



Published on *mache.org* (<http://www.mache.org>)

[Home](#) > [Resources](#) > Printer-friendly PDF

Components of a Solid High School English Course

Tags: [curriculum](#) [English](#) [grammar](#) [high school](#) [HSLDA](#) [literature](#) [reading](#) [speech](#) [spelling](#) [vocabulary](#) [writing](#)



Dear Friends,

August finds some families vacationing and others finishing up those last projects before beginning a new school year. To help you look forward with enthusiasm to September, we encourage you to take some time now to put those final touches on planning, ordering curriculum, and mapping out your school year. As you go over your plans, let's zero in on English and talk about what constitutes a solid high school English course of study. We offer the following suggestions that can easily be tailored to your individual child and circumstance.

LITERATURE

The first component that comes to mind when thinking of English is literature. Before being able to fully enjoy good books, it's important to teach your child how to analyze them by introducing and discussing the literary devices the author uses such as setting, plot, theme, etc. Providing opportunities to practice picking out these devices through a variety of genres (drama, prose, poetry) will encourage your child to better comprehend what he is reading. When choosing literature curriculum, consider buying the teacher's guide for a refresher on these literary techniques, questions to ask, and background information on the author and reading selections.

You have many teaching options available when choosing an approach to literature. One is the textbook approach which lays everything out for you including literary selections (usually just excerpts of novels), suggestions for composition assignments, and quizzes and tests. Another is the integrated approach to literature which primarily uses full-length novels and ties together literature with related periods in history, thereby combining the study of many different subject areas. Whichever approach you lean towards, we've listed a number of [literature suggestions](#) under "Curriculum" in the HSLDA high school section of its website.

To entice your student to read, we suggest you choose an assortment of books at different levels including those above her current reading level--this will stretch her thinking, vocabulary, and comprehension abilities. A [good source for great books](#) (always use care in choosing books from any list) is the College Board. Also provide her with selections to read purely for enjoyment along with those she will be required to read. The [May 2007 high school email newsletter](#) provided many helpful resources for reading list suggestions.

If you would like to give your student the option of choosing her own novels to study, you may want to have her select 5-6 books (at the high school level), and order study guides to help you direct discussions. [Progeny Press](#) and [Total Language Plus](#) have good assortments of high school level novels from which to choose.

GRAMMAR

Reading is enjoyable and comprehensible because authors use good grammar. Likewise, it is important for students to apply correct grammar skills so they will be able to express their ideas clearly and concisely when speaking and writing. Grammar builds in difficulty and detail, so do not neglect to continue providing grammar instruction through the high school years. Again, in order to retain this knowledge, application of it is necessary. The easiest way--you guessed it!--is through writing assignments and public speaking practice. There are many good grammar courses available from major publishers as well as

from curriculum providers who specialize in this area. If, however, you choose not to use a workbook or specifically designed curriculum to teach grammar, then be focused and deliberate in checking and correcting all written compositions for good grammar usage.

SPELLING AND VOCABULARY

Knowing how to spell and having a plethora of words to use will mark your child as being a well-educated and articulate individual. Whether your teen's plans include college, a career, the military, or a vocation, he will use these tools every day. Building his vocabulary is also necessary for taking those college admissions tests (SAT and ACT). In addition, it will aid him in understanding what he is reading for both his literature course and his future goals. An example of a resource to build vocabulary in a structured way is [Vocabulary for Achievement](#). Or, in lieu of a vocabulary workbook, you may simply direct your child to write on a flash card any new word he discovers from his reading, as well as the meaning of the word, and its use in a sentence. If you choose this method, be sure to have your child systematically review these new vocabulary words and encourage him to use them in his conversation and compositions.

SPEECH

Learning to speak in public can never begin too early. Encourage your children to memorize and recite poems or passages of Scripture to a family audience. Oral book reports provide another opportunity to practice speaking in front of people. In high school, your child can prepare speeches on issues she has an interest in or cares about deeply. Public speaking does take courage and requires the child to take a risk, but practice will make it easier. Michael Farris says, "No matter what your career...the ability to present what you're trying to say in a cohesive fashion is very good for your job...."

WRITING

We've saved writing for last because we know it is the section of an English course which gives many parents the most angst. But, it is this component which unifies and uses all the parts we've mentioned. Being a good writer begins with good mechanics--spelling, vocabulary, grammar. Reading good literature by many authors teaches your child how to express an idea or twist a phrase in a way which captures the reader's attention, or interest, or emotions. Having the right tools for the job makes it easier and more enjoyable.

Introduce your child to different types of writing such as creative, analytical, essays or poetry. All use the same tools, but in a different way. Do not become discouraged with your child's writing skills, but praise him by pointing out what he has done well and how he has improved before suggesting any changes or corrections. Teach him to edit his work, checking for grammar, spelling, and content before submitting it to you for grading. Remember, in order to improve writing skills, provide a lot of time for practice. In addition, encourage him to write for pleasure (not for you to grade or necessarily to read).

You may feel you need help in this area, especially if your child resents you critiquing her work, so consider looking at some outside resources. We have some suggestions in the [individual curriculum](#) portion of our website.

Also, in a recent issue of the Court Report Magazine, Dianne Hurst wrote an excellent article on this very subject which you will find encouraging for the [many helpful ideas](#) she offers.

Patrick Henry College offers a writing mentor program which matches your high school student with a PHC student or graduate who will mentor your child in fiction or nonfiction writing, assist with school assignments, give students writing exercises and tips, or edit papers. To learn more about the program or to receive an application for the fall 2007 semester, visit <http://www.hslda.org/elink.asp?id=4231> or email Rebekah Ries at mentorshipcoordinator@phc.edu.

Other resources may be people in your church or community who are trained or gifted in this area. They may be willing to work individually with your child or provide a short course for your teen or a group of teens.

Reading and writing well should be the foundations of your high school program. As you design your English course, including the five components--literature, grammar, spelling and vocabulary, speech, and composition--remember that there may be some years when you emphasize one component over the others, based on your child's strengths and weaknesses. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "If we encounter a man of rare intellect, we should ask him what books he reads." What a blessing it is for you to be involved in choosing the books and materials that will help to shape your child's intellect.

Next month we will be highlighting the average homeschool high schooler. If you have a wonderful, precious, average child--you'll find you are not alone! Average is what most of us are--even though the exemplary or outstanding homeschoolers usually make the news.

Our high respect for a well-read man is praise enough for literature.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Winding down the summer with you,

Becky Cooke & Diane Kummer

HSLDA High School Coordinators



This resource is an article from the *Homeschooling Thru Highschool* newsletter (8/2/2007), and is provided by the Home School Legal Defense Association as a service to the homeschooling community.

**To subscribe to the newsletter, please [click here](#).
For more information about the HSLDA, please [click here](#).**

Author: [Becky Cooke](#)
[Diane Kummer](#)

Source URL (retrieved on 05/26/2013 - 3:33am): <http://www.mache.org/resources/article/11-26-2011/components-solid-high-school-english-course>