

A NOTEBOOK PLANNER

by Tammy R. Arp (October 1998),

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This year is it. I think I finally have refined a way for me to get organized. (Is that really possible?) After two years of effort, I can now announce "EUREKA." My goal was not finding gold, the material kind anyway, but to find a way to coordinate my key homeschooling activities. A way which was neither too expensive nor too cumbersome to maintain. Yes, I know there are a lot of notebook planners on the market, especially the tried and true standard; but somehow, none of them seemed to fit just right. With due respect given to those who have explored before me, and at risk of re-creating the wheel and abusing an expired equine, here is my triumphant summation (at least for this year):

THE START: Materials Used.

I use a full-sized, 3-ring binder, with 2 1/2" to 3" d-rings and clear pockets across the front and back covers. (The pockets are an important ingredient). I also use standard notebook dividers, color coded is an added touch of convenience. I permanently mark the appropriate school year on the front cover and binding as this notebook will become a permanent record. Next year I will start with a new notebook and begin again. The forms I will use are generated from my computer/printer and customized to my needs. (I find this an absolute boon cost wise and practical use wise):

THE FRONT POCKET: Resources.

In this pocket I place my "Homeschooling Resources" sheet with any personal resource numbers penciled in. I also place the small half sheet library schedules from the public library and my church library. Here too I place my library book printouts (usually just loose lying on top of the inside cover). I now have in one spot my most frequently called phone numbers, AND the library hours/phone numbers together with the list of books I may have to renew at the last minute by phone to avoid that late charge. To further compliment this front pocket, I make up three sheets (on regular notebook paper) to be the top three sheets in the notebook:

Sheet One:. Library books I want to get next time I go,

Sheet Two. Curriculum I want to purchase next time I have a spare dime.

Sheet Three. Books I've loaned out (front) or borrowed (back), to whom/from, and return date.

THE NOTEBOOK DIVISIONS:

FIRST DIVISION: Calendar.

Here I place my computer-generated, year-at-a-glance and month-at-a-glance calendars that cover the school year. I use the year calendar to block off holidays and any family events, and then to calculate and block off my school days. I use the month calendar to notate subject benchmarks (at 1/4, 1/2, 3/4 of the year) and scope out my units (broadstrokes only), so I may distribute my work flow over the year evenly and hopefully prevent the end of the year panic if we dwaddled too much!

SECOND DIVISION: Academic Goals:

I have 3 children so I use 3 color-coded, notebook dividers, one for each child. Here I have a Student Course & Source and Goals form (based off of Cathy Duffy's Course of Study sheet in the back of her manual); a copy of the child's year-end, achievement test diagnostic for last year (to help me plan for this year); and a copy of the grade appropriate evaluation checklists from Robin Scarlata's *What Your Child Needs to Know When, An Evaluation Check List for Grades K-8*. (This is an excellent source for academic goals listed by subject and grade. I tore apart her book so I could combine all the subject checklists of one grade together. She gives evaluation checklists per grade for Language Arts, Math, Science and History.) I use these checklists as a guideline and not a mandate (which Scarlata quickly recommends) because each child progresses at his own unique rate and all curriculums are scoped slightly different. However, these checklists do give me a comprehensive target to at least shoot for.

THIRD DIVISION: Unit Master Sheets:

As my two older girls are so close in academic age, I do one science and one history/geography program for them, and then I coordinate my young son to the girls in a unit fashion. In this notebook division, then, I have

2 very detailed master sheets, one for science and one for history/geography. On these master sheets I coordinate by area/theme the girls text book(s), my son's work, any supplements, crafts, hands-on learning, videos, field trips, etc. This is the first year I have used a master planner like this; but after 2 years of flying by the seat of my pants to find activities my young son can do to keep busy AND learning, plus give the girls all that wonderful enrichment stuff homeschool is known for, this pre-planning will pay off well, especially on those brain-dead days when we need to add some spice to the work but I can't think of anything!

FOURTH DIVISION: Daily Assignment Sheets.

Daily assignment sheets can be arranged by subject, by child, by time, or by work flow. I make up my own form that is arranged by my teaching work flow. Laying the notebook flat, I divide two facing sheets, the right page and the left page, into 4 quadrants. The top left quadrant is for my oldest child, broken into her basic subjects (math, language arts, spelling). The bottom left quadrant is my second child's, again broken down into her basic subjects. The top right quadrant on the facing page is my son's, broken down into his basic subjects, and then finally, the bottom right quadrant is the unit study section, those things we do as a group together (science, history, art, music, p.e.). Each quadrant is, of course, marked with the appropriate headings. I like this format because I can see in a glance what the whole day holds for me as a teacher, and the page arrangement even suggests the day's work flow, the basics first in the morning, then the units in the afternoon. I pencil in each day's assignments on this form (a week at a time) and a particular focus to achieve. At the end of each day I write in red how the work was completed. I keep the assignment notations and comments brief but enough detailed so that I get a clear idea of what's happened when I look back. This then makes a good record of achievement. As I will have 180-185 of these double sheets in my notebook (one for each school day), this will be the fattest and the most used part in my planner. You could also use a form that you fill in on the computer if you'd rather type than write.

FIFTH DIVISION: Subject Ideas.

This division contains ruled notebook paper with a single subject heading on each sheet. This is where I write down those out-of-the-blue great ideas for a certain subject that I think I might want to work into our schoolwork but which I'll need to research or develop more fully. I'm great at getting ideas but then forgetting all about them until after we've passed that section! Here I rope them in and jot them down, and if time allows, develop them into the curriculum.

SIXTH DIVISION: Achievement Test Results.

At the end of this year, I will place a copy of this school year's achievement test results for each child into this division.

BACK COVER POCKET: A Financial Record.

Here, I place all my receipts for curriculum purchases and school expenses as they occur over the year. This is handy on two accounts: one, I know where a receipt is if I need to return something; two, it makes a record for this year's expenses. At the end of the year I print off a school budget report so that I have a complete profile of my school expenditures for the year. I then will retire this notebook to the shelf after gleaning anything for next year's notebook (library lists, subject idea notes, etc.)

SUMMARY:

As you can see, this notebook becomes a one spot archive for each school year. If I ever had to validate or reconstruct a school year for any child of mine, I would only have to go to the appropriate notebook.

I know this may seem like a mouthful, and a mountain of work, but once set up, it really carries itself along. I would encourage anyone to whittle and customize whatever needed until they get a good fit. I personally do not attempt to coordinate my household tasks or appointment schedules in this notebook. I use my daytimer for that in order to keep school planning separate and less cluttered.

For those of you who are expert at flying along one day at a time with an inner sense of navigation, I applaud you and admire you. But since I probably couldn't find my way out of a cereal box without a map, these forms and notebook format are helpful. I hope this has proved to be helpful to you too. Happy school year!