspond. Often, new homeschoolers will choose curriculum within their one or two favorite methods.

Don't worry about picking the "right" method, though! Just begin with what seems like the best fit and eventually you'll adapt resources and methods to best fit your unique homeschool needs and goals.

Traditional / Textbook

Homeschool parents may feel more comfortable starting out with textbooks or a traditional school style because they used them when they were in school. Textbooks follow a scope and sequence that assumes a typical school year. Each publisher has its distinctive point of view, philosophy of education, and doctrinal distinctions.

Textbooks give the parent/teacher the assurance that the necessary material is being covered and are generally open-and-go. A possible downside is a more rigid and school-like experience. The amount of teacher preparation or involvement required will vary. Some traditional textbooks are in the worktext format. Worktext material is given to the students in small chunks in workbooks that the students write in.

Textbook Curriculum Choices

- Abeka (Abeka Academy is their online option)
- BJU Press Homeschool (online courses available)

- [Christian Liberty Academy](#)
- [Milestone Books](#) (includes Rod & Staff and Pathway)
- [Alpha Omega Publications](#) (includes Horizons, LIFE PAC, as well as Monarch and Switched-On Schoolhouse for digital solutions)
- [Accelerated Christian Education \(ACE\)](#)
- [Christian Light Education](#)

Charlotte Mason / Literature-Based

Based on the writings of turn-of-the-century educator, Charlotte Mason, this approach **emphasizes respecting children as persons, involving them in real-life situations, and allowing them to read and internalize really good books** instead of predigested “twaddle.”

Children are taught basic reading, writing, and math skills. Then they are exposed to the best sources of knowledge in all other subjects and allowed to draw their own conclusions. Narration plays a large role in reinforcing and evaluating learning.

Other marks of Charlotte Mason homeschooling are the use of copy work and dictation, nature studies and journaling, use of living books, and short lessons.

You will also find homeschool curriculum choices that are strongly literature-based but do not necessarily incorporate all of the other aspects of the Charlotte Mason method. We’ve listed some of the more popular ones here.

Learn More About the Charlotte Mason Method

- [Charlotte Mason Companion](#), Karen Andreola
- [A Charlotte Mason Education: A Home Schooling How-To Manual](#), Catherine Levison
- [For the Children’s Sake](#), Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

Charlotte Mason Curriculum Choices

(Some of these are pure CM curricula and some are inspired by the CM method and may incorporate other methods as well.)

- [A Gentle Feast](#)
- [Ambleside Online](#)
- [Simply Charlotte Mason](#)
- [Beautiful Feet Books](#)
- [Heart of Dakota](#)
- [Queens Homeschooling](#)
- [Five in a Row](#)

Unit Studies

Unit studies incorporate Bible, language arts, reading, history, social studies, art, and science as they apply to an in-depth study on one topic.

(Phonics and mathematics may be incorporated to some extent but will also need to be taught separately.) This demonstrates to the child that life isn't sliced into subjects.

Unit studies usually use hands-on experiences or activities to generate interest and retention of knowledge. **The whole family can study a topic together with assignments given to the students depending on their ability**, sparing the parent/teacher that fragmented feeling.

Unit studies do require teacher preparation time: research in the library, gathering materials from many sources. Without planning, they can also leave the timid a little unsure whether the children have really learned what they are "supposed to" for their grade.

Learn More About Unit Studies

- [How to Create Your Own Unit Study](#), Valerie Bendt
- [What Your Child Needs to Know When](#), Robin Scarlatta

Unit Study Curriculum Choices

- [Konos Character Curriculum](#)
- [Geo Matters and Trail Guide to Learning](#)
- [The Weaver Curriculum](#)
- [Homeschool in the Woods](#)
- [Unit Studies by Amanda Bennett](#)
- [In the Hands of a Child](#)

The Classical Approach

The classical philosophy, or Trivium, emphasizes the skills of memorizing, reasoning and communicating by which any subject can be understood. Since children ages 6-10 can most readily memorize, they are taught basic facts. At 10-15, when they become more independent thinkers, they learn logic and how to draw correct conclusions. At 15-18 they are taught to use language eloquently and persuasively to communicate. Classical education emphasizes the study of history through classical literature.

