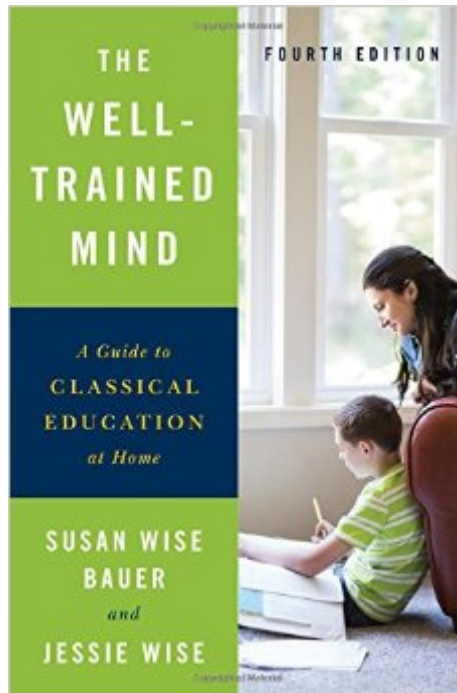


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# The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide To Classical Education At Home (Fourth Edition)



## Synopsis

Is your child getting lost in the system, becoming bored, losing his or her natural eagerness to learn? If so, it may be time to take charge of your child's education by doing it yourself. The Well-Trained Mind will instruct you, step by step, on how to give your child an academically rigorous, comprehensive education from preschool through high school—one that will train him or her to read, to think, to understand, to be well-rounded and curious about learning. Veteran home educators Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise outline the classical pattern of education called the trivium, which organizes learning around the maturing capacity of the child's mind and comprises three stages: the elementary school grammar stage, when the building blocks of information are absorbed through memorization and rules; the middle school logic stage, in which the student begins to think more analytically; and the high-school rhetoric stage, where the student learns to write and speak with force and originality. Using this theory as your model, you'll be able to instruct your child—whether full-time or as a supplement to classroom education—in all levels of reading, writing, history, geography, mathematics, science, foreign languages, rhetoric, logic, art, and music, regardless of your own aptitude in those subjects. Thousands of parents and teachers have already used the detailed book lists and methods described in *The Well-Trained Mind* to create a truly superior education for the children in their care. This extensively revised fourth edition contains completely updated curricula and book lists, links to an entirely new set of online resources, new material on teaching children with learning challenges, cutting-edge math and sciences recommendations, answers to common questions about home education, and advice on practical matters such as standardized testing, working with your local school board, designing a high-school program, preparing transcripts, and applying to colleges. You do have control over what and how your child learns. *The Well-Trained Mind* will give you the tools you'll need to teach your child with confidence and success.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Love love love this book. I was a little hesitant to purchase since I have the older version, but there is so much that has been updated. The literature selections by grade level alone make this money well spent.

Excellent how-to reference book for those wanting to provide a solid college-prep education for their own kids at home. Helps with the nitty gritty of homeschooling, from teaching reading to chemistry. Down-to-earth practical advice for homeschooling families who want a reliable academic plan.

I find the book and the whole "series" very helpful in finding a starting point for home-schooling. Before this book I was complete lost, now I know what I plan to do. Thank you so much for your tireless work involved in creating this guide.

I use this book as a guideline when choosing curriculum for homeschooling. I find the reading lists for high school history/literature very helpful when you are putting together your own curriculum instead of using a "boxed" one. Would highly recommend to those who are interested in using this as a guide to giving their children a classical education.

This book is excellent with all of its updated materials. I have read the original one from cover to cover, but this one has excellent resources, including price lists and internet links to relevant information. It is well worth upgrading to the most recent edition.

Enjoyable and reassuring to read. This is the first book new homeschoolers should buy.

Excellent book. A full length road map to raising your children the best way one can.

