

How to Choose *Your Homeschool Style*

Not sure which homeschool style is best for your family?
Here's a basic guide to help you find your homeschool style!
Check out the pros and cons of the seven basic homeschool
methods to discover which is best for you!



1 Traditional/Textbook-Based Homeschooling

Most similar to the traditional school system, the traditional homeschool method utilizes grade-based textbooks for most subjects. This method continues to be the easiest and perhaps wisest choice for new homeschool parents who are overwhelmed by the multitude of curriculum options available.

Resources

- [Abeka](#)
- [Accelerated Christian Education](#)
- [BJU Press](#)
- [Generations](#)
- [Masterbooks](#)
- [Christian Liberty Press](#)

Pros

For the homeschool parent who is looking for a simple, traditional model, this is definitely the way to go! Especially if you are just beginning and unfamiliar with how homeschooling works, this model may be the best for your first year as you focus on really learning each child's strengths and learning styles. The traditional model is fairly easy to record for transcripts, especially if your student desires to go to college.

Cons

The traditional method can be the most expensive if you buy a textbook kit for each grade level. It is also the least flexible option and requires some of the most lesson preparation/grading work from the parent and can cause homeschool burnout. Finally, many children simply don't thrive on textbook learning or find it boring.

Note: Beware of "online schools" that are in reality public-school-at-home. Online public school is not homeschool and comes with the same level of government regulation, intrusion, and secular teaching as the public schools.

2

Classical Homeschooling

The classical homeschool method has grown exponentially in popularity in the past few years, due in part to homeschool groups such as “Classical Conversations.” Dorothy Sayers, Mortimer J. Adler (author of *How to Read a Book*), and others who developed this philosophy based on classical Greek and Roman educational models.

The Trivium is the backbone of classical education and divides the stages of learning into Grammar (generally the elementary grades), Logic (middle grades), and Rhetoric (upper high school). Or, in more biblical terminology, these stages can be called Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom, correlating to a child’s growth in first memorizing facts about the world, then asking questions about the world, and finally, applying that knowledge to real life. Such learning occurs through reading the “Great Books” and engaging in Socratic Dialogues. Classical education also emphasizes weaving history into all of learning through a chronological model, starting with early civilizations to today. Many adherents also encourage students to learn the classical languages of Latin or Greek.

A closely related method to classical learning, with a similar goal of instilling wisdom, is the Principle Approach, which bases its curriculum on biblical character principles.

Resources

- [Classical Conversations](#)
- [Memoria Press](#)
- [Progeny Press](#)
- [The Trivium Pursuit](#)
- [Veritas Press](#)

Pros

Classical education is a time-tested method of learning that has its roots in some of the earliest thinkers of Western Civilization. Due to its popularity, it is also easy to access curriculum and support groups. It is one of the most academically rigorous homeschool methods out there, and especially prepares students for a liberal arts education, STEM, and law career students at the university.

Cons

While many homeschoolers have adapted this method to fit biblical ideas (see the Blueborns’ *Trivium Pursuit*), its roots are really found in pagan Greek and Roman philosophy. Because of this, it encourages students to read many secular/pagan classics. This can certainly be done wisely and actually build a students’ faith as they engage the world of ideas from a biblical worldview. However, younger students especially may not be ready for this exposure. In addition, because of classical education’s emphasis on chronological history, young students’ are required to begin with the history they are least familiar with (ancient civilizations), rather than starting with local history and moving outward into world history as their brain develops.

3 Charlotte Mason/Literature-Based Homeschooling

The Charlotte Mason method emphasizes the love of literature and learning through exploration. It follows the student's pace as he or she seeks to discover the world around them. Charlotte Mason recommends 15-20 minute periods of learning (no more than 45 minutes for high schoolers) through nature walks and journaling, observation, memorization, narration of discoveries back to the teacher, and especially, reading "Living Books." As this method grows in popularity, an increasing number of support groups based around this model are emerging.

Charlotte Mason is certainly not an exclusive method, and many families choose to utilize ideas from its model while supplementing with more traditional math and science textbooks. It also fits well with the classical model.