Learn More About Classical Education

- [Teaching the Trivium](#), Laurie and Harvey Bluedorn
- [The Well-Trained Mind](#), Jessie Wise and Susan Wise Bauer (secular)
- [Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning](#), Douglas Wilson

Classical Curriculum Choices

- [Memoria Press](#)
- [Classical Conversations](#)
- [Veritas Press](#)
- [Tapestry of Grace](#)
- [Biblioplan](#)
- [Claritas Classical Academy](#)

Unschooling

John Holt, the founder of the unschooling movement, felt that children have an innate drive to learn what they want to learn when they need it. **In practice, unschooling is a non-structured approach that allows children to pursue their own interests with varying degrees of parental guidance.** The child is surrounded by a rich environment of books, learning resources, and adults. Formal academics, if pursued at all, are pursued as the need arises.

Not many Christians practice unschooling in its pure form. Christian parents are instructed to “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it,” (Proverbs 22:6). Parents are commanded in Scripture to teach, train, and disciple their children. “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child,” (Proverbs 22:15) so letting them direct their own educational experiences seems unwise.

There are some things we can glean from unschooling, however. **Unschooling stresses the importance of letting children be a part of the adult world and being involved in “real” activities.** Children can also benefit from the rich learning environment emphasized by unschoolers.

Delight-Directed

Some people use the terms delight-directed and unschooling interchangeably. (They may also call it child-led or relaxed homeschooling.) However, there are some differences between them to consider.

Delight-directed homeschoolers typically use some kind of curriculum at least for certain subjects, while most unschoolers do not. Many delight-directed homeschoolers use curriculum specifically for the 3 R’s (reading, writing, and math) but allow their children to pursue what interests them for other subjects, providing experiences and materials to help them do that.

Delight-directed homeschooling can also be incorporated into many other methods. For example, a homeschool student may explore electives based on

their interests, or a family may choose to do year-round homeschooling but pursue only delight-directed learning in the summer. The materials used for delight-directed learning can come from a variety of sources, most often living books, field trips, unit studies, and even engaging textbooks or courses.

Eclectic Homeschooling

When it comes right down to it, most veteran home educators borrow pieces from many approaches. They may use a textbook for math, use a 4-year history cycle following the classical model, do a holiday unit study for Christmas, and enjoy nature studies for science as Charlotte Mason would do.

Eclectic homeschooling simply means using whatever resources and aspects of various methods best suit the teacher and students.

Many publishers and curriculum choices can be considered eclectic as well. A particular curriculum may include elements drawn from several homeschool methods. Publishers may also provide a variety of curriculum choices or lines, each leaning toward different methods or teaching styles. Examples of more eclectic curriculum options or publishers include Master Books, Sonlight, Timberdoodle, and My Father's World.

Other Homeschooling Methods

There are several other homeschooling methods you may want to look into further. Here are just a few:

- **The Principle Approach** – Teaches students to reason biblically through every area of life using 7 core biblical principles.
- **Montessori** – Parent facilitates a child-led education that teaches self-regulation and provides materials and experiences to explore their interests.
- **Thomas Jefferson Education** – “Leadership education” through the classics and interest-led discussion provided by the parent

What about Online Schools?

Several publishers offer online courses; however, be sure to note whether the online course or “school” is intended for independent homeschoolers or is actually an online public school at home option. A charter school is not a homeschool method.

According to the state of Oregon’s laws, enrolling in a charter school or public school at home option places the family under public school laws rather than homeschool laws. It also comes with requirements as far as what testing must be done and what kind of curriculum can be used with the charter school. For more information, see [Four Kinds of Education in Oregon](#).

Homeschooling allows a great deal of flexibility to tailor education to both children and family needs. For that, we are thankful.

