

Money-Saving Tips for Homeschoolers

- Before purchasing a brand new item, consider borrowing one or buying it used instead.
- Seek quality over quantity. One shelf of carefully chosen books is better than a large but poor quality collection.
- Explain to everyone in the family what the difference is between a “need” and a “want.”
- Remember that haste makes waste. Avoid spur-of-the-moment purchases. If you take time to research an item, read product reviews, and shop around, you will be more likely to save money as an informed consumer.
- Don't buy anything unless you have enough cash to pay for it. It's okay to use a credit card as long as you pay it off every month.
- Be sure to purchase your core curriculum first, then add other items as your budget allows. Once you have an idea of what you plan to spend, divide it by 52 and set that much aside each week in a “homeschool budget” fund.
- Make a list of everything you need and stick to that list. Homeschool materials that are not on the list may look nice, but you don't really need them.
- Stock up on notebooks, pencils, and other school supplies during the back-to-school sales in late summer.
- Have dad bring home scrap paper from the office. The kids can use it for drawing and writing on the other side.
- Many bookstores and teacher supply stores offer educational discounts to homeschoolers, so be sure to ask. You can also sign up for the Office Max “Max Perks for Teachers” and Staples “Teacher Rewards” card.
- Steer clear of the high-priced items at teaching supply stores, but see if they have a clearance rack or bargain bin.
- Instead of purchasing books, request them from the local library first. They can order just about any book that you want through interlibrary loan. Once you find out if you really like it, then you can go out and buy it.
- Don't forget to bargain shop for the books that you've decided to buy. Check your local used book store, online auctions, and used book websites. Alibris.com and Amazon.com are good sources for used books.
- For new books, DVDs and CDs, Amazon's discount prices are hard to beat. Keep a wish list of items that you'd like to get and don't place your order until you've reached a total of \$25 or more so you can get free shipping.
- Christian Book Distributors (Christianbook.com) and Library & Educational Services (www.libraryanded.com) are both excellent sources of Christian and homeschool books and products at discount prices.
- You can save money on curriculum by knowing what you will need ahead of time and watching for sales. For example, Alpha Omega Publications offers 20% off in April and 15% off in May.
- You can usually find used curriculum for half the retail price. Check online for used curriculum markets, or keep your eyes open for homeschool book sales. Other homeschooling families may also be willing to swap curriculum.
- Purchase curriculum at homeschool conventions/curriculum fairs. This gives you a chance to look at the materials before you buy them, it saves on shipping costs, and companies usually offer special pricing for convention sales.
- In addition to the annual state homeschool convention/curriculum fair, watch for smaller local homeschool curriculum sales which are often held in the months of April, May, June, and July.
- Consider joining a homeschool e-mail group where homeschoolers buy, sell, and trade materials. Or join a local support group that has a homeschool lending library.
- Look up recommended reading lists of history-based, literature-based, or "living books." Hunt for these books at the library or through one of the inexpensive alternatives.
- While older encyclopedias don't contain the most current information, they are still a great resource especially for historical facts and biographies. I have both an old and new set of encyclopedias at home, and I regularly refer to the old one just because I prefer its richer in-depth content. You can pick these up very inexpensively at used book stores and Friends of the Library sales.
- Don't overlook thrift stores, church rummage sales, and garage sales as possible places to find educational books, toys and games.

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- Request free catalogs from curriculum publishers. Some of these contain helpful homeschool tips in addition to the product listings.
- The consumer information center of the U.S. government (www.pueblo.gsa.gov) offers many free or low-cost publications. You can also contact your state government and ask for materials available for educators.
- The internet is a virtually limitless resource! Look for free online homeschool curriculum. Or if you have time to browse, use your favorite search engine (such as Google) to research subjects of interest for unit studies. You may be able to find historical information, lesson plans, free worksheets, complete texts of classic literature, thematic craft projects, etc. Make a series of folders under “bookmarks” or “folders” and save the links to your favorite finds in the appropriate subject folder. There are also some sites on the web that have already done much of this work for you. (For example, see the “Library of Links” at www.knowledgehouse.info.)
- Modern libraries offer much more than just books – they have magazines for many different interests, books on tape, movies on DVD, music CDs, educational software, foreign language programs, children’s reading clubs, computers with internet access and printers. Many libraries also subscribe to online reference materials that you can access from your home computer via the library’s website. These may include testing tools, tutorials, language learning software, research databases, online newspapers, encyclopedias, almanacs, and more.
- Take advantage of local opportunities to see matinee performances of plays, concerts, ballets, and other cultural events.
- If you’re going to see a movie, make sure it’s a matinee with a cheaper ticket price. Even better, wait until the DVD is released.
- Instead of renting movies at Blockbuster, check them out of the library for free. Many libraries have extensive DVD collections, most of which are loaned for a one-week period rather than a couple of days like in video stores.
- Don’t let your kids watch Saturday morning cartoons on television. They will be bombarded with commercials and consequently will hit you up with requests for toys, cereals, etc. that are advertised during these shows.
- A few good quality toys are better than a whole room full of plastic junk.
- Try your hand at making some things instead of buying them. Besides saving money, it can turn into a great homeschool project. You might create your own greeting cards, Christmas gifts, Halloween costumes, clothing, outdoor play set, etc. If you’re really good at it, you can even make items for selling at craft fairs to earn money.
- Clip coupons from the Sunday paper and/or print coupons online. Check the store ads and stock up on items that you buy when they are on sale.
- Limit meals eaten in restaurants. Take-out is cheaper, especially if you look for special deals such as Domino’s 2-for-1 pizza on Tuesdays, but even fast food places are rather expensive for what you get.
- Avoid throwing elaborate birthday parties with custom-decorated cake, matching party supplies, etc. You can have a more memorable and thrifty party simply by using your imagination to come up with fun activities for the kids to do, and you can even tie the theme to a unit study such as a pirate party based on *Treasure Island*.
- Rather than going out for ice cream, stop at the grocery store and buy a carton of ice cream along with a box of cones; this will cost about the same as one cone at a specialty ice cream shop.
- Save gas by limiting trips to the store or by combining several errands into one trip.
- Take family trips during the off-season when prices are lower.
- Go on field trips with other homeschoolers to qualify for reduced group rates.
- A part-time job can help older children develop valuable work skills while helping them earn money for college.
- Homeschooled kids aren’t subjected to the peer pressure of keeping up with the latest fashion, so they usually won’t mind getting hand-me-down clothes from older siblings or relatives.
- Buy clothing items at the department store’s end-of-the-season clearance sales. Be sure to allow for your child’s growth. Go one to two sizes larger for younger children, and one size larger for older children.
- Even if you prefer new clothing and household items, don’t overlook secondhand stores such as Goodwill and Salvation Army. While most of the merchandise there is used, they often receive new clothing and household items that were left over from department store clearance racks. And while the clearance prices are already low, secondhand stores mark down these prices even more once they get them.