

# Home Education Methods



At the heart of homeschooling is the freedom to explore educational possibilities to maximize your child's learning experience. As a home educator you have the freedom to choose the method that meets your family's objectives and aligns with your teaching style.

Use this overview of various home education methods to consider what approach is best for your family. Discover the strengths of each approach, points to consider, and resources to learn more. Whether you're an experienced parent educator or just beginning the journey, it's always beneficial to evaluate your options. Note that depending on where you live some of these options will not align with the homeschooling laws.

[Charlotte Mason](#)

[Project-Based](#)

[Classical Approach](#)

[Technology-Based](#)

[Eclectic](#)

[Traditional/School-at-Home](#)

[Independent Learning](#)

[Umbrella Program](#)

[Literature-Based](#)

[Unit Studies](#)

[Montessori](#)

[Unschooling](#)

[Notebooking](#)

\* The Resources listed in this eBook are examples of resource options that many homeschooling parents have found helpful. They are not created or distributed by HOMESCHOOL.TODAY and do not necessarily reflect our opinion or view of home education.



# Charlotte Mason

Charlotte Mason was a British educator in the late 1800s and early 1900s. She believed that children are persons in their own right, deserving of respect and that they learn best when they are given time to play, create, and be involved in real-life situations.

The Charlotte Mason method emphasizes short lessons covering a wide variety of subjects, as well as developing good habits. Students show what they know by giving narrations, participating in discussions, and keeping journals and a history timeline, rather than by taking tests. This style of homeschooling uses living books, a term she coined, meaning rich literature, rather than traditional textbooks or children's books.

## Strengths

- Time-tested with a successful history spanning more than 100 years;
- Budget-friendly with many downloadable materials available online;
- Compatible with unit study and classical homeschool methods;
- Rich literature – living books – is emphasized;
- Useful methods that nurture a love for learning and reinforce good, lifelong habits;
- Many subjects can be covered with multiple siblings together.

**Typical Charlotte Mason homeschool days** might be filled with: nature walks and a nature study, journaling, copywork, dictation, handicrafts, art and music appreciation, foreign language, trips to museums, map work, memorization, as well as the usual academic subjects.

## Points to Consider

- Materials and websites generally reflect Christian-based philosophies;
- Methods are well-suited to younger students; resources for students approaching high school level might be harder to find;
- Advanced studies in math and science will need to be supplemented by homeschooling parents;
- Resources and ideals reflect the past and don't mention screen-based modern technology such as computers or television.

## Resources\*

- *A Charlotte Mason Education* by Katherine Levison
- *A Charlotte Mason Companion: Personal Reflections on the Gentle Art of Learning* by Karen Andreola
- *The Original Home Schooling Series* by Charlotte Mason
- *For the Children's Sake: Foundations of Education for Home and School* by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay
- [simplycharlottesmason.com](http://simplycharlottesmason.com)
- [amblesideonline.org](http://amblesideonline.org)
- [charlottesmasonhomeschooling.com](http://charlottesmasonhomeschooling.com) (Living Books Press)



# Classical Approach

The Classical Approach has roots that date back to the Middle Ages. It is based on three stages of teaching called the Trivium. After younger children have a preparation stage learning the three R's, they begin the Grammar Stage (ages 6-10) where they focus on absorbing information and memorizing the rules of phonics, spelling, grammar, foreign language, history, science, math, etc. The Dialectic Stage comes next (ages 10-12) where logical discussion, debate, drawing conclusions, research, algebra, and thesis writing is introduced. During the Rhetoric Stage (ages 13-18) systematic, rigorous studies continue as the student seeks to develop a clear, persuasive use of language.

The classical method often incorporates Latin and Greek studies or current foreign languages. There is a strong emphasis on reading Great Books in a chronological fashion and a history notebook is kept so the student sees how their lessons fit together.

## Strengths

- Time-tested and proven style of education;
- Great Books focus, resulting in students who are familiar with key texts and ideas throughout history and across the globe;
- Exceptional reading skills are developed and students often become more perceptive readers than most adults;
- Critical thinking skills and logic are taught;
- Copious texts, schedules, learning plans, ready-to-use curricula, and learning materials are available;
- Deeper understanding of more modern languages is possible through the study of Greek and Latin.