Understanding Learning Styles in Your Homeschool

We all learn differently. Understanding and capitalizing on your child's learning style will make learning easier and more enjoyable for your homeschool children. Many studies have been done on how people learn and there are several ways of categorizing learning styles. Probably the easiest to understand divides learning styles into three modalities:

A. The visual learner – Learns best through visual images (diagrams, videos, watching others)

B. The auditory learner – Learns best through hearing (lecture, being read to, songs)

C. The kinesthetic learner – Learns by doing and touching, manipulating materials.

Teaching Tips for Learning Styles

Young children usually start out as kinesthetic learners, developing other strengths as they grow older. Many children develop tendencies toward a particular learning style over time. Recognizing those strengths and tendencies can be very useful when troubleshooting homeschool challenges or choosing curriculum.

Here are some things to consider for each main learning style including a list of teaching tips to try.

Visual Learners

The visual learner takes in and retains information best when it is presented visually: demonstrations, diagrams, maps, and so on. Reading is also a common visual learning tool. However, visual learners will also often prefer graphic representations or illustrations. Some consider reading more of an auditory

learning tool. This may vary depending on the child and whether or not they internally voice the words as they read.

Ideas for Visual Learners:

- Taking notes
- Highlighting key concepts
- Use written instructions
- Sight words for spelling
- Watch videos
- Drawing
- Infographics
- Diagrams
- Building (legos, blocks, sticks, graphic design program, etc.)
- Comics
- Cartoons
- Flashcards (especially those with graphics or illustrations)
- Puzzles
- Visual games
- Word games
- Books with illustrations

Auditory Learners

Auditory learners process information better when it is presented with sound rather than relying too heavily on visual cues. As mentioned earlier, some auditory learners do rather well with reading because they voice the text in their heads or even out loud as they read.

Ideas for Auditory Learners:

- Audiobooks
- Fact memorization songs
- Lectures / spoken presentations
- Discussion
- Oral narration
- Oral dictation for spelling

- Read-aloud books
- Quiet space for work
- Noise blocking headphones
- Dictating reports
- Read instructions out loud
- Use video that uses good audio explanations

Kinesthetic Learners

This type of learner always needs to be moving and interacting with their learning experience. They learn best by doing (rather than hearing or seeing) and their academics will benefit from physical activity.

Again, young children start from this learning style at the beginning and will grow in other styles as they mature. However, they may retain a tendency toward kinesthetic learning.

Ideas for Kinesthetic Learners:

- Frequent breaks with short physical activity (stretching, walks, laps, etc.)
- Work standing or sitting on a stability ball (or upside down on the couch)
- Practice math facts, spelling, etc, while bouncing on a trampoline
- Manipulatives for math
- Hands-on learning and projects
- Games
- Drawing
- Building
- Experiments
- Field Trips
- Puzzles
- Sandpaper letters and other tactile writing/spelling techniques
- Using hand motions or props aid in memorization
- Brainstorm visually on paper or whiteboards

As you begin teaching your children at home, observe them and see if their behaviors reveal a certain strength in one of these learning styles. You will begin

to see that choosing curriculum that fits their learning style or incorporating activities to adjust that material to their style will help them process and retain the information better.

Also note that as they move into the later grades, they'll need to learn to use methods that may not exactly draw on their preferred learning style. So stretching them in those areas as they go into middle school and higher is a good thing.

Identifying your child's learning style can be a very helpful tool in your homeschooling efforts. We hope this guide and lists of teaching ideas will be useful to you this year!

Additional Resources:

- [The Way They Learn](#), Cynthia Ulrich Tobias
- [Every Child Can Succeed: Making the Most of Your Child's Learning Style](#), Cynthia Ulrich Tobias
- [Homeschooling Methods: Seasoned Advice on Learning Styles](#), Paul and Gena Suarez
- [How to Get Your Child Off the Refrigerator and Onto Learning](#), Carol Barnier

Major Christian Publishers

This is by no means an exhaustive listing of publishers for homeschoolers. Instead, it highlights the major publishers of interest to most Christian home educators. Also, note that some of the curricula listed below may have characteristics that place it in more than one category.

For a more complete assessment of material available to home educators please consult resources including [102 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum](#) by Cathy Duffy and [Home Learning Year by Year](#) by Rebecca Rupp.

Textbooks

Textbooks can be divided into two groups: traditional textbooks and worktexts. Christian textbook publishers have written for the Christian day school. Some textbooks are reusable, others are consumable workbooks.

