

How to Homeschool

A QUICK START GUIDE: BY AMY WICKS



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Our Story:

Our story is both a practical one involving the pandemic and a philosophical one that started when I was pregnant. So if you want the long story stick here and if you want to skip over it, I won't be offended. From the practical side, the beginning of covid put our life into a tailspin. At that time, I was in the throes of having a business that was really taking off, one that had taken me a few years to even start to build. I was an art teacher, teaching different types of art events and a lot of private parties, wineries and local businesses. The business was going great and I was on the cusp of opening my own studio. Then covid happened and everything shifted quickly. I immediately had my kids back at home, at this time they were in 1st and 3rd grade and I had a 3yo as well at home full time. For so many parents I knew, the Spring of 2020 was both nerve wracking and chaotic as well as uncertain and simply, did not work in terms of educating our children. Among everything else that was going on, we were also moving across town, an unexpected move, so things were even more chaotic.

I quickly realized that I wouldn't be opening a studio and that I would have to shelf all of my work for the upcoming season of life at home, educating our children. At this point I had not made the decision to homeschool but I did realize that distance learning was not working for our kids and it was not something I believed in nor wanted for my children at such a young age. I know, I sound prehistoric but at the same time, I had just spent years training my girls to be careful of how much screen time they were digesting and we had strict rules at home. Why would I now hand them over to the screen all day? It wasn't in the cards for us.

There were other practical problems I found with distance learning right out of the gate as well. I didn't like how my girls seemed anxious at the thought of logging onto their computers and I didn't like the idea that since we were at home, I should still heed to the public school schedule. I felt that they had tossed the baton to me, so it was my turn to be in charge of our schooling for my kids. I had three kids under age nine and this simply wasn't working.

That's the short version. Here's the depth behind the rationale.

I spent five years in an Architecture undergrad that has a reputation for being outright brutal and it was. On top of that it required a thesis just to receive the bachelors. I had worked hard. But when I started my career and started to move up in my job, I didn't quite enjoy the bureaucracy of building. It was slow and it was political and I didn't at all feel like I was designing much. After working three years and becoming married, I had my first daughter. I returned to work after I had her but I was changed. I no longer felt the important work could be done there, I knew it needed to be done in my own home.

I quit my job and let me tell you it was a struggle. We were not wealthy by any means, quite the opposite in fact. I fully immersed myself in teaching my daughter as much as I could. It was an absolutely fantastic time in my life in which I felt truly free. I have since been lucky enough to have two more children and share the beautiful experience of raising them up as a stay at home mom.

When it came time to enroll my oldest daughter in school I did so without hesitating too much. I thought it was what I was supposed to do. Find a good district, live in the best area we can and go to the best public schools and we did. Homeschooling was something I had given little thought to but always concluded that my daughter was in the right spot.

When my second daughter started school the same thing persisted and it was fun, they were at the same school and saw each other often, they were at a great school and I compromised on things that I thought "weren't that bad". Things that came up at even a great school were social as well as academic.

I felt my daughters were often taking the brunt of bad behavior from other kids at school. If one kid wanted to leave out the others, my girls would always step up and be the advocate for the left out kids as well as the non-dominant personality thereby being bossed around at school often. This was a common theme that persisted with both of my daughters.

Academically, I had one daughter who was way ahead and often not challenged. I had to constantly advocate for her to be given work at her level and I had to be on top of what she was actually doing in the classroom. At one point, I found out she was teaching other kids in class, which I found disappointing. On the other hand, my other daughter was struggling with reading; to the credit of the school, I found the reading intervention to be helpful. Now that I am homeschooling her I have realized much of her slower grasping of verbal information is really due to her learning style which I will link to in this guide.

Making the leap to homeschool was something that I had always been intrigued by but I really couldn't justify it when my girls were at a top public school with fantastic teachers and community. I let the little problems slide and focused on them growing up, trying to be as supportive of their school as possible.

The deeper rationale here is really that I had personally invested so much of my life into raising my kids that it was difficult to watch it slowly be undone piece by piece at public school. Call it socialization or culture if you will but truthfully, like I mentioned above, my stance is that the children who are well prepared for social situations and who are kind, thoughtful and empathetic are often hurt in public school because they simply do not understand the worse behavior of their peers.

Let me be clear, I do not pretend to know the answer to this issue and I do not intend to shelter my children from society in an effort to control their environment; however, I will say that their public school journey was filled with a lot of compromise, for both them and myself. Is this how life should really be day to day or is there some better solution? I really do not know but it was something that was nagging in the back of my mind.

