

Teach the Child, Not the Book!
(*What to do when Life Interferes with your Planning!*)
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On an internet group, a home educator asked for help with scheduling the teaching of history and science. They expressed their frustration because they had been trying to follow the schedule recommended in their history book, which was to teach history on Mon, Wed and Fri (with lessons on Monday and Wednesday, and Friday being the day for review, timeline and map work), and science on Tues and Thurs. The problem arose because sometimes they would not do school on Mondays, and this would throw off the schedule for the rest of the week, and the frustrated mother would then not do any history that week, waiting for the following Monday to start over.

The following was my response to her plea for help:

I think you need to remember something very important:

Teach the child, not the book!

Remembering this helps me not to get hung up on schedules and days of the week so much. Anytime I plan out a schedule of what **MUST** be done when, life comes along and interferes. Like you, I hate to have my plans messed up, and when that happens it's easy to ditch the lot and wait until I can start again and do it "right". End result - lots more missed stuff, being behind schedule, frustration and maybe throwing in the towel all together. ☹

So, how to I avoid this? Well, first, I **DO** have a plan, but the plan is my guide, not my dictator. It's the plan I follow most of the time, but on those days or weeks when other things come up, I put it aside, and just pick up where I left off.

Secondly, I've found the **BIGGEST** problems come when I set myself up to expect that we **WILL** complete a given book or course in the "recommended" time, no matter what. If a text is set up to be done on a 36 week schedule, then that is a **GUIDE**, and a system that is set up to give you somewhere to start. **SOME** kind of recommendation is needed, and some kind of format is useful to the author too, in writing the program. However, if **WE** see that as a rigid requirement, then we are setting ourselves up for problems. Sure, it's nice to aim for the suggested time frame, but I'm not going to get all worked up if it takes longer.

So, when I plan, I write a list of what I would like to get done in each subject for the week. I even plan it out into a schedule at the beginning of each week, taking into account other things I already know will happen this week. But if we get to the end of the week and have not done everything, then I simply roll those things that are not done over into next week's schedule. So what if I start next week with a review that was meant to be done on Friday?? Life will "happen" often enough

that within a few weeks I'll be back to having it on Fridays. Each day, I tick off the boxes on my schedule of the lessons that got done, and those that didn't I either schedule into the following week, or skip, depending on what they are, and what subject. Therefore, I do not plan specific lessons for specific days more than a week in advance, and I also remember that if I take two weeks to finish one week's plan, then at least I'm still making progress, which is better than if the first week didn't go right, so I ditched most of the second week waiting to start over.

I am a person who is very left-brained, very black-and-white, and very "this way is the RIGHT way". But I've been homeschooling long enough (12 years) to know that I need to give myself permission right from the get-go to be flexible, roll with life's punches, and keep going, and take as LONG as is needed to get through things, and that's ok. If I don't do this, then I get frustrated when MY plan doesn't work out, and end up quitting things. I've done that TOO often! I'm trying to remember to surrender each day to the Lord, to do my best with what I have planned, and to relax enough to let HIS plan take first place. :-)

As to whether to do History/Science on alternating days, alternating weeks, or alternating semesters, that is up to you. Look at what you're doing, and what is or is not working for you, and make adjustments accordingly. I've personally started out this year with both History and Science planned for every day, in short lessons. It's working fairly well. I'm considering trying a few weeks with a different arrangement to see what is better. I was thinking of the alternative days plan, but might also try doing alternative weeks. I thought about alternative terms, but decided that for us, this would be too long a gap, and my kids would forget stuff or lose the flow of what we're studying.

Another thought that helps me relax with teaching history:

Realizing that, NO MATTER WHAT, there is no way, no how, that we could teach ALL there is to know about history in 12 years of school. In fact, you couldn't learn it ALL in a lifetime! So, we must pick and choose what we learn about, and if we miss some things here and there, it doesn't matter! When I teach history, I have specific goals in mind:

- 1) To give my children an idea of the FLOW of history, and a broad outline and understanding of what happened when and where. At least the highlights, which will give them something they can fit other information into later.
- 2) To give them a LOVE of history - to make it alive and interesting to them, so they will continue to be interested for the rest of their lives. I think they get a passion for history best when we take our time and linger over the people that we find most fascinating, not rush on because the book says we should be up to "here".
- 3) To give them the TOOLS of how to learn about history - knowing how to find information, how to relate that information to other people/places/things etc. Research skills, constructing a time line etc come into this.
- 4) To help them understand the IMPORTANCE of history, that knowing what has happened before helps us to correctly understand what is happening now, to see

that history is a record of God's dealings with mankind, and to realize that "nothing is new under the sun"; what you sow you reap etc.

When I keep these thoughts in mind, I no longer worry about whether we finish our spine text this year, or take two. I don't worry about whether we will get through all of history from creation to today before the kids finish school. Because I know that I am lighting a fire that will burn all their lives; igniting a passion that will carry through. And THAT is far more valuable than completing any book. Once you light that fire, the kids will begin, once they get old enough, to dive into MORE of history than you have time to teach. They will read every book they can get their hands on about the person or time that interests them. They will make their own records, create their own projects, and bubble over with enthusiasm. They'll read textbooks beyond what you have done with them, and dig deeper than you have time to dig. They'll begin to teach YOU history! ☺ I'm seeing this with my own children, especially my 14 year old daughter, and increasingly my 12 year old son.

So, bottom line, my advice to you is to RELAX, and ENJOY the journey! ☺

Update: I wrote the above 2 years ago. My kids are still excited about history! ☺ My now 16 yo daughter is a walking Tudor encyclopedia, and my 14 yo son constantly tells me things I never knew. My 12 yo daughter has been studying early missionaries, and talks about them as if they were her friends. ☺

Cynthia Hancox currently lives in Foxton and has been married to her sweetheart for 20 years. She has been home schooling her five children since 1994. Cynthia has been running an international internet support group for Christian Homeschoolers for the past 6 years, and has a passion to draw alongside wives and mothers who are struggling, and help them find peace in their life, home and relationships. Visit her website at <http://www.CynthiaHancox.com> and read her testimony, and other articles by Cynthia. Check out her series of books called "Goodbye Chaos, Hello Peace!"