

Learning High School Subjects

by Lenore Hayes

One of the key concerns for new homeschooling families is how to approach high school course work. Regardless of your child's age, the mere thought of having to "teach," at some future point, those dreaded classes that we may have had difficulty mastering years ago can be reason enough for many parents to conclude that homeschooling is something that is only an option prior to the high school years. Not so. Many young adults have been successfully home educated about subjects in which their parents have had little or no knowledge or interest. David and Micki Colfax have admitted that they knew very little in the areas of advanced mathematics or sciences, as their degrees were in sociology and English, respectively. Yet their eldest son, Grant, not only tackled these subjects, but excelled in them and utilized them to pursue a career as a public health physician and researcher.

While most teens are probably not going to want to pursue a future in medicine, their parents do have concerns that such courses as algebra, geometry, foreign languages, and sciences are areas that will probably be helpful in college preparation. There are a number of ways in which these academic courses can be made accessible to homeschooled teens. The following suggestions are far from an exhaustive list of options, but they are methods which have been successful for many homeschooling families.

The Traditional Methods or "I Stayed Away From Those Courses As A Teen, I Intend to Keep My Distance As An Adult"

-Tutors - An excellent resource for this approach is to contact the specific department (i.e. math, biology, etc.) at the local college (community or university level). Ask the department secretary or a professor to post or announce a notice that a family with a teen is looking to hire an advanced college student to serve as a tutor.

-Video Courses - There are videos which provide course studies in a variety of academic (and non-academic) courses. Many of these videos come in sets and can be used as an entire course (rather than as supplemental instruction). Many of the community colleges offer telecourses in general education subjects which provide video lessons supplemented by text reading. These video courses used alone, even without officially signing up for the college class, can be very useful.

-Community College Courses - While many local community colleges have restrictions regarding co-enrollment for high school students (especially those in the freshman and sophomore years or younger), many parents have persuaded admissions officials to allow their homeschooled child to take a class or two. Generally this will require some hoop-jumping on the part of the parent to prove the teen is sufficiently competent to participate in the desired class. Most colleges also require verification from the teen's school that the student's attendance and grades are up to par.

-Online and Computer Courses - These courses are proliferating as more people have access to computers and the internet. Such courses can be found at community colleges and universities (both local and distance learning programs), through private programs which cater specifically to homeschoolers and through informal networks put together by groups of individuals interested in particular subjects.

Informal Hands-On Methods or "Hey! I Never Learned This When I Was in School - I'd Like to Learn Now"

-Team Up With Other Homeschoolers - Subjects can be presented by either an individual parent or a team of parents who are strong in the subject matter. Start a cooperative learning network through a local support group or multiple groups coming together to provide more of a broad overview course. Or keep it small, with a few students and adults to concentrate on more specific subtopics within a subject.

-Use Friends As Experts - There are a couple of ways in which this can be approached, the simplest being to ask a friend or extended family member who is accomplished in a specific field to act as a mentor/tutor to your child. The slightly more complicated version of this is to develop a list with other homeschoolers of who is skilled/interested in a particular area and would be willing to either lead a class or act as a mentor to other homeschooled students.

-Enroll in a Community College Course with Your Child - Your child might be a bit younger than the admissions requirements or he/she might not feel comfortable taking a college class alone. In these cases, a parent or family friend could take the class with the student.

-Learn the Material Along With Your Child - Use any of the above ideas, or develop your own. This is truly an enriching way to approach learning for both the child and the parent. I must admit that in my own schooling, I generally memorized the material only long enough to pass the tests and gained nothing substantive in actual learning. Thus, while homeschooling my own son for the past decade, I've taken frequent opportunities to shore up knowledge that I never fully acquired or skills that I didn't quite master. Homeschooling as a family not only provides the children with academic knowledge, it also models and reinforces our personal philosophy that learning is a lifelong endeavor and not something that ceases upon graduation.