A typical student's day may be scheduled with reading, writing, spelling, grammar, math, history, logic and reasoning skills studies, memory work, Latin vocabulary, religious studies (if applicable), art, and music study.

## Points to Consider

- Parents may find the amount of reading too difficult or the level of reading too sophisticated for their students;
- Focus on reading and seatwork is heavy, leaving less time available for other interests or practical skills;
- Teaching choices are less flexible: order, interests, time frames;
- Parents may question how practical the study of Greek and Latin are for modern day students.

## Resources\*

- *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home* by Jessie Wise and Susan Wise Bauer
- *The Lost Tools of Learning* by Dorothy Sayers
- <https://welltrainedmind.com/>
- <http://treeoflifeathome.com/>
- [veritaspress.com](http://veritaspress.com)
- [Classical Education Books](#)



# Eclectic

Eclectic homeschooling is a popular style of homeschooling where home educators take ideas and approaches from a variety of different methods. It is a style that many homeschoolers default to after they get to know which programs work best for their children. Often, they will evaluate their students' learning styles and watch closely to discover where their talents and interests lie, and then design a curriculum around those considerations.

## Strengths

- Individual needs and abilities of students shapes the approach to their education;
- Most flexible homeschool method;
- Plentiful resources are available and can be drawn from materials from most other methods;
- Popular homeschool method, so there are many other homeschool parents to share ideas and resources with;
- Unique qualities and talents of the students are foundational to help maximize their interest and motivation to learn.

An eclectic homeschool day might include: some time using math software; journal or letter writing; reading from a periodical based on their area of interest; a science experiment in the kitchen; playing a trivia-type geography game; pursuing hobbies; taking a 4-H class or going to an interest club of some sort; and listening to a parent read a more challenging novel before bedtime.

## Points to Consider

- Well-suited to seasoned educators who are more able to decide what methods would mix well, what adjustments might need to be made to a curriculum, or what might work best for their unique child;
- More flexibility and available resources, which may cause a newer homeschooler to feel overwhelmed with all the choices available;
- Homeschoolers who follow this approach may discard a homeschool resource too quickly in a quest to find what works best for their child without taking the time to understand the program better and make good use of the resources they've invested in;
- Focusing on a student's area of interest might leave another subject area inadequately covered for postsecondary entrance criteria;

## Resources\*

- any of the resources listed under the other homeschool styles
- <http://eclectic-homeschool.com>



# Independent Learning

When a child is learning independently, they are taking full responsibility for their learning. Often homeschool families gradually move to this style of homeschooling as their students get older, particularly for high school studies.

Following a structured learning plan, the child will read the lesson in the textbook (or watch the video), answer the questions or problems, check their work, study for the test, and take the test without parental involvement. The parent teacher may grade the tests and papers or help the student when they don't understand something but, for the most part, the student is on their own.

## Strengths

- Busy families that need their children to work more independently benefit from this approach;
- Effectively enables students to learn how to read and listen for understanding;
- Lifelong learning is encouraged as the student learns how to take ownership of their studies;
- Flexible enough for students to determine their own routine;
- Advantageous to students to help them learn perseverance, self-reliance, initiative, and time management which will be assets in postsecondary studies or life in general.

In a typical homeschool day, an independent learner may be: reading and note taking; reviewing previously learned material; making flashcards; presenting assignments or tests to the parent for marking; discussing or researching something; and, making a study schedule for the next course or textbook they will complete.

## Points to Consider

- Parents need to be aware of what level of accountability is appropriate for their child;
- Unsuitable for younger children, while high school-aged students often thrive in this environment;
- Families who want the student's interests to guide what is studied may not find this an ideal method.

## Resources\*

- *The Self-Propelled Advantage: The Parent's Guide to Raising Independent, Motivated Kids Who Learn with Excellence* by Joanne Calderwood



# Literature-Based

The literature-based homeschool avoids the use of textbooks and workbooks whenever possible, using high-quality literature instead. High-quality literature is also referred to as Great Books, Living Books and real books.

