

**General Guidance and Tips**

- Thorough study of English grammar and composition prepares the student to intelligently analyze reading material and to produce effective written communication of various types in adult life.
- Begin Grammar and Sentence Diagramming when the student can read well (pretty much whatever you put in front of them), and write competently (handwriting is relatively neat and efficient), typically around 3rd grade. Assign 6+ sentences/day to diagram.
- Sentence diagramming helps visual/artistic children learn grammar because they are “drawing” the sentences.
- Students who are analytical/mathematical can approach sentence diagramming like a puzzle or problem to solve.
- Spelling practice is studied concurrently, until mastered. Study of Poetry and/or Catholic hymns is also important for building analytical skills for language.
- Begin Composition when sentence diagramming is mastered, and continue throughout high school.
- Give one or two writing assignments per week, using prompts from literature or subjects the student is currently reading/studying. Writing is easier when the student writes about a topic of interest or a book they enjoy.
- Some students struggle to get their thoughts organized and translated to written words on a page. Helpful strategies: dictate ideas to another person (possibly prompted by questions); use speech-to-text or audio recording technology.

**Grammar and Sentence Diagramming Sequence**

- Introduce the parts of speech. Can use Mad Libs for fun practice.
- Basic sentence diagramming: subject, verb, direct object, indirect object, adjectives/articles.  
Helpful acronym: “SAD” = Subject - Action - Direct object
- Intermediate sentence diagramming: prepositional phrases, adverbs, linking verbs, etc.
- Complex sentence diagramming: compound sentences, etc.  
Include all types of sentences: declarative, exclamatory, interrogatory, imperative.

**Composition Sequence**

- 5-sentence paragraphs (see format below)
- 3-paragraph essays (see format below; use paragraphs 1, 2, 5: use only one supporting point or detail)
- 5-paragraph essays: argumentative, expository, narrative, descriptive (see format below)
- Practical writing: business letter, friendly letter, invitation, address an envelope, resume, etc.
- Teach other formats that make sense for the student: journaling, blog posts, poetry, research papers, book reviews, how-to's, etc.

**Standard Paragraph Format**

- Sentence 1: introductory sentence stating a topic or thesis.
- Sentences 2-4: one supporting point or detail per sentence.
- Sentence 5: summarize sentences 1-4 (for essay, state thesis).

**Standard Essay Format**

- Paragraph 1: introduction; use standard paragraph format above, ending with thesis statement in place of summary sentence.
- Paragraphs 2-4: restate each point and support it (one point per paragraph).
- Paragraph 5: Restate/summarize 3 points; end with final thought.

**English Language Resource**

- *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, iew.com, comprehensive homeschool curriculum with lots of guidance for parents.
- *Daily Grams*, Easy Grammar Systems, by Wanda C. Phillips
- *Warriner's English Grammar and Composition*: sentence diagramming, many writing formats, comprehensive reference.
- The Winston Grammar Program is a multi-sensory grammar and sentence diagramming resource: <https://www.winstongrammar.com/>
- *Harbrace College Handbook 10th Ed.*, Hodges and Whitten: comprehensive reference for highschool through adult.
- *A Manual for Writers*, by Kate Turabian (Available at Seton Press)
- *The Secret Code of Poetry*, Johnson (chcweb.com)
- *Spelling Power*: one book for all grades; word frequency lists; constant review of words student struggles with.
- *Sequential Spelling: Teacher's Guide Revised Edition* (Levels 1-7), Wave 3 Learning; even doing just the first level is worthwhile.



- There's no one way of doing things; there are many roads. As Christians, we strive to be the people God made us to be. Don't feel pressured to do things the same way as anyone else.
- Before formal instruction in math, primary math ("number sense") should be learned similarly to the way a toddler picks up their spoken language. In a rich home environment, by participating in a family's everyday activities, children naturally learn many basic math concepts through experience, conversations and games. Later on, they more easily learn the written syntax of math, because they have already internalized and are using the basic concepts. See this article for info: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-learn/201003/when-less-is-more-the-case-teaching-less-math-in-school>
- Avoid Common Core and "new math"
- Most math curricula fall into one of two approaches: "Mastery" (sequential introduction of new concepts once the current one is mastered) or "Spiral" (frequent introduction of new concepts and repeated reviews of previous concepts). Some students will learn better with one or the other approach: ask an experienced homeschool mentor, see <https://www.homeschoolhere.com/spiral-vs-mastery-math/>, or search online to help decide which would work best for your student.
- If possible, all students should gain proficiency through Algebra.
- Past Algebra, most people only need to be competent in consumer math, practical math, and problem-solving.
- Further math study can be pursued according to a student's anticipated higher education, vocation or career path. For example, Geometry is useful for many technical, vocational, and professional careers.
- Mathematics concepts are best learned in the following sequence:
  - Primary Math (first math concepts)
  - Arithmetic
  - Pre-Algebra
  - Algebra I and II
  - Geometry (sometimes studied between Algebra I and II)
  - Pre-Calculus
  - Trigonometry
  - Calculus
  - Statistics



