

The 12 common impediments to producing unimpeachable credentials

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All parents who home educate their children must prepare a written statement that summarizes academic achievements during the teen years. While there are no specific format requirements for the high school transcript, a little bit of knowledge about the process and necessary contents will help you avoid 12 common impediments to producing unimpeachable credentials.

#12 Inattention to Graduation Date

You may indicate this important date anywhere in your transcript layout, but you must not omit it. Month and year are not enough. A specific day has to be cited. If your student has not completed all the high school work by your graduation event, there is nothing wrong with adding a “summer school” session to finish up. However, if an extension of a couple of months is insufficient, then you should edit your graduation date appropriately.

#11 Inadequate Validation

Transcripts demand signatures in order to be considered valid. Don't worry about the titles of “principal” or “head teacher,” but do include after your signature a designation of any degrees you have earned (e.g., John Doe, M.D., Jane Doe, B.S.N., or A.A., B.S., M.B.A., Ph.D., etc.). In some cases, home school transcripts may need to be accompanied by an affidavit that certifies the accuracy of the document. Since this is not a routine requirement, however, you can wait until it is requested to produce one. The bottom line is that you should sign the document and provide current contact information (telephone number or e-mail address) in case the reader needs further clarification.

#10 Incomplete Student Identification

At the very minimum, you need to indicate the student's full legal name, birthdate, gender, current address, and the names of parents or legal guardian. When you list parent names, remember to include both mother and father if both parents are living in the home. Many home school mothers make the mistake of listing only their own names because “mom is doing all the teaching.” What they fail to realize is that when they do this, they create the impression that they live in “single-parent” households. Be sure to provide the student's Social Security Number (SSN) if you are planning to apply for any scholarships or financial aid to help with future training.

#9 Inaccurate GPA Calculations

Most of the academic world today uses a simple 4.0 scale for calculating Grade Point Average (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, F=0). But that's where the simplicity ends! Some schools provide an extra grade point for advanced courses (these are called “weighted” grades), and some states want grades listed numerically instead of by letters. It is not unusual for colleges to ask for both a “weighted” GPA and an “unweighted” GPA. Be sure to label which one you are providing.

There is also a continuing debate about whether “plus” or “minus” grades should be treated differently from a solid letter (i.e., giving more point value to an A than to an A-). So what's a home educator to do? Know what grade point scale is most desirable to facilitate your student's goals, and use it consistently. Remember the basic GPA formula: multiply grade points for a given course by credit(s) assigned for that course. Add the list of grade point extensions for all courses, add the credit totals, and finally divide the grade point total by the credit total. Report your final GPA with a number that extends at least two digits beyond the decimal point.

#8 Improper Length

Many parents confuse the concepts “transcript” and “portfolio.” A transcript is actually an academic résumé—as such, it should be limited to two pages—better yet, two sides of one sheet of paper!

#7 Insufficient Documentation

While home schooling is a completely viable educational choice, some people in the education establishment will question student records that are completely parent-produced. Thus, anything you can do to support your claims with external evidence and careful record keeping will be helpful. Collect items such as a bibliography of all resources used for high school studies, letters of recommendation (and evaluations, if possible) from anyone who works with your child, transcripts for college courses taken during the high school years, research and writing samples, test score reports, etc. Provide a spot on the transcript where you can list the items you are sending as attachments.

Whenever you claim a “weighted” grade for advanced achievement, you should have some outside corroboration, such as CLEP scores, AP evaluations, college transcripts, or at least a bibliography of college level text materials.

#6 Imprecise Course Titles

Since you want the reader of the transcript to know at a glance what your child has studied, create course titles that are as specific to the student’s achievement as possible. If you want to expand a World History course from one credit to two credits, don’t list “World History I” and “World History II.” Instead, use titles such as “Ancient World History” and “Modern World History.” In English classes, cite “American Literature,” “British Literature,” “Literary Genres,” “Journalism,” “Research Writing,” etc. In work study or apprenticeship areas, provide titles such as “Introduction to Carpentry,” “Finish Carpentry Skills,” “Small Engine Repair,” “Orientation to Nutrition,” or “Computer Applications for Accounting.” (Hint: Community college catalogs are a great source of ideas for course labels.)

#5 Inconsistent Evaluation

Because there are many learning experiences at the high school level that require subjective evaluation, the only way to assign accurate grades for your student’s work is to measure achievements against your stated objectives. If you do not take the time to plan your learning objectives, you cannot discern what is “outstanding” vs. what is “average” or “poor.” There is a time element in grading as well—if deadlines are not met, some measure of penalty should influence your grade. Whatever you do, don’t let indecision drive you to use “pass/fail” grades as these can be devastating to your child’s GPA

#4 Inflexible Rigidity

Conventional schools tie the assignment of credit to spending a designated number of hours in classroom attendance and outside preparation. The formula for this requirement varies anywhere from 120-200 hours of work, depending on the definitions involved. In order to assign credits with integrity, parents have to balance the need for recognizing that not all classroom time is productive and the need to avoid inflating their own tutorial advantage.

Since home schooling is not classroom-oriented in the traditional sense, it is crucial that parents apply some flexibility to their report of Carnegie Units earned. If your student finishes the “Algebra I” textbook in four months instead of taking a full school year, that “Algebra I” course still receives a full Carnegie Unit of credit. Likewise, if the student takes two years to complete that “Algebra I” course, the course receives one Carnegie Unit of credit.

But tutorial life is not that easy in those subjects for which you don’t have conventional textbooks. Here you will need to have your student keep a time log of hours invested to achieve the prescribed outcomes. I also heartily recommend writing a “contract” with your student to specify what must be done by what deadline to earn an A, a B, or a C in the course. This agreement will help you tailor each credit you assign to the task list required for mastery.

#3 Irrational Fear

Have you ever thought about the fact that your success as a home educator should not be measured by how closely you imitate the educational program of public or private schools (i.e., scope and sequence, teaching methods, scheduling, etc.) The diploma you grant to your child is a certification that he/she has met your own school’s requirements for graduation, and the transcript provides the details of that process. Your child does not have to satisfy the entrance requirements of any college in order to graduate from high school—though it certainly makes sense to do so if you know that student is college bound. Your family’s home school is not a satellite of the public school system. Thus, your graduation requirements do not have to duplicate the specific list of state graduation requirements. It is completely reasonable, acceptable, and desirable that your child can graduate from high school with strategic adjustments in the credit sequence that reflect talents, gifts, interests, life skills, apprenticeship, spiritual discipleship, etc.

#2 Impromptu Delivery

Procrastination—no matter how legitimate your reason—will always damage your ability to create a high school transcript that presents your student’s work in the best possible light. If you wait until the last minute, you will forget important details, forfeit

crucial edits, and circumvent the creativity that should earmark the tutorial lifestyle of learning that home education is all about.

#1 Irresponsible Omission

The number one transcript transgression that I see far too often is not doing a transcript at all! No parent can see the future. Can you say with certainty that your children will never attend college? Will you prepare transcripts for them when they turn 40? What about the benefits you could receive even before graduation in the form of a “good student discount” on auto insurance premiums? Did you know that high school credentials are also increasingly used for security clearance purposes? Make no mistake about it—producing a high school transcript is a non-optional obligation!

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