Literature choices may include fiction or nonfiction written by renowned authors, children's books, chapter books, popular best sellers, biographies, historic fiction, online magazines, relevant ancient texts, and original source material such as historic journals, eyewitness accounts and correspondences.

## Strengths

- Careful choice of books so learning can be current and in-depth;
- Well-chosen books can help a subject come alive and lead a student into further research;
- Interesting learning allows for better memory retention;
- High-quality literature offers rich vocabulary, grammar and word usage, and demonstrates excellent writing for the student to emulate;
- Read-aloud choices are often above the child's grade level which further expands their vocabulary and knowledge;
- High-quality literature promotes a desire for independent learning;
- Literature-based homeschooling can be integrated into most other homeschool methods and can be a low-cost method by using the library.

A literature-based homeschool day might include reading books together, memory work or copy work from good literature, discussions, quizzes, written summaries or student narrations about what was read, colouring or crafts while listening to stories, and further reading or discussion about what was learned during the day.

## Points to Consider

- Excellent choice for parents and students who already love to read and write;
- Problematic choice for very active hands-on learners or for students who struggle with reading and writing;
- Higher-level math may be a challenge to teach without the use of textbooks.

## Resources\*

- *You CAN Teach your Child Successfully* by Ruth Beechik
- <http://greatbooksacademy.org>
- <http://www.sonlight.com>
- <http://www.novelstudies.org/index.html>
- <https://www.movingbeyondthepage.com/curriculum/literaturebased.aspx>



# Montessori

The Montessori method was developed out of the psychological work of Maria Montessori, an early 20th century Italian physician and educator who worked with special needs children. She believed that children learn best in a properly prepared environment that promotes independent learning and exploration.

This student-based approach uses free movement, large unstructured time blocks, and multi-grade classes. Quality and natural learning materials are kept well organized and made available to the students, believing that children will be drawn to what they need to learn. Montessori homeschoolers will often set up learning centres in their home such as a math area, a sensory area, or a practical life area.

## Strengths

- Suitable for all learning abilities from learning disabled to gifted;
- Spatial and tactile intelligences are highlighted, making this method particularly suitable for hands-on learners;
- Especially appropriate for young students who need touch, movement, and play as part of their learning;
- Very adaptable method that allows the student to pursue their talents or interests;
- Gently fosters self-discipline and co-operative learning, with older children helping younger children.

A typical Montessori day might include: circle time; plenty of time to work at different stations with manipulatives such as sandpaper letters, numerical rods, or puzzle maps; time spent playing outdoors; foreign language instruction; listening to stories; and, time spent practicing personal care or homemaking skills.

## Points to Consider

- Most resources and materials are targeted for younger children;
- Correctly applying the method requires certification;
- Some students need more structure or challenge than this method provides;
- Philosophically humanistic model so available resources will reflect that philosophy;
- More commonly used in the classroom, the Montessori method is not always listed as a homeschool method, so homeschool resources and networking might be harder to find;
- Official Montessori materials can be costly and difficult to find.

## Resources\*

- Maria Montessori, [\*The Montessori Method\*](#) (Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912)
- Maria Montessori, [\*An Absorbent Mind\*](#), Revised Ed. (Holt Paperbacks, 1995)
- Maria Montessori, [\*Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook\*](#) (Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1914)
- Tim Seldin, [\*How To Raise an Amazing Child The Montessori Way\*](#) (DK, 2006)
- <https://www.montessoritraining.net>



# Notebooking

Notebooking is not a homeschool philosophy, but rather a popular method for students to reinforce their learning through journaling. Journaling is an ageless discipline that not only records the journey of learning but develops a child's writing voice and creative talents. Written narrations, copywork, timelines, reports, lists, observations, drawings, maps, and photographs are some of the items that could be included in student notebooks.

Lapbooking is a similar process except a file folder that contains a variety of mini books, foldables, and other materials is used to present detailed information about a single topic or unit of study. The use of notebooking or lapbooking can be used to anecdotally evaluate a child's learning in place of tests.

