



# Higher Education

## KhanAcademy delivers free education around the world

The Internet can be a powerful tool for learning. While there are many sites where the main concerns are Kim Kardashian's marital status, or who the latest "star" to flub a dance move is, **khanacademy.org** is more concerned with teaching your kids algebra.

The site is a free, nonprofit venture dedicated to bringing knowledge to the masses. It hosts a collection of over 2,600 YouTube videos featuring short lessons on a variety of subjects.

Currently, math and science are the principal focus of the lessons, but the site's founder, Salman "Sal" Khan, plans eventually to cover "everything."

A recent partnership with **Smarthistory.org** has added hundreds of videos on art history to the collection of lessons.



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*InSites*

### Home school or whole school

Anyone can view the lessons on the site or do practice problems. If you want to keep track of your progress, you need to register through a Google or Facebook account. The site has several testimonials from users claiming the video lessons have dramatically changed their lives for the better.

Teachers can use the site as a classroom aid. They need to register as "coaches" and create accounts for all of their students. Once they do this, the site provides numerous tools that enable them to track the progress of individual students as well as entire groups. Students also can earn badges as they progress.

The KhanAcademy currently is involved in pilot projects in a few schools in California. The schools integrated the website into their

math programs and saw significant improvements in several areas. The academy plans to initiate programs in more schools in the coming year as its resources permit.

### All in the family

Mr. Khan explains on the site how he started tutoring a young cousin who was struggling with math. They spoke over the phone and used Yahoo Doodle online as a shared notepad. She did so well with the tutoring that several more relatives asked for help. It was easier to make YouTube videos of the lessons that they could watch when convenient, than to coordinate times for everyone to get together.

Other people began noticing the video lessons and sending encouraging comments. Mr. Khan eventually quit his job as a hedge fund manager to do KhanAcademy full time. He initially used his own money to operate the site until donors, including The Gates Foundation and Google, provided enough funding for him to run and staff the virtual academy, and draw a salary.

The staff is an impressively credentialed collection of businessmen, educators, software engineers, designers and other specialists. There are MBAs, Ph.D.s, MFAs and other degrees from such prestigious schools as MIT, Harvard, Stanford, RISD, the University of Pennsylvania and others in the group.

The video lessons are conducted on an electronic blackboard, with most of them narrated by Mr. Khan in an informal, conversational tone. Many have still images of relevant subject matter posted on the board. As Mr. Khan discusses the lesson, notations, calculations and diagrams appear on the board as if drawn with an unseen hand. Most lessons last 10 to 15 minutes, with some a little shorter and some longer.

All of the lessons are grouped by subjects, dominated by math, in a long list at the bottom of the home page. Clicking on a list item takes you to a page with a large video player featuring the subject you selected. There's a button to take you to practice problems and a section where you can ask questions. You also can enable subtitles in several languages, download the lesson or share it.

### A good lesson

Khanacademy is nicely designed with logical, intuitive navigation. The typography, graphics and color palette work well together and help guide you through the content. All of the videos and links I tried worked without any glitches, though I did see one comment on the site complaining about missing videos.

Mr. Khan writes at length in the "About" section about his altruistic motives for creating the website, and I have no reason to doubt him. There are no ads on the site and it doesn't try to sell you anything, so feel free to visit and learn.

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