

The Quick Guide to **CHOOSING A HOMESCHOOL CURRICULUM**

10 Tips to Help you Make
the Best Choice For Your Family



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Introduction

This little e-book came about because it seems to be one of the most common question I am asked through my website and through friends in my life who are choosing to homeschool. Due to the nature of work I do through Teach Beside Me, I tend to know a lot about homeschool curriculum options.

I have been writing this blog for 7 years now and during that time have done hundreds of reviews, most of which are different types of homeschool curriculum. Because of that we have tried so many different types of homeschooling and so many different styles of learning.

I also have read nearly every homeschool book I have been able to get my hands on. I want to know all about the options available so I know that I am making the best choices for my family. That also has given me a great vision of what is out there.

Each year, I spend hours researching and planning the curriculum plans for the upcoming year. In this book, I will go through the different steps I take to make my plan. I hope this guide helps you in your choices!

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10 Tips to Help you Make the Best Choice For Your Family

by Karyn Tripp

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So you have decided to homeschool? Way to go! This can be a difficult choice and I know the stress that can come with it. Your child's education is now completely in your hands. Does that thought excite you or panic you? Maybe a little of both? If you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed, panicked or just curious, you have come to the right place! I will guide you through that choice.

The next logical step after making the huge decision to homeschool is choosing a curriculum, right? If you have spent any time researching, you may feel overwhelmed. There are so many options that look good, so how do you know which is right for you. I have a few tips that may be of help to you.

The most important thing to understand as you are starting out is that there is not a right way or a wrong way to homeschool. Homeschooling is often done because we want to tailor education to fit the needs of our families. You are recognizing a need and following through to create the situation that will be best for your child. Don't feel pressure to conform to someone else's ideals. This is your chance to create a custom education experience for your kids, so be excited at that prospect, not overwhelmed!

Tip #1 Picture What You Want Your Homeschool to Look Like

The first thing to think about is what you want your homeschool to look like. What do you envision? Ask yourself a few questions. Are you wanting to recreate the school atmosphere in your home? Are you wanting a nature-focused school setting? Do you want something that the kids do on their own? Do you want them working through an online program independently? Do you have a lot of time to devote to teaching them, or are you busy and need something that is open and go with very little preparation and involvement on your part?

There are so many different ways to homeschool, but you need to decide what way will work for you and what will bring the most joy to you and your family through the process. I am going to guide you through making that choice.

What are your main reasons for homeschooling? That may affect your choices. Some people choose to homeschool for religious reasons, so they want a religion-focused curriculum. Some choose to homeschool because they travel, so they want minimal supplies to be able to learn as they go.

If you are completely unsure, that's ok! The next tip may help you figure that part out. But I highly suggest you take a little time to think this through. Once you have a little bit

of a vision of what you want, then you can dig in a little bit to the different styles of homeschooling.

Determine your goals for your kids as well. Are your goals to give your child a less stressful situation or a more rigorous education? Do they need one-on-one attention or do they need independent learning? These things will all affect the choices you make.

Take some time to write down your homeschooling vision and the goals you have for your family's homeschool. This is important to really think through. Having a vision and goals puts everything into perspective and makes all of the choices so much easier!

Tip #2 Determine What Kinds of Learners You Are Teaching

How do your kids learn best? Is your child a hands-on learner or more of a visual learner? Some kids need a lot of visuals, whereas others prefer logic and reasoning. You know your kids and what works for them. If you are not sure, there are lots of different places online to test their learning style. You may want to take some time to figure out their learning styles when choosing your homeschool style. This will play a huge part in choosing your curriculum.

Certain styles of teaching are more hands-on than others. Some styles are more writing and reading focused. Take some time to understand how the curriculum works and whether it will fit the needs of your individual child.

Tip #3 Choose a Homeschool Style

Let me tell you about some of the different styles of homeschooling. You have already thought about what your homeschool would ideally look like. Typically everyone has a vision. Your vision may likely fit into one of these styles.

Don't feel pressure to conform to one style! I remember feeling a lot of pressure to choose a style and stick with it early on. It just never seemed to work for me, though. I have had a mostly eclectic style for all of our homeschooling. I never felt like I quite fit into just one defined style. I took the parts I liked from the various methods and fit them in with our own style. This list is just a guide to give you directions and guidance.

If something speaks to you go with it! If there is a style that fits you to a T, then that is great, too! Many homeschool families love a certain style and follow it exactly. However you choose, is great! The reason we homeschool is to make a custom education for our kids, so do it YOUR way.

Homeschool Styles:

Charlotte Mason- Charlotte Mason was an educator in England in the 1800's. She has a large following of her teaching methods. They include nature journaling, copywork, dictation, and a very literature-rich learning environment where students learn from original source books and books that bring the subjects to life. You can learn more about this method at [Ambleside Online](#) or [Simply Charlotte Mason](#).

