



CHRISTMAS
Goals
AND
NEW YEAR'S
Resolutions

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Christmas Goals and New Year's Resolutions

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In addition, parents assume full responsibility for the accuracy of all homeschool records.

Christmas Goals and New Year's Resolutions

The Busiest Time of the Year

Even though you're thinking about homeschooling high school, chances are you have younger children around or you could get something out of this as well. I need us to acknowledge one to another that December is a busy time; there's Christmas, birthdays, New Year's, and it's after Thanksgiving. The amount of cooking, Christmas card writing, and Hanukah celebrating just seems to go on without end.

There are certain strategies that are going to help you cope with the holidays. You don't have to incorporate all of these, but I tended to be a little bit more stressed out during December than other times of the year. I intentionally made our homeschool significantly lighter during December than it was during the rest of the year.

We really worked hard during the rest of the year and I always felt like doing half day during December, and it wasn't a big problem, especially since we came out of the public-school system and seeing how many half days they did.

Christmas School Basics

When we think about Christmas school, one of the things that I did was to make sure that I covered the core classes first. By that, I mean the reading, writing, and math; things that built one on top of each other. You kind of have to do that math lesson in order to do that next math lesson.

You might also make sure that you also cover weak areas. When you're covering weak areas at all times of the year, you don't want to cover them with eight feet of snow. People will say that their child's weak area is writing; therefore, they need to teach writing four hours a day, which can cause burn out--more so during the holidays, so you don't want to do that.

You can also eliminate courses that are fluff courses; however, many are needed to preserve your sanity. It's okay for you to prioritize your own mental health in January. When you think about Christmas school, you want to make sure that you fill this time that remains. After all, you've taken out all these different things; you got all this remaining time because you're so busy with Christmas activities. Be careful on how you fill that remaining time.

Usually it will involve something like crafts which can be counted for art credits even in high school, or baking, which might actually grow into culinary arts. It might involve wrapping other Christmas chores like Christmas shopping; you might even consider it financial literacy if you give your young children a budget that they could use for gifts. Those are all very valuable, worthwhile life skills that you teach young children. Of course, that can be modified for older children as well.

Christmas School for Children

When my children were much younger for our Christmas school, we skipped all the poetry, current events, fine arts, which was easy for me because I'm not a huge fan of fine arts, and typing. We completed a few things during Christmas. The first was history, mostly because we used Sonlight curriculum, and one lesson sort of builds on the previous one. The only thing we did within the history class was the heavy-duty stuff and not some of the fluff pieces like the mapping.

We also completed math and science. There were certain things that we changed instead of skipping it completely. For our writing, instead of the writing assignments that came up in the curriculum, I had my children write Christmas cards and Christmas letters or Christmas stories. We also changed our Bible studies because my children were usually involved in a Christmas play, and they would memorize scriptures with the play for our church.

Our music lessons continued because we took piano lessons; but it would always involve Christmas music. When my children got older, every year during December, the composer that we would study was somebody who might be Christmas-related.

Christmas School for Teens

Christmas school for teens might look a little bit different. I did allow more time for independent study when my children were teenagers. If they could do it independently, I would let them do that. For that reason, they would continue to do their science and Latin; but they did it alone rather than with me.

We did skip some subjects, and that's fine if you do that as well. Take a look at them carefully and see if it builds and if you really need it in order to move on the next thing. I have a little bit of advantage because I've seen what the public-school system has done from the inside. One of the things that you could do is to think that if your children were going to do a half day today or if the snow day is two hours late to start, what would they drop? That's one of the things you can identify as to what subjects to skip.

We would also choose some Christmas literature options; we tried to get things that were tied into either winter or Christmas when possible. I also used Christmas essay prompts. Later on, my children would help us with the Christmas letter that we included in our Christmas cards; I know other families will have their

children write a newsletter or a newspaper that they will include in their Christmas cards as well.

