

## Getting Started Right with Sonlight

You've made your decision, placed your order, and perhaps the shipment is now scattered around your living room - with children draped on furniture perusing the wonderful books they have discovered. So what's the next step? How do you progress from the stack of great materials to educating your children? The "Read Me First" brochure that was included in your shipment will provide some hints, but let me offer my own "read me first" suggestions. You may want to grab a cup of coffee or tea before you start.

**1. Pray** - not just now, but daily as you move through the school year (and through life). The Bible tells us that "the mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps," (Prov 16:9) and to "commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established" (Prov 16:3). I encourage you to pray as you sit down to set up your materials for school, but also incorporate your children in prayer as you commit the day to Him and seek His presence.

**2. Set goals** - a wise person once said that if you don't aim at something, you're sure to hit nothing. I know of many families where the parents sit down together each year and set goals for each member of the family. These goals may fall into many categories beyond academics - such as physical or social development, and character training. Once these have been written down, it is beneficial to share them with the children, providing an opportunity to share your expectations with them and allow them to share theirs with you.

**3. Be flexible, yet set limits.** If you are new to homeschooling, you may be surprised to find out how many non-homeschoolers mistakenly think that you are available any time of the day. In order to protect the time that you need to work with your children, you will need to block out your school time - whether mentally setting parameters for when you are unavailable to others, or actually blocking out time in your day planner. Don't schedule appointments during this time and use the answering machine to intercept phone calls. Likewise, be careful not to get caught up in a wide variety of activities outside the home. If you are blessed to have a large homeschool support group in your area, the many activities they offer can be both beneficial and detrimental - most of these activities will involve time outside of your home and may detract from the time you need at home for basic academics. Examine your opportunities in light of your goals and pass on those that don't specifically contribute to meeting those goals.

**4. Plan your approach** - allow yourself plenty of time to become familiar with the materials you have ordered. The "Read Me First" brochure offers directions for setting up your Instructor's Guide binder. As you do so, read through the introductory materials (Section 1, which can be placed in front of the first tabbed divider in your binder) to help you understand what to expect, as well as to glean from the tips and ideas that are included from other homeschool moms. Be sure to review the explanation of the schedule symbols found on the back of the Section 2 title page, and then scan several weekly schedule pages to see how these symbols are used and familiarize yourself with reading the schedule.

*He who every morning plans the transaction of the day and follows out that plan,  
carries a thread that will guide him through the maze of the most busy life.  
But where no plan is laid, where the disposal of time is surrendered merely to the chance of incidence,  
chaos will reign. Victor Hugo*

**5. Organize your books.** Sonlight provides extra colored sticker paper which can be cut into small squares to label the spines of the books that are included in each Core program. If you are "testing" Sonlight for the first time and not fully convinced that you won't utilize the Love to Learn guarantee, I would delay labeling the books with the colored stickers (unused books must be returned in new condition). Even if you don't label your books right away, you can certainly organize them on a bookshelf where they will be handy for you during the school year. Of course, if your children are avid readers and may get ahead of the schedule, you may decide that you want to keep the books stored in the box until time to read them. You are in charge - if you want to let your children read ahead, that's fine; but keep in mind that many of the geography and timeline activities are coordinated with the books in the schedule, and Language Arts writing assignments

often correlate with the Core reading. Reading ahead can cause you to lose the coordination that is designed to reinforce the information that is gleaned from the books.

**6. Stay ahead of your children** - it's good mental and physical exercise. ☺ Planning is not done just at the beginning, but must be checked and tweaked as you progress through the year. I have made a habit of sitting down each weekend to look at our Sonlight schedule, pull out any new books that we will start that week, familiarize myself with the notes on the books we will read, and check the Forums for ideas or clarification. In conjunction with this, I also look at recurring activities or other appointments that are on the calendar. By looking at the full week, I can anticipate the need for shifting our school schedule to lighten a day that may hold many other demands so that we don't overload ourselves and lose momentum.

**7. Recordkeeping.** Different states will have different requirements for homeschool recordkeeping. The schedule pages in your Instructor's Guide provide a great foundation for keeping records of your school work. I use the "Other Notes" section at the bottom of the white schedule pages to fill in assignments in other subjects so that all my records are centralized. By extending the gridlines down for Days 1-5 and adding horizontal lines, you have a convenient area to record both academic and extra-curricular activities. If you are teaching multiple students with different subjects and activities, you can photocopy the weekly schedule pages for your personal use and create individual schedule binders to keep individualized records.

**8. Organize your home.** You may have wished that I omitted this one, but if you wish to homeschool efficiently, you need an organized setting. Not that you have to have a classroom in your home, but just clearing a small space on the table for your child to work on Math is not conducive to good learning - all the other stuff on the table will provide distractions. In our homeschool we use the whole house - the dining table and sometimes the kitchen counter for written work, the living room or den couch for reading, and bedrooms when the children needed to work out of the flow of traffic (provided there weren't more distractions there).

There are many wonderful guides for accomplishing this task and maintaining it through the year. From Don Aslett's Clutters Last Stand, to the Sidetracked Home Executives notecard system ([www.shesintouch.com](http://www.shesintouch.com)), to the "Flylady" on the web there's plenty of guidance out there. And remember that in homeschooling you are not just focused on academics - begin to include your children in maintaining your home and they will develop vital life skills in the process.

**9. Take pictures, record your journey!** Like a time-lapsed video, your pictures through the school year will show you how your children blossom. Perhaps your pictures will spawn a new art activity - creating a scrapbook. Share those pictures with family, share them with Sonlight, along with your comments, and you might find them on our website or in our next catalog.

**10. Refresh yourself!** The personal commitment involve in homeschooling is enormous, but as we enter our 19<sup>th</sup> year of homeschooling, I still believe it was one of the best decisions we ever made for our family. It is a commitment that has borne fruit in many areas, including stronger family relationships, increased opportunity for character training, assurance of solid academic skills and the list goes on. But, Mom, you need to be careful to plan opportunities to refresh yourself. It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive - it can be as simple as a regular quiet time for everyone, including you - but you need to put that in your plan and give yourself a break.

I hope that you have found some helpful guidance for you as you start your Sonlight adventure. You aren't alone! In addition to finding a local homeschool support group, I encourage you to explore the international Sonlight family through the Sonlight Forums, and to consider me to be your personal Sonlight resource. Contact me any time of the year when you have questions, and I will gladly share what insight I can.