

# Homeschool Convention Survival Guide

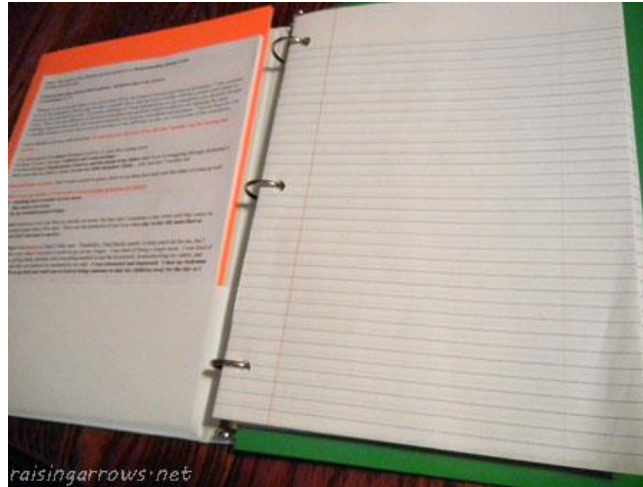
by

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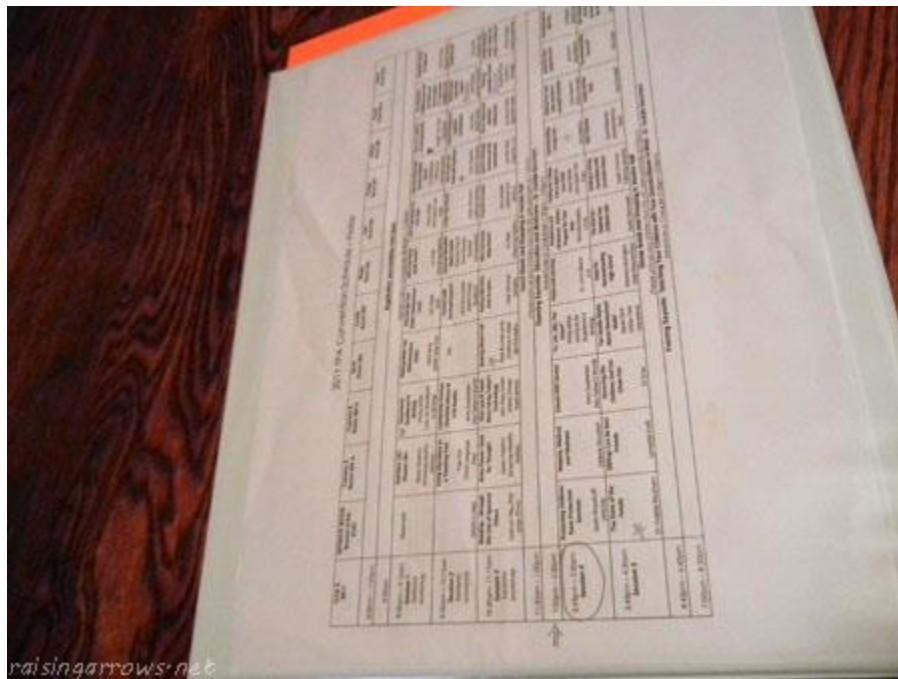
# Step 1

## Make a Convention Notebook



Grab a notebook from your stash of notebooks (*because every good homeschool mom has a stash of notebooks*) and get started! I prefer a white notebook with a clear cover where a cover page can be inserted.

Since most homeschool conventions hand out **session schedules**, having a notebook that allows for a page to be inserted into the cover gives you a place to put the session schedule for each day. Everything is at a glance, so you need to open anything and search for what session you are going to go to next.