When our children were teenagers, we skipped a lot of our enrichment activities that included logic, bible, and memorization. We skipped all the SAT® preparation over the holidays, which you can do unless you really need it for a January SAT® test. We skipped our journal writing, research writing, and sometimes, but not always, I would skip the read aloud activities and take a month off for that.

Someone asked me how often I read aloud to my children, and I did read aloud to them the entire time that we were homeschooling until they started college, and they loved it. Once or twice they would complain, but they had a good time when they sat there on the couch.

What we completed, even during the holidays, were math, science, history, and foreign language. Again, those are things that build; it's a little hard to stop and pick it up later down the road. Instead of doing 100% of everything that they require for something, you can do 50% or 80% of what they require just during the month of December. Remember, it's important to stay sane.

When my children were teens, we changed our writing assignments. They became un-graded Christmas writing tasks like they would help with our Christmas letter or do other things that they would write about for Christmas that I simply didn't grade; I just wanted them to write so they could practice. Our literature would be more reading for fun like Christmas books.

Christmas school for seniors might look a little bit different. If you've already completed your applications during senior year in December, that is what I recommend; I do like to see people getting all their applications done early in

December so that you can relax on the holidays and you don't have to stress over Thanksgiving and Christmas.

I also know that sometimes people don't realize that senior year is upon them until later on, and other people might not know that that is something that I recommend. There is something that you can consider, which is Christmas school for seniors, which looks a little bit different. That's what I call the *radical applications process*; instead of taking a break for Christmas shopping or wrapping and activities, you take a break from the heavy homeschooling, but you do that in order to focus on college applications.

You think about what you need to do in terms of application. It's very time consuming, and you may need to continue with your math, science, and foreign language. The rest of the time, their writing might be college application essays.

Another thing for seniors is to focus on the non-academic core. Part of your application process is when they ask you how many volunteer hours you have. I didn't have everything perfect in my homeschool, and one of the areas of weakness that we had was that we didn't have a lot of volunteer hours.

The Christmas season is a wonderful time for you to add volunteer hours because you can easily volunteer your time at a food bank, a clothing bank, or a soup kitchen; there's a whole lot of people in need over the holidays, and they need extra help. If you do a lighter version of Christmas school, you might actually have some extra hours that you can volunteer; that might provide the volunteer hours to make you look good on your college application.

A Delight Directed Christmas

Christmas school is a wonderful time for you to allow more specialization types of studies (that is, delight directed learning.) Christmas is a great time for you to

let go of the heavy lifting of homeschool and let your children pick up the heavy lifting. It also lets them study things that interest them more that don't involve you.

There are some colleges that actually have a winter session, which is maybe a month long. Instead of taking a year long course on math, all the kids do is to take a month-long course that's interesting, different, and unusual. They just study intensely for a month in that subject.

That's one of the ideas that you can use for your own Christmas school; after they finish their math, science, and foreign language, they can have enough time for the rest of the day that they could just study whatever. If they wanted to study about website development or the biology of horses, then they would be able to do that and study it on their own without a lot of interference from parents.

They could focus on that one, single topic intensely during Christmas school while you do the other things that need to be done. It's okay to bestow independence on your children. If you haven't done that before, then taking time during Christmas school is a great time to do that because they really can't get into much trouble over the three or four weeks of Christmas school during December. You can also take that extra step of asking your child about what they would like to study while you're busy with your Christmas tasks and get some sort of verbal commitment.

Prioritize Sanity

Remember that Christmas can be a very stressful time for parents. It's especially stressful if you are the person in charge of buying and wrapping gifts and the cooking of the food. It's okay for you to remember the little mantra that the stewardesses say when you get on to the airport: parents need to put on their oxygen masks first.

Remember that during the Christmas season you need to prioritize your own sanity. If you allow them their own independence, that's okay as you're trying to maintain your keeping-it-togetherness during the December holidays.

