

## **Lesson Planning: Strategy for Success**

### **SCRIPT VERSION:**

There's a saying, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

Lesson planning is just **determining what you want to cover in the school year and laying out a framework to accomplish those goals:** a strategy for homeschool success. Some parents will be more detailed than others, but having an overview or rough sketch in writing puts your priorities in black and white and lets you see what you may have inadvertently left out.

Whether you use a prepackaged curriculum or an eclectic approach, a written plan can help you operate more on "autopilot." If your kids can read on their own, include them! Whether you let them look through the lesson plan book, or set out work boxes or learning stations for them, they're on their way to taking some personal responsibility in their own lesson management.

A lesson plan also gives you a timeline to measure against as the year progresses. And if you're in a state requiring the submission of lesson plans, or a record of what you've accomplished, this puts you ahead of the game. [Leader: *CHECK WITH HSLDA OR YOUR STATE ORGANIZATION for any requirements – [www.hslda.org/mystate](http://www.hslda.org/mystate) ]*

### **Different approaches to lesson planning**

Of course, families will want to take into consideration any specific statutory record keeping or subject requirements for their states, so these are some general ideas. I liked having a lesson planning book, and once my children could read, each child had her own lesson book to help her learn basic time management. You might use one book for several children, or you can make your own sheets on the computer, or use index cards, a white board, a spiral notebook, or even a computer to-do list. You could even modify the card in a recent Early Years article to hold school assignments, readings, memory verses, and more.

The point is to have a framework in writing that will help you feel accountable—even if only to yourself—and to give you a standard against which to measure as the year progresses (so you're

measuring against the goals that God has given *you*, not your neighbor or the support group leader).

Some people are most comfortable writing their plans out in detail. For example, “XYZ text, page 93, prepositional phrases exercises 1-12.” Others might put under English, “page 93, 1-12.” Still others may just do what comes next in the book, and then just log it afterward, journal style. Some moms even have their older kids log what they did.

An alternative to the standard lesson plan book is the workbox or workfile approach; this can be especially effective for younger children or especially distractible children. Instead of writing each assignment in a “box” on a page, you physically put the work for each assignment in a separate box, such as a clear plastic shoe box or a stacking drawer unit, or even a hanging file or envelope system. Some parents use this approach all the way into the upper grades: you could teach them to concentrate on the work in one literal box at a time, then (the next year or so) put the papers with assignments in the boxes, then transition into writing the assignments in a lesson planning book.

Whatever system you use, it is helpful for the children to have an overview of the expectations. They are more likely to be motivated to finish their work if they know there is a “finish.” When Mom is the only one privy to the assignments, it can feel to a child that finishing one assignment just means getting another one heaped on (and *that* sure isn't very motivating!).

Seeing a manageable (read: finite) number of workboxes, or lesson plan book “squares” for the day, or assignments on the white board gives them hope that there can be an end in sight (for the day, anyway!), and possibly incentive to work ahead.

## **What should you include?**

What do you want to accomplish this year? And what tools will help you to achieve those goals? (Printable Goals sheet is at <http://www.hslda.org/earlyyears/Goals.asp>)

Choosing your curriculum and lesson planning are sort of the roadmap for getting from where you are, to where you want to be, with the actual curriculum itself likened to your mode of transportation. An airplane will get you where you want to go fast, while an RV is good for leisurely trips.

A few years ago, we drove from Virginia to Arizona on a tight deadline for an event, so we drove straight there, no time for sightseeing. But on the way back, we had almost two weeks, so we stopped at landmarks in at least ten states and had a great family time, just enjoying the trip and enjoying each other's company.

It's the same with homeschooling: If your goal this year is to catch up a child who has lagged a little, you'll take the direct route—the airplane—covering the basic skills areas of math and language and character/Bible, and then add the content areas of history and science as time allows. Once you feel more comfortable that you are where you want to be on your timetable, you can start cruising or sight-seeing, taking more time to enjoy the homeschool journey, adding extras to help you meet more advanced, delight-directed goals.

Resources such as *What Your Child Needs to Know When* or *Learning Objectives for Grades K-8* can help you feel more confident that you aren't leaving major gaps in your child's academic education.

### **Build in some “down” time**

Plan to succeed by recognizing that there will be tough days, sick days, good weather days, catch-up laundry days, and so on. If you have a weekly co-op day or recurring medical appointments, plan a lighter academic load that day. Consider adding an educational games day every few weeks, which can be used for educational play if your children are on track, or catching up if you feel you need that. For example, I planned math lessons (our toughest subject) on a four-day schedule, with math games on Friday; if the girls were caught up, they played a math game on Friday, but could use that day to finish any lagging lessons or corrections, if needed.