Traditional publishers

Abeka - Originally a Christian rewrite of textbooks from the 40s and 50s, many of the courses are being revised and are becoming more “user-friendly” for homeschoolers. The material is conservative and challenging. A Beka starts students reading early with a pre-K program that goes into greater depth in K. By the end of Kindergarten children are reading. Abeka includes a large amount of work for the student and advances rapidly. Abeka Academy is also available for an online learning option.

<https://www.abeka.com/Homeschool/>

Apologia - Apologia Educational Ministries provides engaging and conversational textbooks. They are best known for their science courses and household labs, but also have resources for teaching health, worldview, government, and more. Online courses are available as well.

<https://www.apologia.com>

Bob Jones - A Christian publisher that uses current educational methodology, such as more hands-on learning, while maintaining godly standards. Not quite as much reading or drill as other textbook publishers, but still rigorous. Both

textbook and video lesson options are available.

<https://www.bjupresshomeschool.com/content/home>

Christ Centered Publications – This program is focused on Scripture while teaching reading, writing, and math for early grades.

www.christcentercurriculum.com

Christian Liberty Academy School System - A pioneer in homeschooling, Christian Liberty publishes textbooks from a patriotic and conservative Christian viewpoint. They have a strong emphasis on American Christian heritage, character development, and academic basics.

<https://www.shopchristianliberty.com>

Master Books - A Christian textbook curriculum company, Master Books provides resources for most homeschool subjects and has a specialty in creation science and apologetics materials. They incorporate a Charlotte Mason inspired angle in several of their main products.

<https://www.masterbooks.com>

Rod and Staff - A Mennonite publisher emphasizing Biblical content, hard work and diligence. Textbooks are black and white (therefore quite inexpensive). The curriculum includes more desk work than some and the content is advanced.

www.milestoneministries.com

Worktext Publishers

Worktext publishers often use textbooks but also give material to students in small chunks in consumable workbooks. Students progress independently and at their own rate. They do not pass to the next level until they have mastered the previous level. Students can work independently of their parent/teacher, especially in upper grades. Although the independent nature of this approach can be helpful, it is important to make sure you have touchpoints with your child to stay up to date on what they are learning. This helps make sure they are understanding the material correctly and retaining it.

Accelerated Christian Education - Also used in many church schools, these booklets for this curriculum are called “PACE’s.” The lessons are easy for students to follow without much teacher direction.

<https://www.aceministries.com>

Alpha Omega Publications (AOP) - Alpha Omega has several options to choose from for K-12. Their self-paced worktexts are called LifePacs. Their teacher-led curriculum is called Horizons and is also includes a preschool level. For digital options that include self-grading, Switched On-Schoolhouse and their online subscription curriculum, Monarch, are available for grades 3-12. They also have a unit study curriculum discussed later in this document.

<https://www.aop.com>

Christian Light Education - CLE is very similar to Alpha Omega Publications and Rod and Staff and is written from a Mennonite perspective. Booklets are called “Light Units.”

<https://www.clp.org>

Unit Studies

Unit studies incorporate several subjects into one unit. For example, they may include Bible, language arts, reading, history, social studies, art, and science. This is a helpful approach that shows the child that life isn’t sliced into subjects. Studies are themed around topics which can range from historical events to character traits to passages of Scripture. Entire families can be working on the same topic at the same time with each student working at his or her own level.

Unit studies may require a large amount of ongoing preparation depending on the curriculum used. You can create unit studies yourself, but using ready-made resources can help cut down on the preparation time.

Also note that if a homeschool program is based primarily on unit studies, planning and record-keeping may be needed to ensure everything necessary for a given grade has been covered.

Comprehensive Unit Studies

Konos - the “granddaddy” of home school unit study curricula. Units are based on character qualities. The large number of activities included in each level provide a broad choice of material.

www.konos.com

Weaver - by Alpha Omega Publications, Weaver is “a unit-based home education curriculum for children from preschool through high school that teaches fundamental knowledge and learning within the larger context of the scriptures.” The curriculum gives assignments for each grade level so you don’t have to guess what is an appropriate activity for each child and the whole family can be working on the same unit.