For our independent English class, we used the book, "Norman Rockwell's Christmas" because my children could get so much out of it; it's a wonderful unit study on Christmas. We would read the poetry in it and appreciate the art; my children would write short stories based on the illustrations of Norman Rockwell that were included in the book. It's really similar to writing a college application essay.

Christmas Writing Assignments

One of the things I teach parents when they think about that college application essay is that the child should think about one moment in time as if it were a snapshot of their life. Then they write a short story that happens to be true about their own life in that snapshot. That's just what students are practicing when they write stories about the Norman Rockwell paintings. It is practice on how to write a short story based on a picture.

What's interesting was that I recently took a webinar with the Institute for Excellence in Writing and it was called 'Writing from Pictures,' and they did give me permission to share that class with you. Just use a snapshot and write about it, and that would make sense; when you look at the story, think about what happened before and after the picture.

"Norman Rockwell's Christmas" also has some great Christmas literature and excerpts in literature. But you can also get some Christmas literature from the reading lists for the college bound. One of those books is "Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. People read that as tradition during Christmas, but it's important to remember when you have high schoolers that that's actually one of the great

works of literature. It's something that you definitely want to put on your high school reading list.

Similar is "The Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. This is a good book if you have a very active person because it's a short book and you can handle it really quickly; they can have it completed fairly quickly and maybe watch 50 different versions in movie form. Another good one is "Little Women" by Louisa May Alcott because it's based on the Christmas season.

Your Goal as Parents

Your goal is to avoid burn out and stress. January is a very difficult month to homeschool; if you start January being burned out and stressed, it's very difficult to hold out for the whole month of January. Anything that you can do now to make your life less stressed is going to give you a better success in homeschooling throughout January and February, which are traditionally difficult months for all teachers everywhere. January and February are very difficult in part because it's dark outside, but also because it's in the middle of the year; it's hard to keep up that first level of intensity.

One of the things you can do to avoid burn out and excess stress is to make sure you set clear boundaries with the activities that you sign up for and do. Your first task is still homeschooling and caring for your family at this time of year, so when somebody asks you to do something for the holidays, I want you to think of it this way: would your spouse miss a day of work in order to do this task?

There are going to be times when the answer is 'yes.' Maybe your neighbor is in need, or maybe this is an opportunity too good to miss for your children, and your spouse really would take a day off work to get that task done. But other times, that's not necessarily true. Sometimes it really isn't that important and you need to put it more in terms of whether you're really going to benefit from it.

You want to focus on some essential changes when you're faced with something that comes up during the holidays. Think about what's really important. Ask yourself if it's really fun; that's not the thing that you focus on, as there are a lot of things that are fun and good; so that's not the only thing. You also think about whether it's important. Some things are fun; but they're not really important.

You want to think about whether it will increase your work load. Sometimes when you sign up for things, it's really fun and important, but it also causes you to drive in the car three times a day for 30 minutes each way each time. That will significantly increase your work load, so you want to make sure that you balance that.

Sometimes it will reduce your work load. If it's taking the place of something else that causes you a lot of work, then maybe that will be a benefit, and you want to do it even more because you've gone through this process.

Prioritize yourself and your sanity and do not get burned out because you're going to hit the ground running in January. Make sure that you don't get overly stressed out in January and February, so you have to make sure that you're not stressed during the holidays in order to do that.

New Year's Resolutions

The first way to achieve big dreams is to set reasonable goals. Sometimes we make goals that are just enormous; you couldn't possibly achieve them, so you want to make your goals achievable. There is a huge difference between goals and habits. A habit can take six weeks to develop, but a goal can be started right away.

1. Organize your homeschool records. All you have to do in order to keep your records organized is to find any box, find some strategic placement near your

homeschool and put the box there. You want to keep samples of your course work in there; it doesn't have to be everything. If your children do math every day, you don't put in your daily work. You might put in quizzes and tests, but don't keep everything; just keep samples of work.