When covid started and we immediately went into distance learning to finish the spring of 2020, I knew that CA being the way it historically was, this was not going to be pretty. CA is a slow moving machine and truthfully, I knew that distance learning would prevail in 20-21 school year so I started doing some research. This guide is not going to be the be all end all to homeschooling, I simply am going to compile all the information that I know so that you can be well prepared for your homeschool journey. I really hope that you will enjoy this info and then compile some more research on top of this guide. I will give you plenty of links.

Getting Started Guide:

Ideally, you will get this information prior to the year you want to start homeschooling. You may be still in public school, contemplating the leap and wanting to know what you can about homeschooling or maybe you are sure you are making the jump whatever the case may be I am going to tell you about some really important ideas that can drastically help your homeschool journey..

Many of us, myself included went to public school even some of our children went to public school for years and we just don't understand the conceptual of homeschooling; I want you to know that having full time homeschooled two different grades for a few years now, you can do this and you will be surprised at how fantastic it is.

Guided Homeschool:

First of all, there is funding available to help you make the leap into homeschool. I am going to call using funding from a charter school 'guided homeschool'. This is the best option in my opinion and I was lucky enough to snag spots for my girls in April of 2020. Guided homeschool is a fantastic option for first time homeschoolers. You will want to sign up through a charter school or two in your area and you will likely be put on a waitlist the Spring before you start your homeschooling year. Look at all the school options in your area and if you are considering any of them add yourself to their waitlist. So if you are reading this now and you want to homeschool next year, start researching charter homeschooling programs. Personally, I use Heartland Charter in CA. We have been very successful through this charter and they have fantastic resources for our kids.

What you receive with a charter is, an updated cume file as you submit monthly work samples, report cards (if you want them), a teacher to help guide you (it's still your homeschool), a funding account to help you purchase curriculum, materials, technology and field trips. The charter school I work with has been a fantastic option. I was concerned about going rogue with homeschooling because I had never done it before and I was worried about tracking my girls' progress in their grade levels. I thought what if I want to put them back in public school at some point? What if I am not doing enough?

After having homeschooled for almost two years now, I can assure you that if you choose to homeschool, even without a charter school, you will be successful, you have all the tools you need to homeschool your child right in front of you and most of that is the mere fact that you are their parent and primary advocate to begin with.

However, with the current state of the country and CA, I am not sure what lies ahead as I write this. At this very moment there is a high possibility that I will be homeschooling without a charter in the future. We simply are living in an age of uncertainty and it's very stressful. The only thing that we can do is make the next best decision and truthfully, having a heads up on deadlines and registrations for programs for your kids as well as researching, are great ways to be prepared. I am going to give you a ton of links and resources that I highly recommend.

Homeschooling From Scratch:

If you are unable to secure a spot through a homeschooling charter do not worry, you can still homeschool. In fact, this is homeschooling in its original form. What do you have to do to homeschool in CA? It's shockingly simple. You fill out one form! Yep that's it. A form that declares your private home, a school for your child. You are not required to submit any monthly information, just this one form. It's that simple!

Of course, CA rapidly changes so even though this is their current policy and it has been for years and years, be sure to stay up to date on their website. This is your right as a Californian and it isn't regulated all that much. Yet. I have a feeling that the regulation for homeschool is only just beginning.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ps/homeschool.asp>

The form needs to be submitted to the state by **October 15** of the school year you plan to homeschool. So if you traditionally start in August, you would submit the form by mid October.

I am speaking as a Californian and I know there are different rules for different states so here is the link to find your state guidelines:

<https://hslida.org/legal>

FAVORITE LINKS:

State links:

<https://hslida.org/legal>

Charter School Links: (note registrations dates)

<https://heartlandcharterschool.com>

<https://www.triviumcharter.org>

<https://www.ccsa.org>

California Education website (State Standards):

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>

My all time favorite youtuber for Homeschool: She gave me the confidence that I CAN do this. I listened to countless videos by Torrie and she is an all around fantastic resource for homeschooling.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUeh9N7xyOV0ircySFYkriQ>

"Oglesby Ohana"

Recommended to start here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5pq7HSOcJ0>

More fantastic youtube homeschoolers:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/HomeschoolOn>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoh0iC03xsDvmqWir2wh5ag>

A must read homeschool book:

"The Brave Learner", Julie Bogart

<https://amzn.to/3BKpajv>

Learning styles:

<https://homeschoolon.com/the-learning-style-quiz/>

My Schedules:

<https://amysarttable.com/2021/10/11/homeschool-schedules/>

Weekly Schedule	Daily Rhythm
Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core • Pre-k • Chores: Laundry Away 	M/W/F <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7: walk/get ready • 8: bfast/bible study • 9: drop off/yoga • 10: English/Spelling/Read aloud • 11-11:20: recess • 11:20-12: Math/ Writing • 12-1: pickup/lunch • 1-3: free time/work/chores • 3-5: read aloud/make dinner • 6-8: bath/relax/bed
Tuesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Learn • Errands • Chores: Vacuum/Sweep/Map 	T/Th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7: walk/get ready • 8: bfast/bible study • 10: drop off • 10-2: errands/park/swim/run
Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core • Pre-k • Chores: Clean Rooms 	Friday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art • Cook • Field Trips • Research Based • Nature
Thursday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Learn • Errands • Chores: Clean Car/Trash 	
Friday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects • Pre-k • Chores: Clean Bathrooms 	

Daily Rhythm
M/W/F
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7: walk/get ready • 8: bfast/bible study • 9: drop off/yoga • 10: English/Spelling/Read aloud • 11-11:20: recess • 11:20-12: Math/ Writing • 12-1: pickup/lunch • 1-3: free time/work/chores • 3-5: read aloud/ • 6-8: bath/relax/bed

Possibilities of Homeschool:

On the previous page I have linked my current schedule but I just want to tell you a little about the possibilities of homeschool. If you look around on instagram, or the internet in general, you will start finding the beauty in homeschool. WOW! Some moms have absolutely breathtaking ideas, and homes. Please, do not be intimidated by this, be encouraged by this. Most of the women who have it all together as homeschool moms, have been doing it for years. I am in my second year and I have learned so much!

Homeschooling truly is a beautiful thing you can do for and with your children and I have seen it be incredibly fruitful in our lives. I will get into all of that as well but right now I want to talk about your day.

Homeschooling days are generally different each day. You do not need to spend 8am-3pm homeschooling. Homeschooling is such a personalized situation for each family that I want to assure you that you can do this, it can be fun and it doesn't have to be stressful.

I want you to think about what you would like to accomplish throughout each week of homeschooling and then write that all down in a list format. You will of course have your general subjects: Math, English, Science and History but what else would you add to your ideal week? Would you include sports, handwriting, typing, music, art or nature walks? Maybe scheduled field trips? These are the things you need to sort through first. A giant list will help you get started.

Once you have a weekly list I want you to assign a day to each of the things on your list. Will you do math and english 5x a week or only 3? Will you do a science project each week? Etc. Once you know how often you want to include each subject and activity then you can start planning out your homeschool day. If you don't know the answers to these questions yet don't worry, just give it a good try and you can amend your schedule as you determine your curriculum and what activities are available in your area. For example, I have included my schedules but I also want you to realize that our schedule will need to be amended at different times of the year. This is just part of life. Sports change, needs change and that's the beauty of homeschool, you can change things that aren't working and you can change as a season changes. Don't be too locked into one schedule that has to last the entire year.

Once you have come up with a weekly schedule you will be able to create a daily rhythm. A daily rhythm is an overall flow to your days it is not a military schedule. A daily rhythm sets milestones for your day, not exact times. I try to detail mine to the hour but oftentimes I get through the milestones but not 'on time'; this is okay and this is the slower pace of homeschool. Having a daily rhythm allows for flexibility in your day, it says these are the things I would like to move through not rush through.

This is the beauty of homeschool, you can still be you and do other things throughout your day. You are still a mom, you might have other children or a job and we all have chores and cooking that seem never ending. You can make time for all of your usual daily life while carving out a special amount of time for homeschooling. For my family, all of my children function better at the beginning of the day. I've noticed that when I try to homeschool in the afternoon it doesn't work well for our family. I encourage you to try different timing but for us through trial and error I have realized the mornings for roughly 2-4 hours suits our needs the best. I try to make Friday a fun day by incorporating field trips, or more loose subjects like science experiments or cooking.

I recommend getting into an established routine at the beginning of your school year for the first month or so. After that first month you can really start mixing things up! Once the kids know what is expected of them, you can start homeschooling at different locations occasionally like the park or a friend's home or even while you travel! The possibilities with homeschool are almost endless. It is truly such a beautiful endeavor and you will love it even more with time invested.

How to Unschool:

Homeschool is a very specific experience with each child's personality and it requires a lot of patience and a lot of letting go of notions we have learned from our own school experience. We learned from the public school model that we must sit at our desks the majority of the day and listen.

I noticed that when I started homeschooling my girls it was a bit bumpy. They needed the first few months to unschool from public school, which was challenging. My older daughter had already been in school from tk-3 grade and she was very well trained to get her work done and quickly. She is super bright but I noticed while homeschooling her that most of what I'd taught her from 0-5 had dimmed; where was my creative girl? In a way, she almost seemed cynical toward school work and she was only 9.

