



Taming the Homeschool Information Overload Monster

by Anonymous Mom

HomeschoolFreebieOfTheDay.com

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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER:

This report was written by one of our regular and devoted readers who wishes to remain anonymous. The author – a veteran homeschooling mom - wanted to pass along some specific suggestions that have worked for her in taming her own “Homeschool Information Overload”. This is a common problem that increasingly affects many homeschooling moms, especially with the ever growing wealth of websites, resources and tools available online.

Even though we ourselves offer all sorts of resources free of charge every day of the week, one thing we do NOT want to do is to burden anyone with so much “stuff” that it keeps you from taking positive, constructive action in your homeschooling. Hence we are pleased to bring you this report to help you avoid this nasty situation.

Some may wonder - does this report step on OUR toes? Well, yes, a bit... but in a good way, because it confirms something we've always said about our sites and resources. *(In fact, the author uses one of our favorite words of advice in here, which shows she has been paying attention. Long time readers will recognize the word... but just to make a point of it, I've highlighted in in RED.)* Do we feel this information is worth passing along for your consideration - regardless of our sore toes? Definitely. Read and let us know what you think, pro or con. We would be interested in hearing your thoughts on this topic, and hope this report is indeed helpful to many in their quest to tame the information overload monster.

- Jim Erskine

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Do You Have Homeschool Information Overload?

Here are some of the top Signs of Homeschool Information Overload

You have a ton of products clogging up your hard drive

This could mean a couple of things. You either have information overload or you don't have a plan. If you have a bunch of products and resources that are "going to help you" - ie. they are SUPPOSED TO your homeschooling easier, faster, better, or cheaper, but so far haven't been very helpful at all - then you've got information overload.

If you have a bunch of stuff that is collecting dust and you aren't doing anything with it, then you don't have a plan of action. **A Plan of Action is Key to Success in Homeschooling.**

You are sitting there feeling like junk and beating yourself up.

This stinks, and I know the feeling. Honestly, we all feel it some days no matter how long we've been homeschooling. However, if you feel this for more than a few days then you might be overloaded.

How do you know? If you're working on a plan of attack for your homeschooling, comparing this resource to that resource, reading reviews and blogs and discussion boards, but you still don't feel like you're getting anywhere, you're overloaded.

If you aren't doing much and feel like junk, you don't have a plan. You need to sit back, layout a plan of how you are going to teach your kids, and then start implementing it. **A Plan of Action is Key to Success in Homeschooling.**

Way too much to do and not enough time to do it.

This is usually what happens to me. I build "to do" lists (these are good...I'll discuss them later), start implementing them, and then realize I bit off more than I can chew. I then get overwhelmed at the sheer amount of work to do, and little (or nothing) gets done.

If this is you, then you've overloaded yourself with information on what you THINK needs to be done versus what actually needs to be done.

If you've given yourself a huge list of tasks, haven't set down to complete them, or don't do the ones you know will help you...then you need a plan. **A Plan of Action is Key to Success in Homeschooling.**

How To Kill Information Overload In Its Tracks

Inevitably, you're going to get overloaded with work or information. You can try all you want to avoid information overload but it will happen. Here's how you stop it dead in its tracks so it doesn't overwhelm you for too long.

Set Aside a Weekly "Information Sorting Time"

Before each homeschool year begins, you have a general plan of what your kids will be studying and the courses they will be taking. You've made your choices on books, computer programs and resources. Throughout the homeschool year you probably set aside some time to make your weekly plans and schedule to keep yourself on track and focused on your homeschooling goals.

You can do the same with the homeschool information and resources available to you online. Set aside a regularly scheduled time – daily, weekly, or whatever works for you - a specified length time to focus solely on sorting, gathering and evaluating the homeschool information and resources that come your way. Confine this activity to these scheduled times and do not let this activity "spill over" into your family or homeschooling time.

Limit your Internet "leisure" time too

Ouch. This one hurts.

How many times have you read fascinating post after post on your favorite forum for hours? I know I've been guilty of this plenty of times. What about blogs, or Facebook or Twitter or (insert your favorite social networking site here)? Yep. Guilty as charged.

Please don't get me wrong. There is a lot of positive value in visiting blogs, forums, Facebook, etc. But it is easier to stay focused on the REAL tasks at hand – teaching your kids and keeping your household in working order – simply by setting a TIME LIMIT for this sort of activity each day.

I'd suggest an old fashioned kitchen timer for this. If you've given yourself one hour to surf and check your email, etc. then set the timer and put it near your computer. Seeing the time tick away will quickly help you prioritize what you should be doing during that hour. When it rings, stop. Get up and walk away from the computer, even if you are in the middle of something. Treat yourself like you mean business, and you'll soon train yourself to keep the gathering and goofing off to a minimum.