## Strengths

- Multi-disciplinary aspects of notebooking reinforces many skills such as listening, narrating, summarizing, organizing, penmanship, and drawing;
- Easily adaptable to various ages in a family;
- Expressing knowledge the students have absorbed helps them commit the learning to memory;
- Usable with or without curriculum and is compatible with most homeschool styles;
- Lifelong learning is encouraged through notebooking or journaling and gives the child a feeling of owning their knowledge.

**Homeschooling with the notebooking method** includes activities such as: reading; watching or visiting any variety of sources on a subject; oral narration of what has been read or observed; doing some copywork; writing (narration, list, poem, quote, etc.); drawing a picture or colouring a map or timeline figure; and, showing grandparents or friends their growing notebook or lapbook collection.

## Points to Consider

- Students who struggle with written work may not enjoy this as much;
- This method can involve considerable parental time for planning and tracking down resources, depending on what is included in the notebooks.

## Resources\*

- *The Ultimate Lap Book Handbook* by Tammy Duby and Cyndy Regeling
- <http://www.homeschoolinthewoods.com/timelinefigures.html>
- <https://productivehomeschooling.com/>
- <http://donnayoung.org/forms/planners/notebook.htm>





# Project-Based

Project-based homeschooling is rooted in the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy, developed in Italy after World War 2. The Célestin Freinet method is a similar project-based approach to learning. The child takes all the responsibility for their project and their learning, with parents assisting them with research, planning, or obtaining resources for their projects.

Real-life learning cannot be divided neatly into separate subjects, but many projects will incorporate all the major learning areas. The parents keep a journal, recording such things as observations, steps taken, or questions asked so the parent and child can later reflect on and discuss the project.

## Strengths

- Student-led and student-centred;
- Easily integrates with many other homeschool methods;
- Valuable social skills are developed as students collaborate on projects;
- Inquiry-based learning fosters a love and motivation for learning;
- Project work can make research meaningful and develop strong research skills;
- Projects-based approaches to learning can nurture student passions and talents.

A typical day using the project-based approach might include: a visit to the local library to conduct research; some planning on a white board; discussing aspects of the project over lunch; stretches of time where the student is absorbed in working on his project; reading related books; and, some time for studying any subjects that aren't incorporated into the project.

## Points to Consider

- Good choice if you value independent or self-directed learning;
- Structured learning paths can be difficult to plan;
- Guided learning will ensure that all core competencies are being developed in project work;
- Incorporated subjects into a project might not work well for certain areas of study that build on systematic, prerequisite knowledge (e.g. math)

## Resources\*

- Freinet, C. (1993) *Education Through Work: A Model for Child-Centered Learning* translated by John Sivell
- *Project-based Homeschooling: Mentoring Self-Directed Learners* by Lori Pickert
- [Bringing Reggio Emilia Home: An Innovative Approach to Early Childhood Education – Louise Boyd Cadwell](#)
- [The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation – Edwards, Gandini and Forman](#)



# Technology-Based

Technology-based learning can be used to supplement a single subject or as an entire curriculum. Some math and science textbooks have accompanying DVDs to explain concepts. Children can learn to use word processing and other office tools for assignments.

Popular subjects to teach or supplement with the computer include keyboarding, math drills, music theory and foreign languages. Online courses are commonly used by high school students. These are offered publicly or privately. Synchronous scheduling requires students to stream lectures, take exams or hand in assignments at set times, while asynchronous scheduling allows students to log in or submit assignments at their convenience, sometimes with a course completion deadline.

## Strengths

- Tech-based learning can be used in combination with most other homeschooling methods;
- Useful for those who are pulling together their own curriculum;
- Online academies or virtual schools offer accreditation;
- Some parents feel more comfortable having a third party oversee their child's education, particularly for high school subjects;
- Good choice for families who need their children to work more independently;
- Accessible websites anywhere any time which is a good option for families that travel or participate in activities outside the home.

**A technology-based learning day** generally involves moving through one or more websites or using apps through an electronic device. Children may be guided by an online teacher or their parent, but learning is mostly done independently.