One of the easiest ways to organize your records is that each time you have a textbook, make a photocopy of the cover and the table of contents. The cover and the table of contents of the textbooks can be 90% of your course descriptions, so that can really help you with your record-keeping later on.

Make sure that in this box you keep what is required by your state homeschool law, whatever colleges might ask you for, which in general could be a sample of work from any class. You also want to keep whatever you need to write course descriptions in the future. It's a good idea to throw in your tests and quizzes so that you can write course descriptions that include some of your grading criteria. You can also throw in any receipts from any activities that you go to.

2. Mark up your calendar. This is something that you can easily achieve in just one day. As soon as you get your calendar for the coming year, you'll be able to mark it up. You want to put down the dates for the SAT® and you can get that information from www.collegeboard.com. You want to mark the dates for the ACT® and you can find that information on www.act.org.

When you write those down, it's important not just to put down the date of the test, but also the date by which you need to register. I always tricked myself into thinking that I had to register by the week before the registration date so I wouldn't be late and be stressed out about that.

You want to put the FAFSA® on October 1st of senior year. You want to add in college fairs; if you don't know when the college fairs are, then I encourage you to mark September 1st of your calendar as 'find college fair' on there.

If you simply search college fairs, you'll find a lot of hits. You can also search for college fairs in the name of your city and get additional information. They're usually in the fall and in the spring. For the spring time, you may not know the dates of the college fairs for next fall, but you can just set yourself that little reminder.

You also want to arrange a college visit sometime. This may take more than a second because you probably need to talk to your spouse as to when you can get some time off so that you can go and visit colleges some time.

3. Hold a parent-teacher conference. That's pretty easy for us; it's a little more difficult for a private or public school. We simply need to look into the mirror and start talking to yourself. It looks a little bit like schizophrenia, but it goes a long way to getting things accomplished.

If you can, start by using the planning guide when you have your parent-teacher conference. The planning guide is available on the Gold Care Club website. Make sure to look at that so that you know how many classes you have completed, what classes still need to be done, tests needed for the school year; all of that information is on the planning guide. That will help you recognize whether something is missing.

4. Do a quick curriculum check. You want to find out whether it is working; if it's something that you have not used because you hate it, then you want to get rid of it. If it's working, you want to keep what works; but if it doesn't work, you want to get rid of it.

That doesn't mean that you throw it in the garbage can; I want to see you recycling it because you can resell it and get the value back to purchase more curriculum. Parents need to invest in their weak areas. If you find that a curriculum

isn't working, that usually means that it's a weak area; either a weak area for your child or a weak area in the curriculum that you purchased.

You want to invest your money in your weak area. If you find that math is working perfectly, don't spend more money in math. If you never do science because you hate it that much, that's where you want to invest your money.

You can resell the curriculum that isn't working. Use that money to invest in your weakness and purchase a different curriculum that you hope will work better. Do a quick curriculum check; use it or lose it.

5. Begin your transcript. If nothing else, you want to just provide a rough draft of your transcript even if it's simply a paper and pencil. Make sure that you don't lose things over the four years of high school and accidentally forget that maybe you've taught four years of Latin or something.

With the Total Transcript Solution, you can take the class called "The One Hour Transcript Workshop." That will help you get through that one-hour transcript workshop quickly so that you can get more of a rough draft of your transcript. In any case, if you only get that paper and pencil addition, that's better than nothing; it can prevent homeschool dementia and a complete loss of things on your transcript... things that you actually taught.

6. Identify specialization. You want to think about what your child really specializes in. The way to do that is to think about what your child does right now. Chances are if you're not sitting there staring at them, probably what they're doing right now is something that involves their specialization. If they're not doing it right now and they're preoccupied with something else, then think about what they do when they're supposed to be doing something else. That can help you identify their specialization.