Time	Topic	Speaker	Room	Notes
8:00 AM	Registration		Room 100	
8:30 AM	Breakfast		Room 100	
9:00 AM	Session 1	Speaker 1	Room 101	
9:30 AM	Session 2	Speaker 2	Room 102	
10:00 AM	Session 3	Speaker 3	Room 103	
10:30 AM	Session 4	Speaker 4	Room 104	
11:00 AM	Session 5	Speaker 5	Room 105	
11:30 AM	Session 6	Speaker 6	Room 106	
12:00 PM	Lunch		Room 100	
12:30 PM	Session 7	Speaker 7	Room 107	
1:00 PM	Session 8	Speaker 8	Room 108	
1:30 PM	Session 9	Speaker 9	Room 109	
2:00 PM	Session 10	Speaker 10	Room 110	
2:30 PM	Session 11	Speaker 11	Room 111	
3:00 PM	Session 12	Speaker 12	Room 112	
3:30 PM	Session 13	Speaker 13	Room 113	
4:00 PM	Session 14	Speaker 14	Room 114	
4:30 PM	Session 15	Speaker 15	Room 115	
5:00 PM	Session 16	Speaker 16	Room 116	
5:30 PM	Session 17	Speaker 17	Room 117	
6:00 PM	Session 18	Speaker 18	Room 118	
6:30 PM	Session 19	Speaker 19	Room 119	
7:00 PM	Session 20	Speaker 20	Room 120	
7:30 PM	Session 21	Speaker 21	Room 121	
8:00 PM	Session 22	Speaker 22	Room 122	
8:30 PM	Session 23	Speaker 23	Room 123	
9:00 PM	Session 24	Speaker 24	Room 124	
9:30 PM	Session 25	Speaker 25	Room 125	
10:00 PM	Session 26	Speaker 26	Room 126	
10:30 PM	Session 27	Speaker 27	Room 127	
11:00 PM	Session 28	Speaker 28	Room 128	
11:30 PM	Session 29	Speaker 29	Room 129	
12:00 AM	Session 30	Speaker 30	Room 130	

**On the session schedule itself, mark every session you are interested in going to.** I star the ones I am interested in, circle the ones that I definitely want to go to, write “Tape” next to any I intend to purchase a recording for (even though technically no one uses tapes anymore!). Use whatever system works best for you to keep track.

**Add in a folder for loose papers and handouts.** Many sessions offer handouts. You won’t have a hole punch with you, so use the folder to keep these organized.

**Use a zippered pencil pouch to keep pens, pencils, gum, baby’s pacifier, etc. in.** Having these things right there in your convention notebook keeps you from fumbling around for them.

**Next, have a nice stash of notebook paper** to take notes from vendors and speaker sessions.

**When I’m not using Evernote to organize my Convention Wish List, I keep a list of items I am looking for in the back clear cover of the notebook.** But, since I prefer using Evernote to do this, let me give you Step 2 as a quick tutorial of how it works.

# Step 2

## Using Evernote at Homeschool Conventions



So many people carry a smart phone or tablet to homeschool conventions these days, I wanted to offer a way to organize your thoughts about curriculum with a paperless system that works quite well for conventions.

[Evernote](#) is a simple (and free!) online tool you sign up for. You can install an applet (button) to your browser toolbar and an app on any of your mobile devices, and every time you see something you want to remember (hence the elephant icon), you put it on Evernote.

**For homeschool conventions, make a notebook on Evernote for Curriculum.** Prior to the convention, put in links to books and supplies you want to look at, along with prices from varying websites. At the convention, snap photos with your smart phone or tablet and add them to your notebook. Take photos of some of the pages; add prices and your own thoughts. Then you can review it all before you buy!

Here's an example of my Curriculum Wish List notebook:

Homeschool Curriculum Shopping 2013

Homeschool Ideas

#### Exhibitor's Hall Set Up (MPE)

<http://midwesthomeschoolers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Exhibit-Hall-Map-3-4-13.pdf>

#### Conference Schedule (MPE)

[http://midwesthomeschoolers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/2013\\_03\\_07-Workshop-Schedule.pdf](http://midwesthomeschoolers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/2013_03_07-Workshop-Schedule.pdf)

### Curriculum

#### Handwriting

A Reason for Handwriting - \$14.45 RR

Something from Queen's Homeschool?- (Printing with Pictures - \$12.95 on her site & RR

#### Preschool

Rod & Staff ABC - \$15.95 RR (set of 6)

Other things I might like that I saw at the conference:

(insert photos & prices)

At the top of the note, I have links to the how the vendor's hall is set up and also the convention schedule (although, I still prefer to use my convention notebook to keep my schedule in). Below that, I have curriculum I am looking for, prices from online as well as prices at some of the vendor's websites, and a place for any extra things I find while I am there.