## Points to Consider

- Working independently can reduce the opportunity for parents to learn alongside their children;
- Watching DVDs or videos doesn't allow for the two-way communication with the teaching parent that children benefit from;
- Student interest may be impeded if concepts are explained too quickly or too slowly;
- Technical, educational or teaching level of support varies;
- Costs vary from free to expensive for some websites.

## Resources\*

- [Robinson curriculum](#)
- [Khanacademy.org](#)
- [BrainPop.com](#)
- [FunBrain.com](#)
- [schoolathome.ca](#)
- [virtuallearning.ca](#)



# Traditional/School-at-Home

The traditional or school-at-home method is a popular homeschool choice due to its familiarity and ease of use. Prepackaged curricula often include textbooks and workbooks with lessons, study schedules, assignments and tests laid out for the parent teacher to follow.

Some programs offer more support with online video classes and teachers who mark assignments and assign grades. Some families follow a traditional school-at-home style but gather their own homeschool materials.

## Strengths

- New homeschoolers feel secure with a program that is thoroughly laid out;
- Traditional-style homeschool is familiar and can be more comfortable for some families;
- Typically aligned with federal and provincial school standards;
- Good method for families that plan to homeschool for the short-term due to illness or other life circumstances;
- Teachers' manuals, answer keys, test books, and other teaching aids are usually available;
- Distinct subjects so alternative curriculum can be used for some subjects while retaining a predictable structure;
- Many prepackaged, grade-by-grade, ready-to-use curricula available, giving homeschoolers a wide selection to choose from.

A typical school-at-home day is very much like a traditional school day with a full schedule which often includes: worksheets; tests; textbook assignments; classroom type lectures; a language program; and, occasional science experiments.

## Points to Consider

- Boxed curricula are often designed around the larger classroom model;
- Prepackaged curricula is not always cost effective;
- Opportunities to explore personal interests are limited;
- High burnout rate because of the time, energy and cost associated with trying to replicate a traditional school at home;
- Prepackaged curricula are typically designed for US homeschoolers.

## Resources\*

- Abeka
- Modern Curriculum Press
- Houghton Mifflin
- Alpha Omega LIFEPAC Curriculum
- School of Tomorrow PACE curriculum
- Rod and Staff
- ACE
- Sonlight



# Umbrella Program

An Umbrella or Cover school will approve and oversee a homeschool program. They may offer distance learning that can be used for one subject or as a complete curriculum. Some provide the learning materials while others work with the parents to find curriculum choices that are the best fit for the family.

There are umbrella programs that offer courses that are similar to what is offered in a public school and others that follow an alternative educational style. Some offer accreditation while others do not.

## Strengths

- Some parents are more comfortable with a third party overseeing their child's education, especially for high school level classes;
- When accountable to a governing body, parents are often motivated to homeschool more consistently;
- Student diplomas are recognized by most postsecondary institutions;
- Umbrella programs that follow provincial standards can make future transition back to traditional school easier for the child;
- Long-term assurance that subjects and skills are covered.

**A typical homeschool day** under an umbrella program is often like a traditional school day, but that depends on the educational style of the program. Usually, the school will keep a record of students' marks. Sometimes field trips or other activities are organized through an umbrella school as well.

## Points to Consider

- Some umbrella schools may offer a guidance counselling service to help with postsecondary school applications;
- Annual fees could be charged;
- Religious affiliations could mandate some of what is taught in the homeschool.

## Resources\*

- [www.homeschoolacademy.com](http://www.homeschoolacademy.com)
- [www.calverteducation.com](http://www.calverteducation.com)
- [www.clonlara.org](http://www.clonlara.org)
- [www.virtualelementaryschool.com](http://www.virtualelementaryschool.com)



# Unit Studies

Unit Studies take a theme or topic and incorporate all or many different subjects into that topic (language arts, history, geography, science, arts, etc.). They are a popular way of organizing homeschool studies and are compatible with many homeschool methods. Unit studies can be created by the teaching parent, but there are also many prepared unit studies available for free or for purchase. Purchased unit studies are sold as separate studies, or as part of a complete curriculum program.

