

Need Help With Your Supply Order?

Ahh, it's that time of year again where, in many parts of the Northern hemisphere, schools are wrapping up the academic year and looking forward to Summer holiday break. Summer is an important time for children, teachers, and families to rest, play, and let the learning from the previous year settle in before beginning anew in the Fall.

For teachers in schools and homeschool settings, it is also a very important time to plan and prepare for the new year ahead. And that means supply orders! In any Waldorf learning environment the annual handwork supply order can be one of the largest in the whole program. And for teachers, it can be quite a challenge to decide how to best use what limited funds they may have in their budget.

There are many choices to make when planning how to best use your supply budget. How much yarn to order? What colors? What if I run out mid-year? We may not know at this point exactly how many children we will teach in each grade next year. Late enrollment happens all the time. And what about those extra equipment items (think spindles, looms, or sewing machines) that have been on your wishlist but never make it into the budget?

We at Waldorf Handwork Educators have compiled our best tips and tricks for handwork supply orders from a group of handwork teachers and admin office experts with over 70 years of combined experience. If we have left anything out, we would love to hear your tips in the comments below! Keep reading and see our special discount offers for the WHE community from several wonderful handwork supply companies.

How much to order?

This is the proverbial question! How in the world to decide how much to order?

WHO: Every class is different. For example, some years you may have a 1st grade class made up of mostly older children with strong fine motor skills and 4 years of Waldorf early childhood experience. This group may fly right through your selected projects. Other years you may have a very young 1st grade class with lots of special needs and little to no background in Waldorf education. The constellation of the group can make a big difference in how many projects you get through. If you have been teaching for a few years in the same school you may already know the children in the rising class and have a good idea of what they need and what they are capable of. If you are new to the school, talk to the class teachers as well as the other special subject teachers. Find out as much as you can about the children you will be teaching next year.

WHAT: Start with a plan for the year. What projects do you intend to bring in each grade? Sketch out a plan for your year by starting with what skills you want the children to master. It's always best to teach one skill at a time and build from to the next. Choose projects that bring one new skill at a time and lay them out sequentially. It can be hard to know exactly how long each project will take because that depends on the unique group



of children. So plan somewhere in the middle or the fast lane. And then, add in a few more projects. Be sure that the extra projects do not require additional - different - supplies. It's better to overplan than to underplan. One rule of thumb you can try is to see how long it takes you to create a project. Then multiply that by 5 or 6. A big part of teaching is going with the flow and meeting the children where they are developmentally. So don't feel like a failure if you didn't have time for every project you planned. Every year is a bit different and it's best to be overprepared.

For the lower grades 1-4 this will likely include a wide variety and number of smaller projects. For the upper grades 5-8 this will be much easier as the projects are longer and often take the whole semester to complete.

For special or seasonal projects, it is cost- and time-effective to have all grades make window stars, or a small embroidered project, all materials cut and prepared to the same specifications, but completed with a varying degree of complexity according to the grade level.

HOW MUCH:

Now that you have a general plan of what projects you will bring in each grade, you can start to think about the supplies needed. For knitting and crochet projects there is a simple formula you can use. Let's take a knitted bunny for an example. Knit a square in the size you would have the children make. Cast off and weigh the knit square. How many grams of yarn did you use? Next sew up the bunny, stuff it, and weigh it again. How many grams of wool stuffing did you use? You can take these numbers and multiply them by the number of children you expect to have in your class. Another option is to knit and then unravel the item, and measure the length of yarn used. This is especially helpful if you are making something like a striped rainbow ball or a butterfly (see our 1st grade curriculum guide for patterns)

Remember the children's gauge (especially beginners) will vary greatly, and this will affect the amount of yarn and stuffing they will need. It's always a good idea to round up a bit. For sewing, embroidery, or cross-stitch projects, measure out the size of fabric for one project to determine fabric yardage. Especially with fabric, you will want to order extra, and of course left-over fabric can be used the following year.

When planning for the number of children in each grade, always add on an extra 3 or 4 children just in case. It is not uncommon for children to enroll late or join mid-year.

Wholesale:

IMPORTANT: Have your school or homeschool co-op set up wholesale accounts with your main suppliers. Handwork materials are a significant line item in the budget, and many suppliers will be happy to support Waldorf schools, being also aware of the exposure to a large potential retail market (parents) for their high-quality products.



Save money by taking stock:

At the end of every year I love to pull out all my bins of supplies and take stock! Write down exactly how many skeins you have of each color yarn and each color thread. Write down exactly how many yards of fabric you have left too. Now that you know how much you need for each grade, see how much you already have and re-stock accordingly. Once you have done this system for a full year or two, taking stock to re-stock will make life much easier.

Which and how many colors?

Decide on a color palette and then choose colors that 'sing' together. The colors you offer the children should be pre-selected so that no matter what color combinations they choose, the colors will always look beautiful together. For grades 1-3 one light and one dark of every color is plenty. For 4th and 5th grade it is ideal if you have a light, medium, and dark of every color at minimum. Be sure to order extras of each color. You never know what shades the children will be most drawn to.

An alternative approach: If you are a new teacher, or building a program in a new school or homeschool setting, (or have significant budget restrictions) you can maximize the funds you have by ordering larger amounts of fewer colors. This means you will be less likely to run out of any one color, and you can add more colors year by year. Always order a little more than you need, so you can 'bank' the extra for the following year.