**Evernote syncs with all your devices** so it doesn't matter what you are using to gather data, it will all be there! And best of all, you will feel oh so organized!

# Step 3

## Surviving the Vendor's Hall

I remember my early homeschooling years when the vendor's hall was a big scary place of mind-boggling magnitude. I was already overwhelmed by what the speakers had to say, so heading into that sea of curriculum was nearly enough to drown me. It took me a couple of years to get my bearings and not be scared of that huge room.

Let me share with you a few bits of advice that can help ease the fear and anxiety a homeschool convention vendor's hall can invoke.

**1. Take a lap (or two or three) first.** Give yourself 20 minutes or so to browse from one booth to the next to familiarize yourself with the layout of the vendor's hall. Take note of who has the things you are looking for (via Evernote or your Convention Notebook). Take note of places you want to visit in depth later. Get a good feel for the vendor's hall as a whole. You will more than likely realize it isn't as big and scary as you first thought when you were looking into that sea with newbie eyes.

**2. Be prepared to change your mind.** You may think you are walking into that vendor's hall list in hand ready to buy exactly what you've researched only to get there and change your mind. There are several factors that can cause this to happen:

- \*One of the speakers or another homeschool mom introduces you to another product you didn't know about.
- \*One of the speakers or another homeschool mom talks you out of doing that subject altogether.
- \*You actually get to take a good look at the curriculum and realize it isn't what you thought it was.
- \*You run out of money.

It is inevitable that you will change your mind once you get there. Repeat after me...

### It Is Okay.

Don't get flustered by it. But also remember this...

**3. Avoid impulse buys.** So, you've changed your mind and now you are convinced this new thing you've been told about or that you've seen is precisely what you are looking for. So, you should buy it...right? Wrong! But, you can only get the conference special and the free shipping today...right? Wrong! (at least most of the time)

Give yourself some room to breathe and research. Talk it over with your husband. Pray about it. If you are still convinced it's the way to go, then buy it. But if you can, wait. Most companies will honor their conference specials and free shipping if you purchase within a week or two of the conference. Make sure you ask at the booth.

**4. It will always cost you more than you anticipate.** Vendor's halls are an interesting sort of vortex. You don't just find curriculum there. You find old books, t-shirts, bags, toys, bread pans, grain mills and the list goes on and on and on. You inevitably find something else you really need (or want). Be prepared. Give yourself a limit, but don't be surprised (or devastated) if you end up spending a bit more. Your child's education is worth it (and yeah, that bread pan is sometimes worth it too!)

**5. You may have to skip a class to shop.** Most conventions are crammed full of great classes that end up leaving you strapped for shopping time. If you are not a seasoned shopper, that can spell disaster. If you simply can't find a class you are willing to miss, buy the CD/mp3. All classes are recorded for your convenience. Yes, these cost, but in the long run, you will thank yourself. The vendor's hall will be less crowded and you will have more time to think if you skip a class and use that time to shop instead.

**6. Curriculum is heavy...have a pack mule handy.** It might be your husband or a baby stroller, or one of those wheely crates or it may simply be a plan to buy everything at the end and tote it all to the car right away. But, word to the wise...you rarely get to park close and you will be tired. Have a plan in place that doesn't involve you carrying several heavy bags all over the convention for hours on end.

The vendor's hall *is* scary and overwhelming. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. But, with a little bit of preparation and a lot of flexibility, you *will* survive. And if your homeschool convention offers a newbie homeschooling class prior to the conference, SIGN UP! Eventually, you'll be a homeschool convention pro!

# Step 4

## Surviving the Speaker's Sessions

You might be surprised to know that the speaker sessions can be just as overwhelming as the vendor's hall.

Homeschool convention speakers are almost always homeschool convention vendors. Most have written or are selling a curriculum or product that they passionately believe in. That passion will shine through in their class and often serve to convince you of your need to jump on their bandwagon. You can easily find yourself going from session to session nodding your head at every speaker, even when he's contradicted the last speaker you heard.