Online School- There are a lot of places to do online schooling. There are websites that give you a complete curriculum such as [K12](#), [Time 4 Learning](#) and [Connections Academy](#) (just to name a few). There are also websites that give individual classes. Many private schools offer online options as well as many homeschool curriculum companies. There are huge benefits to this since you do not have to do the planning or grading.

Classical Education- Classical Education depends on a three-part process of training the mind called the trivium. The stages of learning are Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric. It is a more rigorous scholarly style of schooling that is very language-focused. [The Well-Trained Mind](#) is a great resource to learn more about Classical Education.

Unit Study- Unit Study homeschooling is teaching around themed topics. It is typically a hands-on learning style with a lot of projects and activities based on that topic. The history, science, language arts and the arts are all centered around a theme that is

worked on for a few weeks. [Homeschool in the Woods](#) is a favorite site of ours with Unit Study lessons.

Traditional School- Traditional School is basically recreating a school atmosphere indoor home. You use textbooks and worksheets and set up a school atmosphere. Many people feel most comfortable with this when they are starting out because it is what they are used to.

Unschooling- This is child-led learning. The children are given lots of options and resources to guide them, and then they choose what most interested them. It is more real-life learning than formal lessons. There is typically no formal curriculum or textbooks. They learn topics when they are compelled to learn them.

Those are some of the basic styles of homeschooling. Read about them and see what seems to fit best with your idea of homeschooling and your family's culture. I am not going to ever say that one style is better than another because it truly is a matter of personal preference and family circumstances.

All-In-One Boxed Curriculum Sets-

Maybe you want something that is all done for you? There are so many companies that offer a full boxed set by grade. This saves so much time and energy. The planning is all done for you. For first year homeschoolers or big families, this is often a fabulous option because all of the planning can get very overwhelming. These boxed sets are all

focused on different styles of learning, so be sure to read and see if their methods fit with what you are wanting.

Here is a small list of some of the boxed sets that are more well known.

Sonlight

Beautiful Feet

Memoria Press

ABeka

Christian Light

AlphaOmega

My Father's World

TimberDoodle

Oak Meadow

BookShark

Calvert

Tip #4 Research

Once you have nailed down the style of homeschooling you want to do it will be a lot easier to choose what curriculum you want to use. Search different websites related to

that style of homeschooling. There are so many specific homeschooling blogs and websites for each and every thing you will want to know about. Check out a few books to read about that style of homeschooling.

I have spent so many hours researching different homeschooling options. I like to know all of my options before making a choice. Once I have read through all of the different options available, I begin my list.

I like to work subject by subject when choosing my curriculum. Math and Language Arts are often the ones that I have the hardest time choosing. Read about all the different math options to get a feel for what they are like. View their samples. Read reviews on different blogs.

Tip #5 Read Reviews.

When I find something that I think will be a good fit, I start reading reviews. There are websites with curriculum reviews and there are lots of blogs that share reviews, too. Read as much as you can to get a feel for it. I have a whole section on my site devoted to curriculum reviews. I have made it a bit of a hobby to try out as many as possible. This has helped me to be an expert in homeschool curriculum. It has also helped me really decide what we like.

Sometimes the reviews and myriad options make me feel like I need WAY more than I really do. I think I need every single book on a book list even though there is no possible way we could read all of them this school year.

Also, don't feel bad if you do not agree with other reviewers. If something you have used works well for you and your family and somebody else hated it, that does not mean it is a poor choice. If it was a good fit for you, that is what matters most.

Some important things to consider while deciding on a curriculum-

- Is it teacher or student led? I like to go for things that are more student-led because that fits better with our style. I know myself and I am not good at sticking to things that have a huge amount of involvement from me. That sounds terrible, but when I have 4 kids that I am teaching, I need it to be streamlined.
- Student learning styles are a big deal. If you know how your child learns, you will be better able to determine through reviews how well it will fit.
- Cost is always an important factor. Find the best fit that is still within budget.
- How it compares to other similar products. Sometimes it is good to read comparison reviews to see how one curriculum compares to another. I often do this when I am stuck on two and can't decide.

Places I Go to Read Reviews:

- Amazon
- homeschool.com

- homeschoolreviews.com
- Cathy Duffy Reviews
- Blogs I read and trust (I have done many on my site.)
- Friends in real life- do you know local homeschoolers? Maybe they have things you can look through before buying. I like to look at something and get a feel for it before purchasing whenever possible.
- Ask in homeschool forums and Facebook groups. People can give you so much information and share opinions of things they have used.
- Go to local homeschool stores or to homeschool conventions to get a chance to look through actual books.

Tip #6 Write a Master List

Do you know which subjects you are planning to teach for each child? If you have not decided that yet, now is the time to solidify that. Do they want to learn astronomy or physics? Do you want to teach them cursive or print? Do you want to incorporate a foreign language or teach them Latin roots? Make sure to ask your kids their opinions, too.