And if you need an occasional catch-up-the-house day, remember that organization, sorting, and classification are math, science, and language arts skills!

### **Be realistic**

(1) Think “**overview.**”

(2) Decide on your **basic timeframe**, keeping in mind any legal requirements for your state. (I found it workable to plan for eight weeks on, one week off, for five cycles, with four-week breaks in December and July.)

(3) Look over the curriculum: **What will you cover** and what can you skip? Your curriculum is a tool, not your master, and you want to remember to include **life skills** and **character training**, as well as **academics**.

(4) Divide your materials by the number of weeks or days, for a **rough plan**.

“A Day in Our Homeschool” (see Resource list) will give you a peek into the typical day of several other homeschool families (did I really just say *typical* and *homeschool day* in the same sentence?), and you’ll find a few sample plans and routines in HSLDA’s lesson planning section.

While you don’t want to be a slave to your schedules or plans, you’ll want to be diligent and do your best to meet your *reasonable goals*. Do you have realistic expectations, or have you over-planned? Have you expected too much in too short a time? Have you underestimated the time to master a skill or complete an assignment? Or maybe you had realistic plans, but [life broadsided your homeschool](#) and you are totally overwhelmed.

My first year, I thought I would be ultra-organized, so I lesson-planned *the entire year* in August. In pen. So what happened when the first child didn’t grasp the math concept as quickly as we’d anticipated? Right—we “got behind” (or we *thought* we did—maybe you’ve been there, too?). So that threw my whole plan off.

This panic taught me to have an *overall goal* of what I wanted us to cover each year, but to divide that up and put it in writing only eight weeks at a time. After all, I can do *anything* for eight weeks! At the end of the eight weeks, I would evaluate our progress and, during the week off, would write down the plan for the next eight weeks. I learned to get more specific in smaller time chunks, so this motivated me to regularly evaluate our materials, our methods, and any character issues. Rather than being in bondage to a rigid schedule, we found security in a basic routine that helped me to transition through my day without having to make all the little decisions all over again.

### **The *real* lesson in lesson planning**

Plan prayerfully and realistically, execute those plans diligently, but *hold them loosely*. “A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9) What we consider *interruptions* to “our” day, God often intends as the *real* purpose for the day!

Adapted from the HSLDA Toddlers to Tweens e-newsletter by Vicki Bentley September 2010 [www.hslda.org/toddlerstotweens](http://www.hslda.org/toddlerstotweens)

## Lesson Planning – Resources

“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” (Proverbs 16:3 NIV)

“Lesson Planning” (article and resources at HSLDA's *Homeschooling Toddlers thru Tweens*)  
<http://www.hsllda.org/earlyyears/LessonPlan.asp>

“Planning Tips” by Kara Murphy (article) <http://www.hsllda.org/earlyyears/PlanningTips.asp>

A Day in Our Homeschool <http://www.hsllda.org/earlyyears/Resources.asp#Day>

Goals planning sheet printable <http://www.hsllda.org/earlyyears/Goals.asp>

Teaching Home e-newsletter #250: Back-to-Homeschool, Part 3  
<http://teachinghome.com/newsletters/newsletter250.cfm>

“Plan to Learn”—*Homeschool Heartbeat* series on lesson planning  
<http://www.hsllda.org/docs/hshb/97/hshbwk6.asp>

Read the statute for your state to see if there are specific statutory requirements for your subjects.  
[www.hsllda.org/mystate](http://www.hsllda.org/mystate) When in doubt, members should call HSLDA!

Choosing curriculum <http://www.hsllda.org/earlyyears/Curriculum.asp>

How to use a card chart to organize your day <http://www.hsllda.org/earlyyears/OrganizeChart.asp>

How to use workboxes <http://heartofwisdom.com/blog/need-to-get-organized-check-out-homeschool-workboxes/> and <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/workboxes/?yguid=56040180>

*What Your Child Needs to Know When* by Robin Sampson  
<http://heartofwisdom.com/homeschoollinks/what-your-child-needs-to-know-when/>

*Learning Objectives for Grades K-8*: Hewitt scope & sequence checklist for various subjects per grade  
<http://www.hewitthomeschooling.com/book/bsingle.asp?i=1026>

Edu-Track computer software  
[http://www.contechsolutions.net/products/eths\\_pc/index.htm](http://www.contechsolutions.net/products/eths_pc/index.htm)

Homeschool Minder  
[www.homeschoolminder.com](http://www.homeschoolminder.com)

*The Practical Planner for Home Education*  
[www.lifelonglearneronline.com](http://www.lifelonglearneronline.com)

*My Homeschool Planner*  
[http://www.everydayhomemaking.com/products/homeschool\\_planner.html](http://www.everydayhomemaking.com/products/homeschool_planner.html) or <http://store.hsllda.org/my-home-school-planner-p191.aspx>

See a comprehensive, updated list at [www.hsllda.org/toddlerstotweens](http://www.hsllda.org/toddlerstotweens) under RESOURCES > Recordkeeping.