Resources

- [Ambleside Online](#)
- [Institute for Excellence in Writing](#)
- [Living Books Press](#)
- [Simply Charlotte Mason](#)

Pros

The Charlotte Mason method works wonderfully with families who have multiple children, allowing them to have "morning time" periods of reading aloud, memorization, narration, or nature discovery that benefits all ages. This method also fosters a love of learning and reading more than rote memorization of facts. With so many resources available online and through the library, it's also one of the least expensive ways to homeschool! It is also easy to make this method overtly Christian, because as the parent, you choose the books and topics you'd like to cover. For example, many families use Bible passages as the subjects for memorization, narration, or reading.

Cons

While Charlotte Mason creates a love of learning and discovery, in its purest form, it can lack academic rigor in the high school years, which can be unhelpful if you have a college-bound student. The model often emphasizes literature and liberal arts over STEM subjects. For this reason, many families choose to use this method only in the elementary/middle school years or supplement this method by using more traditional textbooks for math, science, and grammar.

4 Unit Study Homeschooling

The unit study method focuses on one area of interest at a time (such as Japan, WWII, or elephants), and then incorporates every subject into that one area. This works well for teaching multiple ages at once within a homeschool family. It's probably also one of the most fun ways of learning because of its hands-on, interest-directed approach. The goal of unit studies is to create a holistic approach to knowledge, connecting a child's brain to history, science, math, literature, etc., all from the study of one interest.

Resources

- [Alpha Omega](#)
- [Five in a Row](#)
- [Konos Homeschool](#)
- [Tapestry of Grace](#)
- [Weaver Homeschool Curriculum](#)

Pros

Unit studies are often free online or easy to create yourself, making this method a very inexpensive option. It works especially well for large homeschool families who desire to teach all their children at once. For example, as a family goes through a unit study on mammals, they may read books about mammals, take a field trip to a zoo, memorize poems on mammals together, and then break off and give each student more age-appropriate homework. The unit study method also works well to make weaker subjects more appealing to students by integrating them into an interesting theme.

Using unit studies can allow students to direct their own learning based on their interests. This creates not only a love of learning and discovery but also a sense of self-direction in learning. Students will learn to explore and teach themselves, which is more valuable than knowing mere facts!

Cons

Like Charlotte Mason, the unit study method tends to work better in the younger years, when your primary goal as a teacher is to impart a love of learning. Many parents use this method in early education and then move on to a more academically rigorous method in the later years. In addition, unit studies can be so diverse it is difficult for students to pull all the information together. While there are a lot of unit studies available, it's difficult to find one that will ensure you've covered everything your student needs to know in their given grade level.

5 Unschooling

Unschooling does not mean neglecting to teach your child. In fact, it's intended to be one of the most intentional, parent-facilitated learning methods there is. This method emphasizes an unstructured, activity-based, real-life approach to learning that is individual and student-directed (also called the delight-directed method). In this philosophy, the parent acts more as a facilitator to help the student in their personal journey of discovery rather than as a formal teacher. Unschooling highly emphasizes reading, not in traditional textbooks but rather “Living Books,” similar to the Charlotte Mason method. It also views grade levels as an imposed structure that doesn't truly represent how the individual child learns.

The important thing to recognize about unschooling (despite potential abuse of the term/idea) is that while the parents are not providing lectures, formal grading, or lesson plans, this model requires them to be even more involved, not hands-off. Their goal is to model a love of learning, rather than teach a specific list of curriculum.

The Thomas Jefferson Education movement has similarities to both unschooling and the Classical model, while also emphasizing character-based leadership education and reading “Great Books.”

Resources

- Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind*
- [Thomas Jefferson Education](#)

Pros

This model truly imparts a love of learning to students. It works especially well with artistically-gifted children who might otherwise struggle with academics. It also encourages students to take responsibility for their own education and go into life with a thirst for knowledge, rather than simply checking the boxes to graduate high school or college. Unschooling is also inexpensive and works well for teaching multiple-age students without burning out the parent!

