

The co-op does not employ teachers. Co-op facilitators volunteer their time and expertise free of charge; they may be certified teachers or a parent with a degree, knowledge or passion for a subject. Most of our teachers hold advanced degrees in the subjects they teach. For example, we have had a portrait photographer teach a photography class, a computer programmer teach the computer labs, a published author teach composition and creative writing, an artist teach drawing and art appreciation, a counselor teach psychology, and a nurse teach health, biology and nutrition. However, we have also had "regular" parents successfully teach economics, music appreciation, history, civics, marine biology, cooking, etc., simply because they are passionate about those subjects and enjoy sharing their passion with students. As we homeschoolers know, if a parent likes a subject and has a teacher's manual, he or she can teach anything!

Most of us in co-op want to avoid the pitfalls of a public school classroom. Mindful of this, here are a few tips gathered from the Internet and other co-op teachers to make co-op classes better for your students and easier for you. Some are obvious, but they bear repeating. Even the ones obviously geared to elementary classes can be adapted for high school classes.

- Start your class with prayer to set the appropriate tone and prevent many problems before they start.
- A public school format will be foreign and uncomfortable to homeschoolers who are used to self-directed learning or unschooling methods. In other words, do not expect all homeschooled children to sit quietly and raise their hands to speak.
- Presenting material in a boring manner, such as lecture only, will be less preferable to hands-on, interactive methods.
- If you present information on a handout or from a book, have elementary students take turns reading portions aloud to ensure their attention. Also, you may want to use reading material slightly below your students' grade level to accommodate all reading levels. For elementary students, you may need to rewrite or paraphrase original text from the Internet or books. That way, students will be able to understand the material and pronounce words without embarrassment.
- Do not expect all students to be on the same level. Some students may be well experienced in the subject matter, while others may be new to the topic, regardless of the age group.
- Avoid anything that ridicules or excludes students who cannot keep up.
- Junior high and high school teachers should consider making the purchase of the textbook mandatory for students. Investing in a textbook seems to increase the level of commitment by the parents and students in attendance, preparation, and participation.
- Do not assign homework for elementary grades, and be careful how much homework you assign for high school. Too much homework may conflict with the high school student's regular schedule of coursework at home, causing some students to have difficulty keeping up. However, you are not obligated to make the course easy, as high school level classes are college prep and, therefore, should be challenging. Plan to be flexible the first few weeks of class until you determine the level of students in the class; then you can increase or decrease the workload as needed.
- Do not be afraid to send a student who did not do homework to study hall until the

homework is completed. It usually takes just one time, and from then on all your students will be prepared for class every week!

- Separating students to work independently (by themselves, not in small groups) defeats the purpose of a co-op group class. Individual work can be done at home; the large group provides the benefits of multiple views and perspectives. Of course, in a class such as creative writing, students may do some of their work at home and bring examples to class to share with the group and discuss their progress.

- We encourage teachers to schedule guest speakers as this is one of the benefits of belonging to a group. Anyone may be invited as a guest speaker, but please be sure to inform speakers that they will be in a homeschooling atmosphere (parents and children in a wide range of ages, not all sitting perfectly still in rows of chairs, who are allowed to interact and ask questions, etc.). This may sound obvious, but some speakers honestly have never addressed this type of group and may not know how to react.

- A sample guest speaker is anyone who can show off his hobby or interest to your class and tell the students how he got started. Lots of show-and-tell, passing things around so the students can see up close, and a simple hands-on activity can transform a short, dry speech into a great co-op class.