So, here are a few ideas for surviving the speaker sessions...

**1. Take a bag of goodies with you.** I carry a bag I can sling over my shoulder that contains snacks, gum, water, pen, paper, money, etc. Conference sessions can be long and slammed together. Take anything you think you might need, but don't load yourself down unnecessarily because that bag will get heavier as the day wears on.

**2. Take notes.** The speakers are going to throw a ton of information at you. Be prepared to write quickly and in a way that allows you to easily refer back to your notes later when you have more time to digest what they have said.

**3. Don't hesitate to buy the CD/mp3.** As I said in the last post, all sessions are recorded. If you didn't get it all or really want to hear it again, buy the CD or mp3. The recording companies often have a conference special in which you buy so many CDs and get another one for free or you can buy the entire conference speaker sessions for a flat fee.

**4. Speakers are opinionated and passionate.** If they weren't, they wouldn't be worth hearing. However, those opinions are just that...opinions. Give yourself time to digest what they are saying and to check what they are saying against Biblical truth before buying what they are selling (either in the form of a tangible product or an intangible opinion). Not everything a speaker says is gospel truth or specifically needed in YOUR homeschool. Glean what is relevant to you, leave the rest.

**5. It's okay to get up and walk out.** Sometimes you get into a session only to realize it wasn't what you thought it was. There is no need to torture yourself for the next 45 minutes. Get up, walk out, and head to another session or to the vendor's hall. Speakers have learned to understand that people have to leave sessions for all sorts of reasons and that it isn't a knock on them per se. Plus, you are there to learn. If a session is not what you anticipated, go elsewhere to you spend your time wisely.

I've also noticed something as I've come of age in the homeschooling world. I don't have to have the speaker sessions the way I once had to have them. I'm not a newbie who needs the how-to homeschool classes. I've been going long enough I've heard a lot of the big-name speakers at least once. I don't have as many doubts and fears that need to be quelled by someone who has been there and done that. I no longer hit every single session as I used to. I take more shopping time and less classroom time.



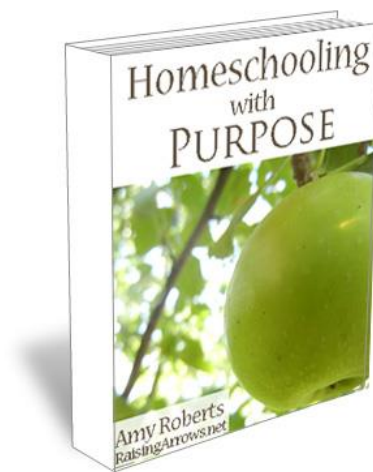
I don't know if this is a trend among seasoned homeschoolers, but I do see a lot of veteran homeschool moms who don't even bother to go to the sessions at all. They pay the fee to shop and that is it. They know what they want and need and no longer feel the sessions benefit them.

My husband and I still enjoy the sessions, but we sit there on our terms. We listen and process and ignore what doesn't fit our lifestyle, and talk on the way home about the things that intrigued us. I'm still there to learn, but what I'm learning no longer feels like the deep end of the swimming pool.

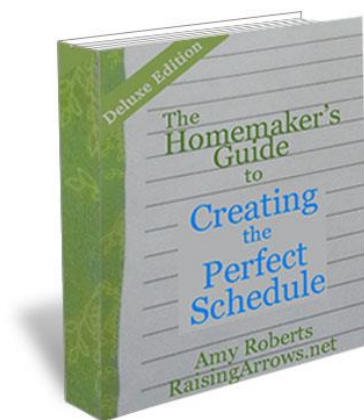
Someday, you'll feel less overwhelmed and more like you belong amongst the seasoned conference goers. Until then, take it slow and easy and enjoy the ride!

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### **Check out my other homeschooling ebooks!**



<http://www.raisingarrows.net/homeschooling-with-purpose/>



<http://www.raisingarrows.net/the-homemakers-guide-to-creating-the-perfect-schedule>