


Comparing Saxon Math vs Singapore Math Curriculum

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The math wars of the 1990's have quieted down and are almost a thing of the past.

With the release of their 2006 guidelines, the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) effectively ended 17 years of promoting 'reform math' programs and acknowledged the need for schools to return to more traditional math programs.

Teachers and Homeschool parents can now move on to the next question. Which traditional math curriculum is best? The correct answer depends largely on the needs and preferences of each teacher and student.

There are many traditional math programs to choose from. This provides a brief review of two of the most popular programs, Singapore Math and Saxon Math. These two curriculums have some things in common:

- Both are used in public schools, private schools and homeschools
- Both have clear track records of improving standardized test scores
- Both share the traditional math emphasis on math facts as the building blocks of all math concepts
- Both have proven to be effective with a wide range of students

They also have some important differences:

Cost Comparison -Saxon Math books are more expensive than Singapore Math books because Saxon has a lot more pages. Saxon student books are hard cover from 8th grade and up.

Saxon Emphasizes Practice - Saxon Math puts more emphasis on doing practice exercises while Singapore Math puts more emphasis on critically thinking through concepts. After concepts are introduced, Saxon moves immediately into practice exercises to help cement the concept in the student's mind. Saxon requires students to memorize formulas, achieve fluent recall of math facts and apply algorithms to solve problems.

Singapore Emphasizes Thinking - Singapore teachers spend more time helping students to think through and verbally discuss each component of the concept. Singapore Math avoids reliance on memorized formulas and algorithms so there is not as much emphasis on repetitive practice exercises. Instead, Singapore strives to give students an understanding of math concepts by walking students through each component of a problem, and then presenting them with the whole problem to solve. This way, students are trained to think actively as they work through each step of a problem instead of plugging the problem into a formula.

Saxon is More Structured - Saxon Math is more structured, making it easier for teachers and students to follow the roadmap. Each new concept is followed by practice exercises. Review questions are provided after every 10 lessons.

Singapore Math Requires More Teaching - Singapore Math is less structured, using an approach which is less familiar to anyone who learned math in the U.S. As a result, Singapore Math can be more challenging for U.S. teachers and students, especially older students who are already familiar with U.S. math programs. Singapore's approach puts more burden on teachers to:

- spend more time teaching new concepts, breaking the concepts into components to ensure students are understanding
- stimulate verbal discussion of the concepts
- supplement the material as needed with flash cards, manipulative items, and extra drills
- continually assess how well students are grasping concepts then provide additional assistance as needed

Singapore Math is More Focused - Saxon Math practice exercises blend previously covered concepts together with new concepts, forcing students to continually review previous concepts. The rationale is repetitive practice over time is necessary to grasp the concepts and to achieve quick and effortless recall of math facts. Singapore focuses on one concept at a time, seeking mastery of each concept before moving on to the next one. One of the reasons why the NCTM liked the Singapore curriculum is because it focuses only on a few key concepts for each school year. The NCTM recognized a key weakness with some U.S. programs is having too many objectives, making them incoherent and difficult for students to master anything.

Recommendations - For school teachers who are willing to try something new and put more effort into teaching, my recommendation is Singapore Math. Singapore students lead the world in math test scores and your students can do the same. For Homeschool parents who are pressed for time and need a program that allows students to work more independently, my recommendation is Saxon Math. Saxon also offers CD ROM teaching videos to enable students to work even more independently. Saxon is also a great choice for U.S. school teachers looking for a program with a more familiar approach. Saxon Math has proven success with a wide range of students, even turning struggling math students into math lovers!

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