

## Considerations When Buying Curricula

*An excerpt from Homeschooling in High School for Higher Education  
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Although we still have a few months left in this school year, the time will soon be upon us when we have to start thinking about the next school year. Therefore, this article will review some of the advantages and disadvantages that you may want to consider before making your next homeschooling curricula purchase.

Buying curricula has some distinct advantages. When you buy curricula, it can save you a great deal of time and effort when it comes to planning lessons, grading your child's work, reporting exactly what will be covered for each subject each year to the governing body in your state that oversees homeschooling, and keeping records of what your child was taught for any given subject.

Before you buy curricula, you may want to consider which materials the publisher offers, which materials you want, and which materials you *really* need to purchase to get the job done. Do you need the student textbook, the test book, the speed drills, the lab manual, the teacher's manual, the lesson plans, the learning aids, the flash cards, the posters, and all the other supplemental materials? Or, will just some of the materials suffice?

The choice of materials can be a matter of personal preference. The more materials you have available, the more options you have for teaching and learning. If you purchase just a textbook, you limit yourself to being able to have your child read the information, complete the activities, and answer the questions that are in that text only. If you buy workbooks, you can expand the number of opportunities your child has to practice working with the information presented in the text. Similarly, test books can help you evaluate your child's knowledge beyond the level you can by using the review questions at the end of the chapter in the text.

If you buy the lesson plans and teacher's materials too, you usually have the benefit of not having to worry about figuring out how to use the materials appropriately or even having to worry about what to teach and when—the lessons tell you everything you need to know (usually). Teacher materials can also be beneficial by providing you with the answers to all the questions. Be aware though that in some subjects such as mathematics, especially in the advanced grades, the teacher's manuals may provide the answers to

only *selected* problems. If math is not your strength, you may also want to be certain that the teacher manual not only provides you with the answers, but also shows you the steps used to obtain the answer!

When buying curricula, you may want to look at how you've used similar materials in the past. Learning materials are like paint. We tend to buy much more than we will ever use and then we are stuck with partial amounts left over that we can't really use and that we have a difficult time throwing away. This is a common dilemma for parents who are new to homeschooling. Since they don't know what they need, they tend to buy everything!

When you have one child, materials are expensive enough, but materials for multiple children can really add up fast! If you know that you'll re-use materials with your other children, a substantial investment in materials can pay off in the long run, but bear in mind that some materials, such as science and history texts can become outdated because their subject matter changes rapidly!

You may be able to buy used materials from other homeschoolers. Sometimes you can save money by buying a used text from another parent and then just have to buy the workbook or test book from the publisher. Keep in mind that the publisher may have produced an updated version of the text since your friend bought it, which means that if you use the old text with a new workbook or test book, the information may not correlate.

Once in a while, you'll find used materials at a yard sale or thrift shop. It's a good idea to check the copyright date, as well as the content. Some books are classics that can be used forever, such as for literature or spelling. Other books, such as history and science, may be out-of-date. If the science book says that the world is flat and that the sun revolves around the earth, you may want to search for a more current version of the book.

If the information in the text is presented at a high-rate of speed, meaning that advanced skills and concepts are presented in rapid succession or they are presented before the age that may be appropriate to learn the information—especially for your child—you may want to look for other materials. For example, check to see when the publisher has children learning how to write in cursive or when the multiplication table is introduced. If you feel that the publisher is rushing things a little because certain concepts and skills are being introduced at too early a grade level, trust your instincts because you and your child will likely end up being frustrated and disappointed otherwise.

It's my opinion that there seems to be a tendency for publishers of homeschooling materials to "accelerate" the learning process a little to help promote the idea that homeschooled children learn more information faster than their public school counterparts. If your child needs more time and practice with certain skills or concepts than the textbook provides, you may have to set a schedule different than recommended by the publisher, as well as supplement the curricula with workbooks, tests, flash cards, or other materials.

If you plan to buy curricula for the new school year from the same company from which you purchased curricula the year before, it is important that the information, skills, and concepts in the materials build upon what was taught the year before in that subject. Similarly, the materials should help set the stage for what will be taught the following year in the same subject.

When you buy curricula, whether you buy a single textbook or all the materials for a course, you also tend to buy the educational and sometimes religious beliefs, opinions, and preferences of the person(s) who wrote and/or published the book. If the approach in a particular curriculum concerns you, you may want to either look elsewhere or determine how you want to address your concerns when you use the material such as having your child skip certain sections of the book.

Whatever curricula you decide to purchase, the most important question to consider is whether or not it works for you *and* your child. There are many high profile publishers and authors in the world today and some of them have produced a variety of excellent materials, but if the materials don't help you comfortably teach your child so that he/she can learn effectively, the curricula will be frustrating to use and essentially be worthless in the long run. Happy learning!

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