<https://www.aop.com/curriculum/shop-weaver>

Tapestry of Grace - a unit study curriculum written with a Christian worldview and organized by historical time period. It takes a four-year cycle of history covering literature, writing, fine arts, Bible, geography, and more. It also uses the classical approach by providing grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric levels for all the lessons so multiple ages can work on the same topics.

<http://www.tapestryofgrace.com/index.php>

GeoMatters - provides curriculum including the history and geography-based unit studies called Trail Guide to Learning and Trail Guide to Geography. They teach geography, history, Bible, and more. Other options from GeoMatters include Galloping the Globe and Learning Language Arts through Literature.

<https://geomatters.com>

Unit Studies with a Narrower Scope

Amanda Bennett’s Unit Studies - great for multi-level teaching that goes deep on a certain topic, such as a historical event or time period, science theme, holiday, etc. Although they’re not meant to be a comprehensive curriculum, they provide a wide range of activities and studies to choose from and often include lesson plans.

<https://unitstudy.com>

Notgrass - a combination of textbook-style history and unit study, covering history, geography, literature, some elements of language arts, and Bible. A curriculum package often includes a textbook and a consumable workbook, as well as opportunities to incorporate literature, biographies, and source documents.

<https://history.notgrass.com>

Once-a-Week Unit Studies - history-based and can be used once a week as a supplement for your studies or as a main curriculum when you use four or five together. They are Christ-focused and designed to be as open-and-go as possible.

<http://homeschoollegacy.com>

Literature-Based

Several curriculum providers are what could be considered “all in one” even though they don’t primarily use textbook or worktext style materials. They often utilize several homeschool methods (classical, Charlotte Mason, etc.), cover several subjects, and accommodate multiple learning styles. Some curriculum in other categories, such as Tapestry of Grace, could be included as literature-based curriculum as well.

Sonlight - Uses good books, both fiction and nonfiction, at appropriate age levels and organized around historical themes instead of textbooks to instruct. These books capture children’s attention and inspire a love of learning. Lesson plans are laid out in such a way that it does not include much teacher prep time.

Some of the books used, especially in the upper grades, do not reflect a Christian world view. As with all curriculums, parents must make the ultimate decisions on what to teach.

<https://www.sonlight.com>

Five In A Row - A literature-based unit study geared for ages 4 through 8. Unit studies are built around outstanding books for children and should take a week to complete. Each story is to be read aloud every day for one week and the

family does activities which expand on the book. There is also a *Before Five In A Row* for preschoolers and *Beyond Five in a Row* for older children.

<https://fiveinarow.com>

Heart of Dakota - a Charlotte Mason based curriculum for preschool through high school, Heart of Dakota has a biblical worldview. Lessons include key ideas from history that are incorporated into Bible, art, science, and more.

<https://www.heartofdakota.com>

Simply Charlotte Mason - Provides open-and-go lesson plans and curriculum for a Charlotte Mason education. Resources include helps for teachers to incorporate CM methods, history studies, enrichment studies, and individual studies.

<https://simplycharlottesmason.com>

Beautiful Feet Books - history and literature curriculum based on living books and guided lessons. Their literature packs include general history (American and world) as well as more specific studies such as the history of the horse or the history of science. Geography and character lesson guides and literature packs are also available.

Classical

The classical philosophy, or Trivium, emphasizes the skills of memorizing, reasoning and communicating by which any subject can be understood. Since children ages 6-10 can most readily memorize, they are taught basic facts. At 10-15, when they become more independent thinkers, they learn logic and how to draw correct conclusions. At 15-18, they are taught to use language eloquently and persuasively to communicate. Classical education emphasizes the study of history through classical literature.

Memoria Press - Offers complete packages for core curriculum per grade level or resources you can purchase separately. Memoria Press offers classical

curriculum with a focus on bible literacy, church history, and Christian faith. An online academy is also available.

<https://www.memoriapress.com>

Veritas Press - Implement a classical education using their teaching kits, complete grade-level packages, or online courses. Self-paced or live courses are available.

<https://veritaspress.com/>

Classical Conversations - Offers curriculum that can be purchased alone or as a part of a Classical Conversations paid community / co-op experience.