## Strengths

- Unit studies are easy to tailor to the learning style and interests of the student;
- Multi-level unit studies allow all the children in a family to study the same topic together;
- Incorporating things like cultural cooking, field trips, skits, or other hands-on projects make unit studies engaging and fun;
- When subjects are presented in a holistic manner, students develop a more “connected” sense of knowledge;
- Works well with many homeschool styles;
- Easy to adapt studies to focus on a student’s weaker subjects.

## Points to Consider

- Adequate coverage of subjects and competencies is necessary to ensure when using this approach;
- Not all prepared unit studies are created equally and a teaching parent needs enough homeschooling experience to recognize what will work well for their students;
- Unit studies might not work well for subjects that build systematically, requiring prerequisite knowledge (e.g. math).

A typical homeschool day using a unit study about Ancient Egypt might include: reading books about Egypt (history); making a salt dough map of Egypt (geography); exploring why the area around the Nile was so fertile (science); calculating the height of a pyramid (math); watching *Prince of Egypt* (cultural studies); learning how to spell “pyramid,” “ancient,” and other related words (spelling); creating a page with a picture of a sarcophagus and a short written description (art, handwriting and composition); and, listening to a bedtime story set in Egypt (literature).

## Resources\*

- *Tapestry of Grace*
- *Five in a Row*
- *The Weaver Curriculum*
- *My Father’s World*
- <http://donnayoung.org/forms/planners/unitstudy.htm>
- <http://www.konos.com>
- Valerie Bendt, *Unit Studies Made Easy* (Bendt Family Ministries, 2004)
- <https://diyhomeschooler.com/>



# Unschooling

Unschooling is a child-led method of homeschooling that is strongly influenced by the work of John Holt. This style of homeschooling is also referred to as natural learning, experience-based learning, interest-led learning, deschooling, or independent learning. Unschoolers tend to avoid typical school schedules, textbooks, tests, or formal lessons and prefer to have children learn by following their interests and curiosities. There is also a respect and trust in the natural ability of children to direct their own learning. Unschooling parents see their role as facilitators rather than teachers.

## Strengths

- Interest-led learning allows children the opportunity to become experts in their areas of interest;
- Research skills are developed in children through this approach;
- Supportive of the development of a love for learning;
- Highly adaptable to the learning style and needs of the child;
- Incorporating experiences, projects, field trips and activities that follow their interests can facilitate a richer, more memorable learning experience;
- Unique personality and gifts of each individual child is respected in unschooling.

An unschooler's day might include: time outdoors, building projects, helping in a home-based business, reading historical fiction, playing board games, watching videos, drawing, or creating their own books. They will often focus on one activity passionately before moving onto another area of interest.

## Points to Consider

- Careful attention is necessary in unschooling so that parents aren't discarding valuable methods of learning and simply reacting against the limitations and failings of institution-based education;
- More orderly structure could be necessary for some students than this method provides;
- Systematic coverage of subject areas will not happen in unschooling, so students may miss some core competencies or have difficulty re-entering school if the parents decide to discontinue home education;
- Good recordkeeping is essential when unschooling for a quality education;
- Good temporary option for children who are recovering from a difficult school experience; following pursuits that truly interest them may re-ignite a joy of learning.

## Resources\*

- [JohnHoltGWS.com](http://JohnHoltGWS.com)
- John Holt, *How Children Learn*, Revised edition, (Da Capo Press, 1983)
- John Holt, *Learning all the Time*, Revised ed. edition, (Da Capo Press, 1990)
- John Holt & Pat Farenga, *Teach Your Own: The John Holt Book of Homeschooling*, 1st Paperback Ed. (Da Capo Press, 2003)
- Clark Aldrich, *Unschooling Rules: 55 Ways to Unlearn What We Know About Schools and Rediscover Education* (Greenleaf Book Group, 2011)
- Mary Griffith, *The Unschooling Handbook: How To Use The Whole World As Your Child's Classroom*, 2d ed. (Three Rivers Press, 1998)