Plan Your Path Each Day

This doesn't mean just have a "to do" list for the day. Organize your activities around some predetermined path. If you follow a list of tasks that takes you step-by-step on your journey to wherever you want to go, you will not have information overload.

This is why I stated earlier that having a plan is extremely important.

A PLANNED PATH > SPECIFIC TASKS = No Information Overload

No matter what, follow this rule!

Set a Specific Limit on The Amount of Time & Money You Spend on New Resources

This is pivotal in preventing information overload. Many times I've found that the inexpensive ebooks or free reports are huge killers of my time. Set a monthly limit – both on your money and time - so you aren't just reading ebooks but actually implementing the tips and tricks that you've learned.

A specific money limit will also prevent you from splurging on high end products when you can't even do anything with them yet.

Don't be caught in an "Information Hoarding" mentality

Information Overload can sometimes be a sign of laziness. Lots of us tend to be information custodians instead of users. It is a lot easier to just sit down and keep feeding yourself information without thinking of how to implement it.

If you sense you are just spending your time accumulating but not applying, give yourself permission to let things pass you by. The thing about information these days is

that if you found it once, chances are you'll be able to find it again. You don't need to hoard it.

Stay Away From “Pretty, Shiny Things” that sidetrack you from your current homeschool plans.

If you take the time to develop a “game plan” for your homeschool year, and can stick to your plan and avoid the “pretty shiny objects” that are constantly coming at you, you’ll get further along than you ever thought possible.

For most people, the only thing on their horizon is the next step. Many times, we feel overwhelmed because we’re focusing on the end result rather than the next step.

Focus on your plan, buy only those products which help you do it better, faster, cheaper, or easier and you’ll prevent information overload.

But What about Missing Out on all the “Free Stuff” out there?

I know to some of you, this may sound as if I am dissing free resource sites (such as Homeschool Freebie Of The Day), and suggesting you do not make use of the resources they offer. That is not what I am saying.

What I am saying is that you must use discernment and discipline with the resources you come across, and **GLEAN WISELY**. If you come across a resource that is usable with your current studies, go ahead and download it – but use some of the time you have specifically designated for reviewing new resources to determine how or if it can fit in with what you are already doing. If it is a good fit, use it. If not, file it away for possible future use, or simply do not bother to download that resource. **Just don't spend your valuable time with it if it is not applicable to your current homeschooling plan.**

It is fine to build up a library of resources that have potential for future use, and file them in a specific folder which you can easily access at a future date. But don't get sidetracked into reading OR in the searching for these during times you should be working on something else.

The Price You Pay for "Free"

You see, there IS a very real price for the multitude of "free" homeschool resources you can find on the internet. **It is the cost of your time, mental energy and focus.** If a "free resource" – be it a download, a website, an email, or a social

networking tool - takes up too much of any of these, THEN YOU ARE PAYING MORE DEARLY FOR THAT RESOURCE THAN YOU REALIZE.

Downsize your Information Input

If there is just too much incoming information cluttering your brain and keeping you from getting to what you really need to be doing, one of the best favors you can do for yourself is to stop it at source if possible. Some ways to do this are:

Unsubscribe from email lists & newsletters that do not directly benefit your homeschooling goals.

Drop any social networking sites or tools that are directly keeping you from focusing on your priorities. Close your email program while you are doing other tasks at the computer, and only look at it at a designated time each day.

Choose not to read every book your friends recommend, or that have forever sat in your “to read” pile. Just pass them along to someone else.

Tell well-meaning friends who want to share other resources with you that you are focusing on using what is currently working for you and right now and you do not have time to review other materials.

If you can't – or don't want to - stop the information at source, put on your “Information Filter” hat on a regular basis. Think of yourself as a human “spam filter”. Get ruthless and start to throw things away without even reading them first.

Let me share a bit of my own story in this: When I first went through this process, I started with my inbox, which normally contained anywhere from 200 – 300 emails per day. Many of these emails were generated from lists I was a member of, or had once signed up for, but now were largely just dead weight – many messages were either not of interest to me, were completely unread, or to be honest with myself, simply ways to noodle away time on the computer. I decided to unsubscribe from every email list that I knew was not helping me to focus on my core homeschooling and family goals.

For a week, when I spotted these in my inbox, I immediately went to the bottom of the email where the “unsubscribe” link was located, and clicked through. It takes less than 30 seconds to unsubscribe from most lists. The result after three or four days of this pruning was an inbox with approximately 40-50 new emails each day, and as much as an hour less time spent “reading my email” each day. (What freedom it was, too! I

had never before realized how oppressive it was to have to deal with all that email day after day.)