### Primary Mathematics

- Math picture books, e.g. "Sir Cumference and the..."
- Measuring, weighing, cooking, counting, money, telling time, recognizing numbers, etc.
- Games that involve math, card games, logic games, puzzles, etc.

### Consumer and Practical Mathematics

- Dave Ramsey or other personal finance homeschool course
- Tracking spending, making and using budgets, comparing prices, etc.
- Crafts: sewing, carpentry, woodworking, etc. build problem-solving skills
- Life of Fred math series: new concepts are introduced in response to "real-world" situations in the storyline

### Textbook Options

- Mastery: Math-U-See, Singapore, Modern Curriculum Press, Jacob's, Foerster, Seton
- Spiral: Horizons, Saxon
- Other: Life of Fred (literature-based; developmentally appropriate; covers all math, primary through college-level Calculus and Statistics)

### Other Recommendations

- Old arithmetic, algebra, geometry textbooks (see below for sources)
- Mastering Essential Math Skills (2-book set)
- Euclid
- Modern School Mathematics Geometry by Jergensen, Donnelly, Dolciani, (1972)
- Used book sources:
  - [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com)
  - [thriftbooks.com](http://thriftbooks.com)
  - [bookfinder.com](http://bookfinder.com)
- E-book sources:
  - [archive.org](http://archive.org)
  - [play.google.com/store/books](http://play.google.com/store/books)
  - [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org)



- CG:** I really loved Math U See when I homeschooled because it was so parent-friendly, and I still use it if I tutor math students.
- LL:** LL: I used Horizons math and supplemented with Life of Fred
- MB:** For math, I use Seton for K-3; Saxon for grades 4-10, [except for] Geometry...which we do in grade 9. I use the old Houghton-Mifflin book that I used when I took Geometry in 1982-83. P.S. I forgot to add that I have not taught math above Algebra 2, which we do in grade 10. But if I were to teach Trig, Pre-Calculus, or Calculus, I would probably use my old high-school textbooks. (I like the "old math" much better than the "new math.") ...this is the Geometry book that I'm using. It's old (1972), cheap, and available: Modern School Mathematics Geometry by Ray C. Jergensen, Alfred J. Donnelly, Mary P. Dolciani
- SB:** K - 3rd: Modern Curriculum Press workbooks  
4th - 7th: Saxon (56 in 4th grade to 87 in 7th grade)  
8th Grade: Jacob's Elementary Algebra  
9th Grade: Jacob's Geometry  
10th Grade: Foerster Algebra and Trigonometry  
11th Grade: Foerster Precalculus with Trigonometry  
12th Grade: Foerster Calculus
- KC:** We used Singapore Math for elementary grades, then switched to Math-U-See after 6th grade...supplemented with some online things for specific areas where we needed more help.
- LL:** Forester is very thorough for pre-calculus and calculus. These you can get at Canada College in Redwood City, California.
- KC:** One thing that was helpful was getting college-level introductory algebra courses, Physics Made Easy, things like that. A fellow homeschooler who also taught engineering at the school our son ended up at once told us it was important to understand algebra as the language of science and engineering, that enables you to solve problems, and that it is the best way to understand and love God as Logos (or as Pope Benedict put it, primordial reason). That was really helpful in removing our algebra blockade!
- LL:** Algebra is critical for understanding calculus. We opted for intense algebra 1 and 2 followed by pre-calculus for one of our kids. We skipped geometry. The other one had an easy time with math and did all the classes. If a child has executive function disorder, then the sequencing skills necessary for doing proofs just isn't there, so focus on what the student can do. They can always come back to geometry later.