There really is a joy in annoyance. When you feel annoyed at the things that they do, granted that you're annoyed, and that's not so good. But there's also a good thing on that annoyance; that annoyance can help you identify their specialization. Colleges call it passion and it's something that's very important to them, and you want to highlight that on your transcript.

You could also use their specialization and think about transcript subjects. If your child is annoying you right now because he or she is just sitting in front of the computer and it involves HTML which you're not really sure what it means, that can be an actual transcript subject called Computer Science. Think of what they do and whether you can make that into a subject on your transcript.

It might also indicate possible college credits. If your child is constantly turning on the history channel or reading history books when you go to the library and you can't get them to read literature, that can indicate that they could pass a CLEP® exam and earn college credit.

Annoyance can also indicate things that you need to put on their activity and awards list. If they're annoying you with things like soccer, that can be an indicator for you that you should put that on their activity list. When they've been to the division championship and won something, you can put that on their awards list.

Annoyance can sometimes indicate some sort of career preparation. My son, Kevin, is a very analytical person and was very involved and studied chess all the time. We did put it on his transcript as a Critical Thinking class and it did help him with his engineering degree; it was an activity that we put on his activity list every year. Chess was also special because it pointed out his career preparation.

There were two different kinds of career preparation for him actually. For one thing, he realized that he loved solving problems, and that's why he decided to go into science as a career because he thought he could solve problems. The

other part was when he taught chess, he taught it to very young children as analytical as he is.

7. Estimate your SAT® score. Usually the PSAT™ results are mailed to parents in December. You get them earlier if you take the PSAT™ as an independent homeschooler and you use the homeschool code. You get the scores two weeks later; they're filtered through the public school and then come to you after that.

You can add a zero to each score in the PSAT™. For example, when they get a 50, you add a 0 to that score and they would get a 500 on that section. 500 is average for each section. One of the things that you need to recognize about the SAT® scores is that it's not like taking a math test.

In a math test, you could get 100% right and you like to see your kids get above 80% or 90%. But it's very unusual in the PSAT™ to get 90th or 80th percentile. The average score is 50 on each section of the PSAT™ or a 500 on each section of the SAT®. That means that exactly half of the nation gets below 500 and half gets above 500. If your child happens to get 501, that means that they're above average.

If you do not have a PSAT™ test and you'd like to estimate your score, then you can get a sample test at home. Remember that you also need to plan for the PSAT™ for next year; it's only offered in October, so it's very important that you put that on your planning calendar for next year. If they missed the PSAT™ or did not take ACT® this year, then you can give them a sample test. You can estimate their scores by having them take it at home.

Estimating their scores can help you figure out which college would be an appropriate college for them to apply to. You don't want them to get into a college where they're way over their head. You want to apply to a college where they're

a real fit. The average SAT® or ACT® score of the college should be relatively close to your child's SAT® or ACT® test.

8. Start your reading list. There are two ways to go about doing that: first way is the easy way and that's having your children do it. After all, they need practice with their typing skills. Have your children type up their reading list. Worst case scenario if your children don't do it, you can do that yourself.

What I did was that I had my children bring the books that they have read for the past three months and put them in the floor so I could type them in. You can combine all the books they've read for fun that they bring to you with all the books you assigned them for school. You only need the title and author on the reading list so it's really not a huge chore that you need to do. Always put the title first or the author first, then alphabetize your list to make sure that you don't have any duplicates.

New Year's Resolutions

Learn about how to homeschool high school. Become a member of the Gold Care Club or the Silver Training Club, and take the membership classes. Buy the books and resources that you need to learn about your job as a home educator in high school.

Learn about college admission. It's something that you need to sink in for a while so that the more you can learn about it slow and steady, the more information you'll be able to retain. It's important to remember that slow and steady wins the race. If you try to cram everything you need to know about college admission into the week before the application is due, that's not setting yourself up for success.

But if you can learn about it, slowly and steadily over the course of your high school years, then you'll be ready for college admission when it happens. If you

can learn about homeschooling high school slow and steady over the course of 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th grade, then you'll be ready when it's high school time, and that will set you up for success.