After paring down my inbox, I next turned my sights on my Facebook and Twitter accounts. I decided to keep my Facebook, as it does serve a useful purpose for keeping in touch with family and friends – but I did decide to cut the time I spend there in half, basically only checking in every other day. Twitter, on the other hand, just seemed plain silly and trivial – so I closed that account completely.

The results of all this information downsizing? Yes, there was a fleeting feeling of “missing out” for a couple of days, but it was soon replaced by a feeling of freedom and much less stress. I suddenly had fewer excuses to fiddle around on the computer, and more time to focus on my children and their education. There was no collapse of my world, no complaints from my friends, and if I missed a nice site or download here and there, it didn't matter because I didn't know about it anyway. (No-see-um, No-want-um.). Actually, when I told a few of my close friends what I was doing, they thought it was a grand idea and wished they could do so themselves. (More than one mentioned the addicting nature of “social networking” tools.)

Take a Break and Clear Your Mind

I learned this one actually from an internet marketing writer. **45 minutes** is the point where we start to drift off and become slightly less productive. Our brains aren't designed to focus on anything that long.

I've tested this and noticed my least productive time is usually when I've been staring at the computer screen for hours.

Take breaks from any computer usage frequently. Get up and do some household chores, walk around the block, or go throw frisbee with your kids. Rest your eyes by focusing on something in the distance (this prevents headaches from computer screens as well).

Another thing that I recommend doing to conquer information overload is to set a shut down time. A shut down time is when you completely disconnect yourself from all things that deal with homeschooling. Your shut down time may be a specific time of the day, or it might even be a block of several days, it's completely up to you. Doing this will relieve some of your stress and refresh your focus.

This gives me clarity and perspective. I then get back to work, figure out what got me bogged down, and move forward with my plan.

Declutter your computer and desk

This is such a time robber it's not even funny. My desktop is at times covered in ebooks I will never read. Documents, Zip files, audios, useless programs I won't ever use equals wasted productivity.

Clean out your digital and physical areas of useless junk you're never going to use. Clutter usually makes us feel anxious. By eliminating extra windows in your browser, cleaning up papers, and taking care of mindless junk clogging up your surroundings, you'll feel more energized and clear your mind.

Get Back To Your Homeschooling Plan

After you've taken a break and eliminated all the clutter, focus on some simple, easy-to-do and useful tasks that help you achieve your goals. Momentum keeps you on track with your plan. Eliminate anything that doesn't further your plan.

Repeat the Steps To Avoid The Information Overload

Go back over the list of steps to avoiding information overload, figure out where you made the mistake, and don't repeat it. By not making the same mistakes you will steadily get more productive and less overloaded with information.

Here are a few more good tips especially for Homeschool Newbies:

Keep it Simple

Don't be afraid to keep your teaching and homeschooling simple, especially when you are just starting out. A simple, well prepared meal is often much more satisfying than a huge buffet of delicacies. Attempting to follow too many plans, use too many resources and cram too many activities onto your schedule can be like stuffing yourself at the all-you-can-eat buffet. Ultimately your kids will holler "enough!" and won't benefit from this approach. Purposely pare down on your teaching resources. Do your research on what resources will best suit you and your family, and then stick with them.

Learning VS. Doing

There's a myth that you always have to read all sorts of articles, ebooks and textbooks, or listen to a whole series of seminars to know what to do. But you don't need to examine ten different curriculums or spend 50 bucks on a computer program or a seminar to teach you how to read a book with your kids, or go on a field trip, or find places on the map. Come on...!

Sometimes by simply doing basic activities or lessons with your kids, you will teach – and they will learn - 10 times faster and with a lot less stress involved. I made this mistake a lot when I was newer to homeschooling. Don't wait until you “have it all down perfect” to get started. Just start, and you'll both learn as you go.

Don't Panic

Don't get to the point where you have to make a decision about a homeschool curriculum in a panic. This usually means you've spent way too much time analyzing and collecting instead of creating a plan of action, at which point you're desperately trying to find something to keep your kids busy, instead of using what is best suited to their needs. Plan ahead and give yourself ample time to determine what resources you need and what would be a good fit for your kids.

Conclusion

Information overload is a factor of life. At times, we all get tired, stressed, anxious and stray from our plans.

It isn't enough to just know what causes information overload. You must actively guard yourself from it.

However, when the inevitable bout of information overload occurs, you must take strategic steps toward killing it and getting back on track as soon as possible. Small changes are the key to improving anything. They really do add up. **A Plan of Action is Key to Success in Homeschooling.**

Thanks for reading this report and I hope this helps you get more done and achieve your goals faster with fewer problems.

Sincerely,

Anonymous Mom