- BS:** My son does have executive functions issues, but he is doing great in geometry. I do think it's important to have geometry (and all the algebra) for calculus...it gives you all the formulas you need and gets you the 3d thinking needed for the advanced classes. That being said, I don't think that path if for everyone; the kids going into technical majors and computers should have it though.
- LL:** Yes, you are right; their choice of major does guide our decisions about what to teach. Even with [learning disabilities] every child is different. What works for one of our children doesn't necessarily work for all of them. So many of our decisions are based on gut instinct because we know our kids. It is wonderful to have a supportive community to brainstorm ideas instead of having to think inside the box like traditional systems tend to do. My kids really needed a lot of out-of-the-box decisions that I would not have made when I began teaching, but over time gained confidence. Over time, we also learn what it feels like when the Holy Spirit is guiding us. So many times I still don't know the right thing to do in a situation, but the Holy Spirit shows up 100% of the times I ask for guidance. While my children were being taught school subjects, I was being taught to trust God.
- KC:** Another thing that can be really helpful is Learning Palettes. They cover many subjects, but especially math, and they include a focus on patterns etc. that lay the groundwork for algebraic thinking. They are self-correcting learning tools, so younger students can use them independently, but you can also discuss the concepts.
- AH:** Very neat, KC! We do have several of the Wrap-ups from that company. Here's the website for all their products:  
<https://learningwrapups.com/home>  
I clicked around and found an online version of Learning Palette for free:  
<https://learningpalette.com>
- CG:** I used these Wrap-Ups in my classroom probably 40 years ago.
- AH:** For math, we use Life of Fred and Euclid, along with occasional online tutorials if needed (e.g. Khan Academy, YT videos, etc.), but do not start formal math until late elementary-age. Math is a life skill used in everyday activities and problem-solving, so they get a lot of real-world experience by then.



**General Guidance and Tips**

- The handwriting paper with red and blue lines is great for beginners.
- Many children find their pencil slipping or have discomfort at first. Try using thicker pencils, get pencil grips, or re-use a rubber grip from an old pen on their pencil.
- A wonderful way to get students, especially boys, moving and learning the direction the letters go, is to have them use large, arm-extended motions as you stand with them, facing the same direction, tracing the letter they are learning in the air. You may need to stand behind and guide them a few times. Another movement-oriented way is to write very large letters on the sidewalk with chalk, then have the student walk the letter-writing out (following you, if needed), so they get the direction in their mind.
- For a reluctant beginner or perfectionist, it may be helpful to fill the bottom of a pan with rice or sand, and have the student trace letters with a finger just to get the motion and the idea of shapes and lines. It's a similar principle to the wet-sponge-on-a-slate method used in Handwriting Without Tears; the child gets the idea, it doesn't have to be perfect, and there's no permanent record of "mistakes."
- When a child, especially a boy, goes through a growth spurt, his hand muscles and grip may change, and he may experience a setback in his penmanship, which can be frustrating and mystifying. Grip strengthening can help with that.
- Left-handed writers often smudge their writing. One response is to just not worry about it, but try different writing instruments to see which works best (pencil doesn't smudge as bad as ink pen).
- Alternatively, teach the child to hold their pencil just like a right-hander does, with their pinky resting on the paper and all the other fingers up above it, so that nothing drags through previously-written letters.
- Copywork is a wonderful way to practice penmanship once all the letters are learned. It's also a great way to connect with literature. Favorite poems, quotes and prayers are an endless source of copywork material. These can be illustrated and collected into a keepsake portfolio.
- Some kids will want to go back to printing when they're done with the penmanship program/workbooks. Have them do copywork



in cursive for practice, so they don't forget – perhaps something special, like prayers they are learning. Help them develop their signature, and have them practice it regularly, so it will become neat, legible and eventually look "grown-up".

- Children also need to learn to READ cursive, so they can understand historical documents—and grandma's birthday cards. Practice this skill by printing things out in different cursive fonts on the computer, and by reading copies of actual historical documents like the Constitution, etc.
- Some children have a terrible, pain-filled time getting ideas down onto paper; some experience dysgraphia. It is fine to be your child's scribe for writing assignments, or have them use a computer to type up their compositions. In general, children should practice their penmanship separately from writing assignments, as penmanship and composition are very different skills. Some dyslexic students do better with cursive.

**Recommended Pensmanship Resources**

- Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting Instruction Manual + desk charts AND/OR use the workbooks. The Instruction Manual contains the complete method for teaching. Workbooks are self-contained, and can be used with or without the Instruction Manual. Available at: [handwritingsuccess.com](http://handwritingsuccess.com) and [rainbowresource.com](http://rainbowresource.com)
- Handwriting Without Tears, for students who dislike writing or are perfectionists.
- Callirobics, also for those who don't enjoy penmanship.
- Seton Handwriting
- Simplycharlottemason.com penmanship series (use in this order): Delightful Handwriting, A Child's Copybook Reader, Print to Cursive, Hymns in Prose.