Cons

While unschooling has definite benefits, taken to an extreme, it can become an excuse for not teaching your child (because “life is school ...”). The model also tends to be more of a negative reaction to other types of schooling rather than a *bona fide* educational philosophy. The philosophy also comes from a humanistic perspective, viewing children as a “blank slate” that are shaped merely by their surroundings and experiences, rather than sinners in need of a Savior. However, unschooling can certainly not be taken to such an extreme and fit very well within a Christian worldview.

Unschoolers still have to jump through the same hoops of assessments, subject requirements, and record-keeping as required by law, just as other homeschoolers do. Especially if students are college-bound, unschooling can be difficult to put on a transcript and may not prepare students well for college testing. Finally, most children thrive best under routine and structure, which unschooling can lack.

6 Montessori *Schooling*

While Montessori is not technically a homeschool model, and requires certified training for teachers to truly use the label, the method works very well within a homeschool setting, especially for special needs students, highly gifted students, and young children. Montessori is child-directed and is based on individual learning styles, and, like unschooling, the parent acts as a facilitator, not a teacher. Montessori is intended for a classroom set up to encourage children of mixed ages to explore and cooperate together.

Montessori certainly requires teacher-education to learn the philosophy and method behind it, but many parents find it well worth it to help their children love learning and direct their own education. Parents begin creating a prepared environment in their home/homeschool room that encourages kids to discover, with craft supplies, science experiments, exercise equipment for kids, sensory play options, etc. always available for the child to explore. Montessori also emphasizes creating a structured routine in which children can flourish and feel free to learn.

Resources

- *The Montessori Toddler: A Parent's Guide to Raising a Curious and Responsible Human Being* by Simone Davies

Pros

Montessori emphasizes routine and an orderly environment, which not only helps children know what is expected of them, but it also allows them to thrive and love learning. Montessori's hands-on approach fits life in the home very well, as young children can learn through daily activities such as cooking, laundry, and organization.

Cons

To truly use the label "Montessori education," one must complete certified training. The approach is also intended for classroom use, although many parents have successfully adapted it to homeschooling. It also tends to favor the younger years, so some parents move on to more traditional educational methods for upper elementary and beyond (although many of the principles apply for life).

7

Eclectic Homeschooling

After researching all these methods, not sure which one fits your style? Or do you have multiple children with such different learning styles that you're not sure any one of these fits your family? You're not alone! Many families mix-and-match curriculum from different methodologies to customize their own homeschool model. In other words, if you're not into educational philosophy, but just want to teach your specific children with what works best, eclectic homeschooling is for you.

For example, many parents love the literature-based Charlotte Mason style for English and liberal arts but desire to use traditional textbooks for math and science. Some parents have a passion for a certain subject but perhaps struggled in school with math or English. They might benefit from using a more hands-on approach to teach their passion while leaving their weaker subjects to a textbook or even an online homeschool class.

Pros

The eclectic model is truly the most versatile, allowing the parent to customize the curriculum and method for each student.

Cons

The eclectic approach offers the most control for the parent, but it also requires the most choices! If you're new to homeschooling or are overwhelmed by curriculum options, it may be better for you to buy a pre-packaged curriculum instead of mixing and matching. In addition, because eclectic homeschooling requires you to get to know how your individual students think, it may be better to go with more traditional models at first while you observe and experiment. However, I would warn against using the term "Eclectic Homeschooler" to get out of researching educational philosophies or truly getting to know your students' learning styles. Be intentional about the goal and the means of getting there in your homeschool!

As you choose

your homeschool style and curriculum, remember that you can always grow and change! You don't have to stick to one style or even one curriculum! Discover and experiment to find what works best for your family — and even what works best for each individual student. If you have additional homeschool questions, here are some resources to check out:

- Find encouragement for your homeschool journey and much more at [CHEC.org](https://www.checcolorado.org)! Subscribe to our:
 - tri-annual *Homeschool Update Magazine*
 - email list for updates on events and encouraging homeschool tips
 - CHEC blog
- To learn more about curriculum options that fit with your homeschool styles, check out [CathyDuffyReviews.com](https://www.cathyduffyreviews.com).
- Reach out to the CHEC office anytime with questions at 720-842-4852.
- Join the [CHEC Homeschool Discussion Facebook Group](#) to connect with other homeschool families.

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