There is an adjustment period in homeschooling, especially if your kids have gone to public school for a long time. You will have to be patient with them and with yourself realizing that these habits were not formed overnight. Habits include rushing through work to get it done and not taking the time to fully understand something for the actual joy of learning it as well as learning tied to rewards systems. The good news is that these habits were broken relatively easily with the exposure to a more robust curriculum.

The summer season naturally lends itself to unschooling, definitely take advantage of this the summer before you begin homeschooling. You will be researching curriculum most likely and you'll find that there is some amazing stuff out there. While you are prepping for homeschooling, let your kids be very flexible and free over summer and encourage them to pursue anything and everything they are interested in learning. This natural spark of curiosity is the backbone of homeschooling.

The other thing you will need to keenly observe and you probably already know about your child is their learning style. My oldest daughter is a model student. She is extremely bright and an auditory learner so she can take direction verbally and really understand and utilize it for learning. My younger daughter is the extreme opposite of this style. She is a kinesthetic learner, she has to be part of what she is learning and learns by doing. She is the learning style that is absolutely not conducive to public school because she really needs the interaction to solidify learning. I will link some information to learning styles in the links section but it is helpful to know your child's learning style.

What you need:

I want you to start envisioning a relaxed environment where you and your child homeschool together, what does that look like? Where in your home would be a good spot? On any given day this could literally be reading on the couch, learning outside on your patio in the sunshine or right at your kitchen table. I recommend thinking about a spot that can be your primary homeschool area. Ours is our kitchen table. Homeschooling has lots of books and access to lots of materials so I like to be able to spread out on our larger kitchen table, we don't have a dedicated homeschool room at the moment and I am guessing most people don't either.

You'll want the basics for each child:

Paper, pencils, markers, colored pencils, access to a computer, Math curriculum, English curriculum, Science and History, handwriting and reading books.

I like to try to have a read aloud going all of the time that I can pick up and read to the girls while they are doing simpler subjects like handwriting or drawing. This would just be a nice novel that is age appropriate that all of your kids can enjoy like *Boxcar Children*.

In gathering all of these supplies, you'll want to have a cabinet cleaned out in your house to store all of this stuff and then on top of that you may need to make baskets for your kiddos with all of their daily books and materials. Definitely be thinking of storage.

You might want:

A binder to organize your schedule and keep important papers, a stapler, a laminator, paper supplies, pens, hole punch. Don't worry if you don't have all of these things out of the gate, you will easily determine what you need once you start homeschooling.

Curriculum:

There are a thousand directions to go with the curriculum. I am going to tell you what we use and why but by the time you read this I may be using a different curriculum so you'll want to do some research and find what works for your family. Please don't be married to curriculum. If you notice that something isn't working for your child and you are both not enjoying it, switch it out. It is far more important that you find something that works then forcing yourself to complete something that isn't working.

There are tons of different computer program curricula and that is not something that I have used quite yet but I know a lot of people that have had success especially in the upper grades with online courses. This could be a fun option if you have a child that is an independent learner.

I used these curricula last year:

- Masterbooks Math
- The Good and Beautiful Language Arts
- The Good and Beautiful Handwriting
- Spectrum Science/The Good and Beautiful Science Units
- Varied History resources: we were studying California History at the time so we used several different books and visited missions.
- Spelling You See
- Typing Program online



This year we are using many of the same curricula at the next level but we have also switched over to The Good and Beautiful Math curricula which is working really well.

It is quite possible that your children may be in different curricula brands as one works for one child and another for a different child. There are tons and tons of curriculum options both secular and nonsecular.

I use a nonsecular curriculum because I like the values that are built into the curriculum; however, I supplement with a secular curriculum to keep us on track for grade level standards. In California, grade standards are posted on the California ED website so if you are not sure if your kids will be returning to public school at some point, these are helpful to give you the confidence that you are on the right track.

In addition, since I work with a charter school and receive funding, I have a teacher who oversees our work monthly and so the work samples that I submit are from a secular curriculum. I like Spectrum workbooks which are the state standards. I use these to supplement our curriculum and I use them to keep myself on track as well as for work samples. These workbooks are cheap and available on amazon. I buy multiple subjects each year.

You'll want to give yourself some time to research the curriculum and then just go for it. You won't know specifically what works until you start homeschooling. Make adjustments as needed for your child. Additionally, once you start working with your child you will realize if there are any gaps in the curriculum you're using and you'll be able to then seek resources for that particular gap. Maybe your child needs help with spelling or multiplication, you can seek these out as you identify them.