I start with a list of things that I think would be a good fit for our family. Sometimes one thing will work for one child but not another, so I usually do this individually for each

child. My master list usually has more than I would realistically be able to use, but it helps me see where I need to continue my research. I make a list by subject for each child. Then see where there is overlap and choose my favorite of the two options. Also, if you have multiple children, figure out what subjects can be combined to save funds and time.

Another thing to consider is over-planning. Most years, I over buy. I think I can fit in more than I realistically can do. It is definitely ok to keep things simple. You can add more in later if needed.

Tip #7 Budgeting

Budgeting is a huge part of choosing a homeschool curriculum. If you have a strict budget for your homeschool, you will need to plan more carefully as you are choosing. This will greatly affect the choices you make for your homeschool.

Total up the amount it will cost for your list. If the cost is too high, look for places that you can cut costs. Maybe you can find local deals or buy things used. Also, there are a ton of free options for homeschoolers. If there is a very minimal budget, research the free options available.

Free Homeschool Options

Do a Google search for Free Homeschool and you will get so many hits! A blogging friend of mine at Only Passionate Curiosity compiled this great list of [Free Homeschool Options](#). It is a huge list and has so many amazing things! Also, check out the website [Free Homeschool Deals](#) and [Easy Peasy All-In-One Homeschool](#).

Public Funding

While homeschooling is not a tax write-off, there are often some public funding options that work through charter schools. If you are not opposed to public funding, this is a great option to look into to help with costs. They vary state-by-state, so you will have to look into that in your area. We also have the option in our state to enroll in some of the Online Public schools for free (such as K-12 and Connections Academy).

Buy Used

There are many places to buy curriculum used. I buy most of our books used through Amazon. But also look through local homeschool groups, local classified ads, used bookstores, group discounts (such as [Homeschool Buyers Co-op](#) and [Educents](#)), ask in local homeschool groups and online in Facebook groups. There are actually some Facebook groups dedicated just to selling used curriculum.

Check your library. You may be surprised how many things your library carries! Be sure to look into interlibrary loan as well to save money.

Tip #8 Consult Your Kids

I love discussing the options I am considering with my kids. I always show them the things I am deciding between. They very often have strong opinions one way or another. If they are strong-willed (like most kids), they will definitely let you know if something is not right for them. Getting their input before purchasing has saved me a lot of hassle!

Involving the kids in the decisions also makes them much more excited for the upcoming school year. My kids love choosing history, science and literature books! They are so happy to help choose the learning games I purchase. It makes a huge difference in their enjoyment level if it is something they are excited to learn about.

Tip #9 Make Your Choice and Stop Looking

This is so important. If you have taken your time and done your research, what you have chosen is most likely a very good choice. So, just STOP looking for new ones!

What happens all too often is that you will read a glowing review of some new curriculum and suddenly that one looks so much better than the one you are already

using! Be careful to not get sucked into this. There will always be that feeling that the grass is greener on the other side. Doubts will creep in and you will think that maybe what you are doing is not really the best for your kids. What if that new way would teach them better. . .

I have had this happen to me so many times. It took me a few years to really realize that even though I may think that other choice will fix everything, it usually will not. I was so much more content when I stopped worrying if I made the right choice and just used the choice I did make!

If you have done your research, you will have found a good option! Even if your friends love it and your favorite blogger loves it, it is ok to stick with what you have, and what is already working.

Tip #10 Be Ok with Adjusting

I know I just said to stop looking once you have made your decision in the previous tip, however, sometimes there really is something that really does not work for your family. Or sometimes, you can modify a curriculum that you purchased to fit into your needs.

I do not always love the teacher manuals for the books I buy. I will often take it and make it fit with my style. That is totally ok to do! If there is a script you are uncomfortable using, then don't use it!

If your child fights and cries and is miserable, maybe you need to find a better way. I have made my kids finish something that is just plain miserable to them because I do not like to leave books unfinished. It never goes well, and we all struggle with it!

If you are not getting something done because it is too parent-intensive, look for a simpler option so you are not constantly beating yourself up about not finishing everything on the list. If your list is never complete, edit your list so you don't feel the constant guilt. Be ok with removing a few extras that are not getting completed. Be ok with throwing out or selling a book that you can never get through. Don't feel guilty!

I also am frugal, so if I spent good money on something, I want to get my money's worth. You can sell books online. People are always looking for used homeschool curriculum. There are ways to get money back from your unused items.

Conclusion:

So, to sum it up, here are my 10 tips again for you:

1. Picture What You Want Your Homeschool to Look Like
2. Determine What Kinds of Learners You Are Teaching
3. Choose a Homeschool Style
4. Research
5. Read Reviews
6. Write a Master List
7. Budgeting
8. Consult Your Kids
9. Make Your Choice and Stop Looking
10. Be Ok with Adjusting

I hope this quick guide has helped you in making your choices, or at least knowing where to begin. Take the first step today! You *CAN* do this and you will do it well. Good luck making the best choice for your family!