Prioritize:

Decide how to prioritize your overall budget for the classes. For example: First graders can be overwhelmed by choosing colors, and part of our work is to guide children into selecting appropriate colors for a project and into considering how they interact with each other. They are usually happy with a narrow choice of colors. The knitting/ sewing itself is exciting.

Fourth graders are working with color, and need a far wider range of colored threads, and these are expensive supplies. Eighth graders can learn multiple machine-sewing skills on relatively small projects, but a set of matching sewing machines (with interchangeable parts) are extremely valuable - and they are a one-time capital investment for the school. Like chairs and desks, you may be able to make a case to amortize the cost over multiple years.

Tools:

Sewing needles, pins, scissors, tape measures, crochet hooks, the list goes on and on. Always buy in bulk to save money. And be sure to stock up on extras of the little things (like sewing needles) that tend to 'walk away' mid-year. If possible, invest in high quality tools that will last for years to come. Fabric scissors are a great example. Choose scissors that can be sharpened and invest in an electric sharpening tool. That way you can re-sharpen them yourself every year and save the cost of buying new when they wear out.

Teaching care for materials and tools:

A large part of a handwork teacher's work is teaching care for materials and tools, the foundations for the children's creativity. Making their own tools (e.g. knitting needles in 1st, 2nd,



5th grade, making a wooden mallet for woodwork in 4th grade) will naturally increase the children's investment – and care for – their tools. Stories about a lost sewing needle, or the impact on society when sewing machines were invented, will also open their eyes to the treasure of things we so often take for granted.

Teaching your students how to hold and how, where, why to store a sewing needle will minimize loss. Teach them how to use scissors in a careful and precise way to minimize accidental waste. Keep track of the tools you use in the classroom. If you walk in with 5 needles be sure you leave with 5 needles.

When children are eager to take their work home, it's a sign of success for the teacher. They are eager and enthusiastic! But it is rare for young children to remember to bring their work back to school. Request direct communication with the parent/ caregiver by written note, email, or phone call, before sending 'parallel' work and supplies home. Explain if the project falls by the wayside, you request the materials be returned to school so they will be available for others to use. Minimizing the attrition rate of materials will impact your budget.

These suggestions – and more of your own ideas – will significantly impact your budget, and more importantly, will raise the respect and care the children put into their work.

Mid-year inspiration:

Be sure to set aside at least 25% of your annual budget for mid-year inspiration (or restocking). Inspiration is the spice of life! You never know what may come up part way through the year. Perhaps you have an exciting collaborative idea with another teacher. Or maybe you come up with a new idea for a seasonal project that you feel is just right for this particular group of children. Allow space for the unknown! Your future self will thank you if you allow funds for future inspiration. And your future self will *really* thank you if you saved enough for that unforeseen mid-year order! Let the person who does the ordering know they can expect a 'refill order', so the funds do not get re-allocated or frozen before you have a chance to complete the full year's order!

Extra equipment:

Maybe you have been teaching for several years and have always dreamed of having a class set of looms, or matching sewing machines for 8th grade. Every year you think maybe this is the year, but you just can't pull it off. Here is a good way to achieve that dream equipment goal. You may not have enough in your budget for a whole class set but you just might be able to squeeze in 2 or 3 every year. If you chip away at it you will have that class set in just a few years time.

Streamlining the process:

Many schools and co-ops ask teachers to put together their supply orders and then send it to the front desk, an ordering department, or a purchasing person to place the order with the school's funding. That person may or may not know much about handwork supplies. Here are a few tips for making life easier for that ordering person and ensuring you receive exactly what you wanted to order.



- Organize your supply order list by vendor. This may take a little time to go through multiple vendors and make a detailed list of what you'll need from each website or store, but it is worth the time!
- Share your cart or wishlist, when possible, or take screenshots of your cart. This streamlines the process for the purchasing person, as they can simply accept the cart or wishlist, and then check out. If you can't share your cart or wishlist, screenshots make it helpful too.
- Be detailed and make notes. Admin staff may not know the difference between a size 3 and a size 9 needle, so they may just order the cheaper option! Even if your ordering person is fluent in handwork supplies, you can never be too detailed in your requests!
- For small business vendors, you may need to describe what you're looking for a bit more. Nancy from the corner wet felt store may know what you order, but if your purchaser doesn't know exactly how to ask for it, you may not get what you're used to. If you have established connections and preferences, make sure to tell your ordering person to mention your name, and ask for the point person you usually talk with.
- Be available to answer any questions that may come up. Especially if your purchasing person is new at this, make sure they know they can come to you with questions as many times as they need!
- Some schools may give you an established budget, and you place the order, to be reimbursed by the school.

Planning for the future:

Summer order time is way too late to ask for a budget increase. Do your research and find out when the budgets are set in your school or co-op. Make an appointment with whoever sets your supply budget for the year and meet with them EARLY, a few months before the budgets are set. Do your research ahead of time and bring real numbers for what you need. Show them all the ways you can save money and how carefully you have looked for ways to cut costs. Show them that you are being as responsible as you can with the school's limited resources but be clear on what you really need.

Community resources:

For more detailed tips about working with the admin, board, and faculty of your school be sure to read our article [Educate, Participate, Advocate](#) on our community resources page.

And you'll also want to check out [Building a Healthy Robust Handwork Program](#). With this document we outline recommended best practices, support handwork teachers, and offer insight and information gathered from our cumulative experience, as an aid to the decision-making members of each school community.



Waldorf Handwork Educators
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