I reviewed the third edition of this book on [Amazon](#), focusing on its overinflated claims about the supremacy of classical education (such as the unsupported claim that a classical education will produce a

better mechanic, who is not only more logical and better at keeping accounts but also better able to deal with customers, than other methods) but touching on a number of other points. So I was extremely curious about what the fourth edition would do regarding a couple of serious issues with earlier versions. In particular, I was interested first of all in whether the history- and literature-heavy nature of the WTM program would give more emphasis to the overall role of the arts, which had previously gotten relatively short shrift. I was also interested in seeing the extent to which math recommendations would change, as professional mathematicians and scientists on the WTM homeschooling boards pretty universally panned the way earlier editions approached this subject; and I was most concerned with how the authors might reshape or modify their claims that WTM methods and materials can be easily adapted and used for all special needs children -- particularly as the book now mentions that this population is probably overrepresented among homeschoolers due to the difficulties in getting appropriate educations through the schools for many, especially for twice exceptional kids. In a recent book by a woman raised in Finland who moved to the U.S. as an adult, a chapter on education mentions, besides the usual statistic of how highly Finns rate in international performance rankings, that Finnish schools have recently added even more of the arts into schools, at a time when U.S. theory is increasingly pushing them out. The Finns believe, and this is verified by recent research, that the arts deeply engage many students who may not otherwise be engaged in the curriculum, that they encourage creative and divergent thinking, cooperation, and contribute to emotional and social well-being. The authors of this book, however, tell parents not to worry if they skimp on art or science in the elementary years, lest instruction is "spread too thin." That said, their idea of the value of art and music is that they "improve muscle coordination and perception skills." Music improves "reasoning skills." Really? This is the value of the whole world of the arts? I'm pretty sure that if they had bothered to ask professional artists and musicians, their advice for working with children in these areas, plus their view of arts' benefits, would be very different. They would not be "classical," but my point is that for these authors, the world of the arts is viewed with incredible narrowness and completely ignores the way that many children, particularly but by no means exclusively children who are not neurotypical, are lit up by these areas, and that the arts can be a gateway into and a fabulous means of teaching subjects like math and history and science for children who might otherwise resist those "core" subjects. My point is that in this edition as in previous editions, the tidy philosophy of classical learning -- incremental, sequential, explicit, and top-down, heavy in the humanities in which the authors are clearly most comfortable -- takes precedence over the widely varying needs of real children. Regarding math, I was pretty horrified to read that the distinction between procedural and conceptual math is that the

former teaches algorithms while the latter teaches why they work. There are two enormous problems with this in my opinion. First, the authors' definitions of both are still firmly rooted in arithmetical operations, and second, they offer how to "teach" conceptual understanding through explicit instruction. As in previous editions, the teacher still shows kids "how numbers work" by bundling toothpicks into tens, then uses leading questions which have specific "right" answers. The authors proclaim the child then "knows how to carry." This top-down, teacher-asks-child-answers explicit model of instruction cuts the child off from the whole realm of problem-solving and thinking things through, from using divergent and lateral thinking, from developing mathematical reasoning, and from entire areas of math that young children can become quite interested in that lie outside the arena of computation. As I've remarked in my comments on previous editions, this is similar to the authorial attitude demonstrated in responses to a child saying he doesn't like strawberries. Instead of encouraging discussion as to why strawberries are important to eat, what other ways there may be to make them acceptable to the child, or what other foods could provide the same nutrients, the parent says, "Eat one every time I serve them and you'll learn to like them." I am living testimony to the fact that I grew up under this sort of regime, both nutritionally and educationally, and it did not work. I did not like strawberries until I was in my thirties, and I still won't touch liver. I could perform arithmetical functions, but I didn't become fascinated by math until adulthood, when I learned from my own child's early explorations with numbers, quantitative relationships, spatial relationships, and much more, how to think differently. It was not merely a matter of understanding why something worked; it was a matter of playing, trying to figure out, running into roadblocks, trying something else, and most of all, learning to move outside the traditional math curriculum to include mathematical problem-solving in a much broader and more divergent way. As to the special needs section: in the third edition this was barely over a page. Now it rates four pages, but nearly two are taken up by one individual story encouraging parents to have early evaluations. And to my dismay, that's about it. The revised title of this section is "When Learning Doesn't Improve: Difficulties and Challenges." Non-neurotypical thinking is defined as a series of failures: the kid who "just can't figure out reading... who seems to have no grasp of spelling... who at nine, ten, eleven is still staring at addition problems as though he's never seen them before." Learning success and failure are both defined in terms of the pre-determined timetable and scope and sequence. The fact that children who are non-neurotypical may have other strengths, that they may learn more abstract concepts first and lag on what we conventionally consider earlier skills, that they may not learn incrementally or through heavily textual materials and lots of writing, that they may not learn to read or spell phonetically but be visual learners, is not even brought up. I have homeschooled one child, taught