Question and Answer

Question: Our boys take classes online with teachers other than myself. There are many busy work type homework assignments due every week, and during the month it gets extremely hectic trying to keep up. If they let their grades slide, do you think it's ethical for me to give them a break and tweak it on the transcript to get a better grade since I know they're busy at times like this?

Answer: Yes, unless those online classes are through an accredited school. If you're doing one of those accreditation programs online, then it's completely out of your hands and that online teacher is the teacher for your child. Once that's accredited on their transcript, then you have to have it exactly the same on your own transcript.

But if you're taking a regular class, one of those unaccredited homeschool-friendly and you're just taking it for supplements, then you can choose what you want to include in your grade. You can have the Potter School experience; represent half of your grades and the other half of your grades might be the things that they do at school.

The same thing can be said for co-ops. If your children are involved in a co-op, perhaps one day a week and four days a week they're homeschooling at home, you can have 4/5 of their grades with the things they did that were assigned to them at home, and the other part is just what they bring at home.

Keep as much flexibility as possible in your homeschool. Those online teachers really don't know your child and your situation and they don't know how busy you

are; they only know what's on their end. If you can use the online class as a tool rather than as a task master, that will help.

In a situation like the Potter School, it's a good idea to just tell the teacher. It would seem reasonable if you could say that you're busy during the holidays and your child will not do the busy work; your child will listen in on class and will not provide a writing assignment until January or something like that.

Question: Are others afraid of taking too much time off?

Answer: Yes, a lot of people worry about that. I see a wide variety of homeschoolers and there are so many right ways to do it. There are homeschoolers who acknowledge that they homeschool whole year round so they take time off regularly throughout the year.

I was worried about taking too much time off as well, so I looked at our public-school calendar; I made note of how many days off and how many half days they had. I made sure to schedule that many for me. Instead of taking teacher preparation days, we would take off days for birthdays and Christmas. I would also make sure that we would not take snow days.

It's also important for you to remember that even at the high school level you want to do your core classes. But at the same time, you don't always have to give 100%; it's okay for you sometimes to have a lighter schedule than other times.

If you're mapping current events or something that's important to you, it doesn't mean that you have to do that every single day of the year to get it done. It's just like studying for the SAT; you don't have to study for the SAT® seven days a week. It's okay for you to have that for just a couple of days.

One of the ways that you can wrap your mind if you're a worrywart, then think about working hard in the mornings to make sure that your children do the heavy lifting of school during the mornings with things that do not involve you. We would always get our math, science, and foreign language done, and we would try to get the history done but only those portions that would build and portions that they could do independently.

They would try to do some additional reading; we used literature-based curriculum, as my kids loved reading. It wasn't hard for them to finish their reading during the week, even though I wasn't there helping them. Anything that involved me had to be done by 11.30 or noon because I needed every afternoon to get to those home things.

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Suggested Resource

The Total Transcript Solution

Impress College with The Total Transcript Solution!

Easy 4-step solution to create your transcript quickly
Training, tools and templates to explain everything simply
In-depth personal consultation for extra help

Easy and Fast 4 Step Transcript Solution

- Step 1. Video training to provide instruction and boost your confidence
- Step 2. Book instruction for those who learn best through books
- Step 3. Ten transcript templates to choose the one that fits your needs best
- Step 4. Personal coaching by phone or by email for feedback by The HomeScholar

Everyday Value Bonuses

- Bonus 1: Testing Pack to maximize your child's performance on high school tests
- Bonus 2: Resource Pack with planning guide, grading criteria and year-by-year calendar
- Bonus 3: Savings Pack with resources to help you save money
- Bonus 4: Continuing Education with the Silver Training Club support system for parents
 - 5 new classes each month, including tools and templates
 - First 30 days free, then \$27.00 / month,
 - Cancel anytime with one click cancel or email request

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