<https://classicalconversationsbooks.com>

Other Full Curriculum Options

While some overlap among the categories listed above is common, some curriculum options are more eclectic than as far as what teaching methods they employ. Here are a few to consider.

My Father's World - Combines Charlotte Mason, classical, and unit study methods into a full curriculum with a biblical worldview. They feature hands-on activities and classic literature with their lessons.

<https://www.mfwbooks.com/>

The Noah Plan - Created by the Foundation for American Christian Education (F.A.C.E.) and based on the Principle Approach, this program is for grades 1-12 and is drawn, upon the American Biblical-Classical approach to education. Emphasis is put upon America as a Christian nation and returning to those roots, building Christian character in children, and the seven biblical principles taught throughout each subject.

<https://face.net/the-noah-plan/>

Bright Ideas Press is a Christian publisher that sells homeschool curriculum products from a variety of authors. Some popular ones include Mystery of

History, the Christian Kids Explore Science series, Wonder Maps, and more. They also include several online courses for middle school and high school. <https://www.brightideaspress.com>

15 Tips for Choosing Homeschool Curriculum

When the modern homeschooling movement first began, there were only a few curriculum options to choose from, and most of them were Christian private school curriculum publishers who had to be convinced to sell to homeschoolers!

Nowadays, homeschool curriculum choices are very different, with **the main challenge is choosing from among a growing sea of options!** If you're overwhelmed by the choices, you need these 15 tips for choosing homeschool curriculum!

1. Pray, pray, pray! If we seek God for wisdom (James 1:5) and follow His guidance, He has promised to direct our paths (Prov. 3:4 & 5).

2. Set goals. "If you don't know where you're going any road will get you there."

3. Think about why you are home educating. Write down your reasons. They may change over the years, but they will help you narrow your choices.

4. Think about the purpose of education. Why should children be educated? So they won't be a burden to the state (lawmakers viewpoint)? So they can earn lots of money? So they can take care of their families? So they can serve God?

A great definition for "education" comes from the Webster's 1828 American Dictionary:

"Education: The bringing up, as of a child; instruction; formation of manners. Education comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations. *To give children a good education in manners, arts and science, is important; to give them a religious education is indispensable; and an immense responsibility rests on parents and guardians who neglect these duties.*" [emphasis added]

5. Think about your philosophy of education. How do children learn best—memorization or exploration? Should we start early or wait “until they are ready?” Do they do best if left to their own devices or with guidance and structure?

6. Learn from others who have homeschooled. Read about their experiences and ask questions in conversations! But don’t be swayed by every wind of “truth” that blows. Keep your goals and philosophy in mind.

7. Avoid comparing. We usually compare our weaknesses to others strengths and, of course, we come out short.

8. Focus on character. Teaching materials are the least important part of your home school. Attitudes and godly character on the part of parents and children alike are far more important.

9. Take up the charge. Remember, God has given these children to you as a special gift and stewardship. He chose the right parents for the right children. He knows your strengths and weaknesses, and your children’s strengths and weaknesses. You are the only ones that can decide what is right for you and your children.

10. Do not get stuck in analysis paralysis. There is no perfect curriculum. Spending excessive amounts of time and energy trying to find that mythical perfect curriculum will frustrate you and distract you from more important things.

11. Don’t be a slave to your curriculum. Whatever curriculum you choose, remember, curriculum is only a tool. “Any curriculum will work if you do.”

12. Use your tools as you see fit. You don’t have to assign every page and every problem. Assign about half the problems. If the child has mastered the concept, he doesn’t need the practice. If he needs review, you can come back and use the problems previously skipped.

13. Choose curriculum that meets your needs, too. If you don't like the material, you won't use it even if everyone else says it is the best.

14. Be aware of how much teacher preparation is needed. You may be in a season where you need to avoid or be very choosy about how much teacher preparation you can take on. Find out how much is involved with each curriculum option you consider.

15. Expect change and be flexible. You are always learning. Don't feel like a failure if a curriculum does not work. If you are new to homeschooling, consider using a curriculum with a little more guidance the first year or two until you understand what works best for you, your student and your situation. You can always change it up later!