others in a homeschool co-op, and known a number of others all of whom learned "differently," and what is striking is that all of them had a huge developmental leap in mid-adolescence specifically in the area of writing and spelling. Kids went from resisting writing a single sentence to writing multi-page articles for newspapers, entire pamphlets for local theater groups, hundreds of pages of fan fiction, business proposals and panel discussion proposals. Most of them did not learn to take dictation "to hold a sentence in their heads" -- they were visual learners who needed to see, and to have visual strategies, for spelling and writing. In her online additional resources for special needs student, Susan Wise Bauer suggests that twice exceptional kids -- gifted, with learning differences or "challenges" (challenges which may only be challenges because they are being forced to work with a neurotypical scope and sequence and method of instruction) -- need to forge ahead conceptually but work on remediating their weaknesses. This one-size-fits-all suggestion is dramatically misleading, because doing more of the same on low-level skills is precisely the way to kill off the fire to learn in many 2e kids. My own daughter, for instance, learned to spell when she was approaching adolescence and both of us figured out that she was a highly visual memorizer and simply did not learn phonetically; she began to take to copying quotations at that age as well. After about eighteen months, she'd closed the gap and was working at grade level in those things. Many 2e children have quite advanced mathematical understanding early on, well before they memorize their addition or multiplication tables. My daughter became totally automatic on addition only during algebra II, when she found the level of mathematical thinking was interesting enough that she learned in the context of solving problems she wanted to solve. I'm by no means saying every 2e kid learns this way, or that remediation is never a good idea. I'm saying that a one or two sentence reference to "remediation" across the board is so vague as to be meaningless, and well-intended parents who believe that, as the WTM states, kids must master their addition and subtraction tables before they learn to multiply, must master their multiplication tables before they learn fractions, master fractions before they learn algebra, etc., may in some instances be actually doing something very counterproductive. My daughter actually mastered algebra I procedure while going through algebra II, because the higher level mathematical reasoning gave her a context in which the lower level skills mattered. Had I held her back and insisted she either stay with algebra I until she performed at a certain level, or had I allowed her to quit (the WTM recommends that children who struggle with algebra I be allowed to "rest on their laurels" and not required to go on to higher math), she never would have gone into college testing into calc 3. Learning can, and sometimes does, happen out of a predetermined incremental order. At least the earlier editions' claims that WTM can work for all special needs children is not repeated here. However, it is

assumed and then completely bailed on: "Adapting classical education to the varied needs of non-neurotypical children is beyond the scope of this chapter." And why? Because the book is already a long one. But there was room for adding other sections on different topics. On one hand, it is probably a good thing that people with no education in and history of working with a diverse spectrum of special needs children have not tried to lay out a program. However, given that the authors have just referred to the fact that special needs kids may be overrepresented among homeschoolers and pose real challenges, and the fact that numerous people on the WTM forums were waiting for this new edition to give them specific guidance in precisely how to adapt for their child's unique needs, this is unconscionable. They're going to pay nearly \$40 to find that there is nothing near the level of help they were in need of. The book has expanded sections on how to apply for college and how to write a transcript, but not on how to go about getting evaluations, how to understand whether you've gotten the testing your child needs, how to prepare for an evaluation, how to keep records on questions or issues, how to ask for specific recommendations afterwards, etc. I found the earlier editions unethical in their brief and blithe assurance that WTM could be used with any and all special needs children; sadly, I find their current unwillingness to discuss adaptation of their philosophy and methods equally problematic. If adaptation is possible, why not discuss it, even while admitting different adaptations will be needed for different kids (just like the rest of the book does for neurotypical kids)? Why not give one or two specific examples of how this might be done, for different kids at different ages? If adaptation for all is not possible, why not tell readers that outright? SWB asked people on the forums for questions, suggestions, stories, and advice for her revision of this chapter. It was clear that many of them were desperately looking for help in how to adapt WTM methods and philosophies for their children who learn differently. I was surprised at how quickly her solicitation of feedback ended and she had finished revisions; now I see why. She used their stories, but didn't offer what they most needed.

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