## Outline version

**Lesson Planning & Recordkeeping**

1. **Set goals for each child** (intellectual, physical, spiritual, social – see Luke 2:52; for goal planning sheets/helps, see *HSLDA—see URL on resources handout*).
2. **Determine what will be covered this year.**
3. **Order appropriate materials to accomplish goals. Consider “living” books and life skills.**
4. **Decide on “school” schedule.** Some suggestions:  
Many new homeschoolers know only to have “school at home” and don’t realize it’s okay to have a different routine. For example, some families may use the regular public school schedule, while others may educate year-around, and others may work eight weeks on, one week off, for five cycles (like we did!). They may begin at 6 a.m. and finish by 10 a.m., or they may eat a late breakfast because dad works night shift, and they may work on lessons from 10 till 3. You should decide what works for *your* family.
5. **Peruse materials and determine what you will cover and what you will not.** Your curriculum is a tool, not a master.
6. **Divide materials by number of weeks or number of days for a rough plan.**
7. **Build in some “down time.”**  
Plan to succeed by recognizing that there will be tough days, sick days, good weather days, catch-up laundry days, etc. Consider adding an “educational games day” every few weeks, which can be used for educational play if they are “on track,” or for catching up if you feel you need some catch-up.

When we participated in a co-op, I gave us a very light academic load on Tuesdays. I also built Friday’s math lessons (our toughest subject) as a four-day schedule with math games on Friday; if they were caught up, they played a math game on Friday, but could use that day to catch up corrections, etc. if needed.

8. **Lay out a framework** (1 math lesson per day M-Th with math game Friday; 1 LLATL lesson per week, 1 A Beka literature unit per month, one Konos unit per month, etc.).
9. **Write out a plan to accomplish your goals.** Use pencil! Consider doing your actual daily planning in shorter time periods, such as eight weeks at a time, then review progress and plan the next eight weeks accordingly.
10. **Records to keep:**  
A lesson planning book can include a rough journaling of the basic assignments covered each day (week-at-a-glance format) and assignments can be checked off when finished. Grades (if desired) may be added in red pencil in the appropriate block (if the spelling test is Friday, put the score in red in the Friday language arts block in the planner). This gives you a record of your lesson plans for future reference, or to submit (if you are in one of the states requiring submission of plans).

**Other helpful items** (see “Beginning the Homeschool Journey” in *The Virginia Homeschool Manual*):

- Your school calendar, with field trips, outings, sports events, etc. marked (as well as any attendance records if required).
- Your typical daily schedule. You might even include your lesson plan book or journal.
- Lists of the materials you used this year. I like to include how much I spent and where I purchased my materials, for future reference.
- Report cards/grades, if issued, and any standardized test scores or evaluation reports.
- List of extracurricular activities and field trips.

- Photos of your child studying, playing sports, learning on field trips, socializing with others, etc. Also, photos of projects your child has completed.
  - Reading lists of books completed.
  - Projects and achievements.
  - Samples of his best work. You might collect this weekly, then cull monthly.
  - Checklist of life skills acquired.
  - Audio or video tapes of your child reading, playing an instrument, reciting from memory, etc.
  - Standardized test scores/evaluation of progress
- 11.** Measure yourself against the goals God has given you for *your* family (not your neighbor's or the state's). (For a helpful "Lessons Learned" worksheet, see *Meetings in Minutes*.)

Excerpted/adapted from *Home Education 101: A Mentor's Manual* ([www.HomeEducation101.com](http://www.HomeEducation101.com))

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Vicki has addressed state and national conventions, university teacher organizations, and many mothers' groups. She is the author of *My Homeschool Planner*, *Everyday Cooking*, *The Everyday Family Chore System*, *Home Education 101: A Mentoring Program for New Homeschoolers*, *High School 101: Blueprint for Success*, and other homeschool and homemaking helps. Vicki has a heart for parents, with practical wisdom and encouraging words. [www.everydayhomemaking.com](http://www.everydayhomemaking.com)