## CORAC EDUCATION CARD: READING

- Phonics is proven to be the best method to teach reading.
- The same teaching methods are used for students with learning disabilities/challenges and for those who catch on more quickly.
- Daily lessons include repetition of skills to link proper speech sounds to their letter representations, while teaching correct letter formation, decoding skills (reading) and encoding skills (spelling).
- Use the amount of repetition needed in order to build foundational reading skills and solidify the neural pathways that make reading automatic – this can range from 1-4 CORRECT repetitions for a "gifted reader" to 200+ for a child with a language-based learning issue.
- Sample "Scope and Sequence" for beginning reading skills (your phonics curriculum will have its own); some are practiced concurrently:
  - Phonemic awareness: letter sounds, phonemes
  - Differentiate consonants ('C') and vowels ('V'); blend C-V and V-C sounds together
  - Decode and encode CVC words (consonant-vowel-consonant)
  - Phonological awareness: hear and manipulate units of sound in spoken words (syllables, onset, rime, phonemes)
  - Digraphs: 2 letters making one sound (incl. ff, ll, ss, zz at end)
  - Consonant blends, at beginning and end of words
- Multi-sensory materials and methods should be utilized systematically to practice reading and spelling skills, especially when a child struggles or is young. Examples:
  - Phonogram cards
  - Reading words, phrases, and sentences using the new skill, then transitioning to very decodable stories
  - Clay that can be shaped into letters, while practicing sounds
  - Sand trays for drawing letters (e.g. an 11x13" metal cookie sheet with a bumpy bottom, filled with a thin layer of sand)
  - Shaving cream
  - Magnetic phonogram/letter tiles
  - Finger-Spelling: child uses fingers of non-writing hand to tap out the sounds in a syllable, using fingers one at a time in left-to-right order
  - Finger-Tapping: child uses fist (or all fingers together) to tap out the syllables in a word



## CORAC EDUCATION HELPLINE DISCUSSION: MATH

### Phonics Curriculum Options

- Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons, Engelmann
- All About Reading <https://www.allaboutlearningpress.com/all-about-reading/>
- Primary Arts of Language, Institute for Excellence in Writing [https://iew.com/taxonomy/term/6/?f%5B0%5D=im\\_field\\_grade\\_level%3A6](https://iew.com/taxonomy/term/6/?f%5B0%5D=im_field_grade_level%3A6)
- Sound Beginnings, Fogassy [http://www.ourfathershouse.biz/shopsite\\_sc/store/html/page16.html](http://www.ourfathershouse.biz/shopsite_sc/store/html/page16.html)
- Little Stories for Little Folks, Catholic Heritage Curricula
- Handbook for Reading, Abeka
- Word Mastery: A Course in Phonics for the First Three Grades (1913) [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Word\\_Mastery/ht4AAAAAYAAJ?hl=en](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Word_Mastery/ht4AAAAAYAAJ?hl=en)
- McGuffey's Eclectic Primer (available in print or online)

### Phonics Materials, Decodable Books and Readers

- Sight words: [https://sightwords.com/pdfs/word\\_lists/dolch\\_group.pdf](https://sightwords.com/pdfs/word_lists/dolch_group.pdf)
- Orton-Gillingham word lists, decodable stories and games from <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/> (search The Literacy Nest and The Dyslexia Classroom)
- Flyleaf Publishing: decodable books available in print and free to read online at <https://flyleafpublishing.com/>
- "I Can Read" books of different levels
- McGuffey's Eclectic Readers 1-6, available in print or as free ebooks: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/author/5671>
- Faith and Freedom Readers

### Detailed Scope and Sequence (examples for reference)

- <https://keystoliteracy.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Systematic-Phonics-Scope-and-Sequence.pdf>
- <https://s3.amazonaws.com/sl-us-standard/resources/phonics-scope-and-sequence.pdf>
- <https://portal.flyleafpublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SS-091619-with-Part-Numbers.pdf>



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### Phonics Curriculum Options

- Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons, Engelmann
- All About Reading <https://www.allaboutlearningpress.com/all-about-reading/>
- Primary Arts of Language, Institute for Excellence in Writing [https://iew.com/taxonomy/term/6/?f%5B0%5D=im\\_field\\_grade\\_level%3A6](https://iew.com/taxonomy/term/6/?f%5B0%5D=im_field_grade_level%3A6)
- Sound Beginnings, Fogassy [http://www.ourfathershouse.biz/shopsite\\_sc/store/html/page16.html](http://www.ourfathershouse.biz/shopsite_sc/store/html/page16.html)
- Little Stories for Little Folks, Catholic Heritage Curricula
- Handbook for Reading, Abeka
- Word Mastery: A Course in Phonics for the First Three Grades (1913) [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Word\\_Mastery/ht4AAAAAYAAJ?hl=en](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Word_Mastery/ht4AAAAAYAAJ?hl=en)
- McGuffey's Eclectic Primer (available in print or online)

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- Orton-Gillingham word lists, decodable stories and games from <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/> (search The Literacy Nest and The Dyslexia Classroom)
- Flyleaf Publishing: decodable books available in print and free to read online at <https://flyleafpublishing.com/>
- "I Can Read" books of different levels
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- <https://portal.flyleafpublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SS-091619-with-Part-Numbers.pdf>



## CORAC EDUCATION CARD: GRID-DOWN LEARNING

- Resourceful parents can make teaching materials out of just about anything.
- Stock up now on essentials, enough for several years if possible: loose-leaf notebook paper, folders, 3-ring binders, spiral notebooks, glue, crayons, markers, construction paper, pens, pencils and sharpeners, erasers, scotch and masking tape, art supplies, etc.
- Look on [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com), [thriftbooks.com](http://thriftbooks.com) and other online sellers for any textbooks or other books that I'll need for several years of home-schooling.
- Optional: download e-books for offline viewing on a tablet. Ensure you have the tablet, charger, and a solar power backup system, all stored securely and shielded from EMP.
- A deck of playing cards: make a simple memory-matching game for younger children, and a more complex matching game for older children. For children in the upper grades, they could be used as a mathematical tool for learning and illustrating the rules of probability.
- Needle, thread, fabric scraps, and old buttons: I could use these items for "Home Economics" and teach my kids how to sew a button, hem pants or a skirt, repair a rip in a jacket, patch a hole, and so on.
- Knitting and crochet needles, yarn, and patterns: Knitting and crocheting are other "Home Econ" skills that could be very useful in the coming years. These could also be considered Art classes.
- An old ham-radio test-preparation book: When my 11-year-old son wanted to get a ham radio and take the exam for a Technician license (the entry-level ham-radio license), I worked the test preparation book into our homeschooling curriculum that year. My son learned mathematics that supplemented that in his regular math book, and science that enriched that in his regular science book. I would also take sentences from the test-preparation book and use them as English lessons: I would have my son parse the sentences (naming the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and such; pointing out the prepositional phrases and telling me whether they were adverbial or adjectival; diagramming the sentences; etc.). After this "unit study," my son had learned a great deal of academic material while positioning himself to earn a Technician license and be able to use a ham radio.



## CORAC EDUCATION CARD: GRID-DOWN LEARNING

- Mathematics: board games like Monopoly can teach even kindergartners how to add by fives, tens, and hundreds. I could use cookbooks to help teach fractions/scale up/scale down for recipes. I could use index cards for making flash cards for addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts. I could teach my high-school-aged son how to balance a checkbook and do a budget.
- For Religion lessons, I could use the Bible (or a children's bible for little ones), the Baltimore Catechism for younger children or the Catechism of the Catholic Church for high schoolers, other religious books around the house, and saints' biographies written for the various children's reading levels.
- For language arts: We have tons of fiction and nonfiction books around the house. Many of these could be used for reading lessons, book reports, essays, grammar lessons, vocabulary lessons, and thinking skills.
- Maps and atlases could be used for geography, map-reading skills, and math skills.
- I would look around my house to see which books could help my children learn history (of my state, of the US, of the Church, or of the world) and government. Biographies of the Founding Fathers, saints and other holy people, scientists, inventors, etc. can teach a great deal of history. Even historical fiction like Johnny Tremain (for younger kids) or books by Louis L'Amour (for older kids) can teach much history.
- Since I garden, I can work science, math, and home economics into our homeschooling plan: my children can help me plan and tend the garden; harvest the fruits and vegetables; and preserve the produce by canning, fermenting, dehydrating, and root cellaring.
- This list of things that I could do (or in some cases, am already doing) is a good starting place, but it is only a start. If push came to shove, I'm confident that my husband and I could come up with many other ways to educate our children well by using only what we have on hand at a particular moment; and I'm certain that all the readers of this short article could do the same.