Free Resources:

The Good and Beautiful Language Arts: Absolutely phenomenal that this mom developed this curriculum and is sharing it for FREE! You can check out the website and download the pages to use with your child.

Libraries: Please do not negate your local library! They have loads of books on every subject, available computers, dvds and sometimes they have free workshops too! Kids love going to the library and this is a great way to develop lifelong reading habits.

Online worksheets: Google Image literally anything you'd like to see in terms of worksheets (ie: multiplication, division, science, etc.) and you will be shocked at how much you can find to help supplement your homeschool.

Pinterest: Likewise pinterest is a fantastic resource for homeschoolers, there are tons of homeschool linked projects and worksheets that you can find on every subject.

Teachers Pay Teachers: Some free and some affordable projects and worksheets.

Discounts for homeschoolers: Always ask for a discount to National parks, zoos, and museums many have special homeschooling pricing. Additionally, many museums and landmarks have free tours you can utilize for field trips.

Free Websites for homeschoolers: There are a lot of resources online for FREE for homeschoolers, google what you are looking for like FREE typing program or FREE science videos.

YouTube: Do not discount youtube, though you will have to filter it prior to allowing your kids to watch it, there is a plethora of knowledge on youtube that you can access for free. I myself have over 50 painting tutorials that are made for kids.

CA education website: The education website for CA will give you all the standards of public school so you can see what your children's peers are learning and if you are missing any gaps.



Social Groups: are available in most communities, if you join a charter this is easier to seek out but there are also church groups, sports, friendships already established and homeschool supplemental classes.

Additionally, there are many privately owned companies that will discount music lessons, riding lessons, pottery, art and more for homeschooled children. Seek these networks out in your community.

How Homeschool Has Impacted our lives:

Homeschooling has been very eye opening for me and for our girls. It has given us an opportunity to mend a disconnection that was growing since my girls started public school. I felt they were gone so much and they were constantly tired and running on fumes. In reality, I felt I got the scraps of their day when they were done with talking and connecting, they were just plain tired and on top of that, we usually had sports practices.

I have more well rested kids, we are all around more healthy and not so rushed. The girls are able to explore more of their interests in music, swimming, art and writing. We are able to see friends outside of school more. They are healthier in that we can make better lunches and spend more time going on walks and being in nature. They just seem overall happier to me.

The biggest change would be in the sibling relationship. In the early years, the girls had such a strong bond because they were together everyday. Once they both were in full time school, they were drifting apart. They didn't see each other as much and their age gap became more distinct. Since they have started homeschooling, they have grown so much closer and get along really great. They are more creative again too, constantly thinking of their own projects and then pursuing them.

Homeschooling has definitely impacted my life in that it has allowed me to step back into the role of primary daily caregiver like I was when my girls were younger. I like this role even though it does come with challenges of course. There is once again more cooking and cleaning during the day and I have to be aware of what the girls' needs are each day academically. On some days, this is a lot of extra work of course but the girls are now at the age where they can handle additional responsibility with helping prepare meals and clean up the house, it's not all on me.

Overall, I look at homeschooling as an investment in my kids future. I am now keenly aware of exactly what they are learning and what they need to grow into each stage that comes up. I am happy with the decision to homeschool and feel it has been a great fit for our family. I am also not unaware that their needs may change as they get older and we may seek some sort of schooling option outside of homeschooling. What is great about homeschool is time will tell and there is no correct amount of time to homeschool, we simply are going to do what the girls need at each stage.



You CAN Homeschool:

You may be reading this thinking there is just no way that I can do this. I am not a teacher, my child will not listen to me but I am here to tell you that yes you can do it! It is possible, even if you have a packed schedule or are working a lot at the moment. I can not speak to every schedule but I know that if you want to make something happen in your life you will figure it out. I also run my own business out of my home which takes a generous amount of time per week on top of homeschooling. I generally reserve my mornings for homeschool and my afternoons for working. You may be facing a very constrained schedule but I implore you to not give up and to seek the schedule that you really really want in your life.

You do not need to be a teacher or have ever taught to be a homeschool teacher. There are resources available through charter schools but even if you are unable to utilize the funding and infrastructure of a charter homeschooling program, you still can do this. You need only be able to read further than your child in their curricula and know what to expect. If there is a subject that comes up in math or history that you are not familiar with or do not like or understand, you can either learn it alongside your child or you can outsource that subject to a tutor or an online program. Let me repeat, you do not have to know everything to homeschool! You are not an encyclopedia and you may not be a teacher by trade but you can bring your unique talents, past experiences and perspective to the table for your kids. You are also their parent, no one in the whole world knows your child's personality as much as you do. You can do this!

