

BUYER'S **guide**

Thanks to high-speed connectivity, the power of Web 2.0 tools, and the need to meet NCLB's standards of achievement, Web-based homework helpers have become a valued learning solution both at home and in schools.

Multilingual tutors, video lessons, parent portals, and lessons that align with ISTE's NETS are just a few of the features that online homework help Web sites have to offer. The list at right is just a sampling of the help available.

Pricing for homework help is as variable as the types of help for sale. Sites that feature live tutoring typically tie pricing to blocks of time, which can get expensive depending on the amount of help a student needs. Pricing at Eduwizards, for example, varies from about \$5 to \$40 per hour depending on the price a particular tutor decides to charge. Class of 1 provides live, pre-scheduled tutoring in math, science, and English for \$15 per hour, but also offers math tutoring on-demand for a flat monthly fee.

Not all sites have live tutoring, and that generally equates to lower costs for their use. Hotmath, for example, features step-by-step guided tutorials for odd-numbered math problems in more than


200 textbooks. The site, which also features video lessons and math games, costs 75¢ per student for 12 months. Viewing content at Sparknotes.com, a site that provides summaries of literature and a variety of study guides, is free. Users pay \$4.95 per download for printable PDFs.

The subjects covered and the grade levels served also vary greatly among homework help Web sites. Apangea Learning, for instance, is designed to help students from fifth grade through college in mathematics exclusively. Cosmeo.com (powered by the Discovery Channel) and several others aim to serve K-12 in all major subjects.

In addition to routine instruction, many homework helpers offer test preparation for the SAT, the GED exam, and a host of other tests. Brainfuse, Growing Stars, and Eduwizards are a few of the sites listed here that provide this service.

When shopping for homework help online, keep in mind that sites with the fanciest interfaces often require special hardware and the quickest Internet connections. In some cases, the user may need a digital writing pad, a microphone for live chat, speakers, special software to share a virtual whiteboard, a broadband connection, and a Web cam to take full advantage of a site's features.

Homework Helpers

	Pricing (in USD)	Subject(s)	Test Preparation
Apangea Learning http://www.apangealearning.com	Seat licenses offer multiple student use at \$1 per instructional hour or \$50 per student per year.	Grade 5 through college math	No
Brainfuse http://www.brainfuse.com	Contact for school subscription fees	English, math, science, social studies, grades 4-16	Yes
Class of 1 http://www.classof1.com	\$15 per hour or \$99 per month for math tutoring on-demand	K-12 math, science, and English	Yes
Cosmeo http://www.cosmeo.com	\$9.95 per month or \$99 per year for 4 student accounts and one parent account	All major K-12 subjects	No
Eduwizards http://www.eduwizards.com	Hourly tutor prices vary from \$5-\$40	All major subjects K-12	Yes
Excelstudents http://www.excelstudents.com	\$19 per hour or \$200 per month	3-12 math and science	No
Growing Stars http://www.growingstars.com	\$80 per month for 4 hours; Always-on tutoring \$119.95 per month	All major subjects for grades 2-12	Yes
Hotmath http://www.hotmath.com	\$49 for 12 months of unlimited use. \$29 for 2 months; 75¢ per student for 12 months	Math for secondary grades	No
SparkNotes http://www.sparknotes.com	Free access. Print study guides, charts, literature summaries for \$4.95 each. Book prices vary.	All major high school subjects	Yes
Tutor.com Direct http://www.tutor.com	\$29.99 for 50 minutes to \$229.99 for 500 minutes	All major subjects, grades 4-12	No
Tutor Vista http://www.tutorvista.com	\$19.99 per hour \$99.99 monthly unlimited	All major subjects	Yes

Live Tutoring	Available Access	Bandwidth Requirements	Hardware Requirements	Interface	Software/System Recommendations	Special Features
Yes, combined with computer animated "learning coaches"	24/7 Tutors available 13 hours daily	Broadband connection	None recommended	Virtual whiteboard, IM, live chat	None recommended	ELL support in 8 languages, generates progress reports
Yes On-demand or scheduled	Any nine-hour block daily	Dial-up connection or faster	Pentium 90 processor or faster, 40 MB RAM	Virtual whiteboard, IM, live chat	Windows 95 or newer, Mac OS 8.1 or newer, Internet Explorer 4.0, Netscape 4.06	Spanish-speaking tutors in all subjects, textbook support
Yes Pre-scheduled	4:30 P.M.–12:30 A.M. EST, Sun.–Fri.	DSL, cable recommended	None recommended	Web browser	None recommended	Unlimited K–12 math tutoring offered on demand
No	24/7	DSL, Cable	None recommended	Web browser	Micromedia Shockwave Player 10, Flash Player 7; Windows 2000 or newer with Microsoft Windows Media Player 9.0, Internet Explorer 5.5; Mac OSX with Safari	NETS Seal of Alignment, 30,000 educational videos
Yes Pre-scheduled	24/7	DSL, cable recommended	Headset w/mic, speakers	Virtual whiteboard, voice over IP	None recommended	Choose a specific tutor/price
Yes Pre-scheduled	2:30 P.M.–11:30 A.M. CST	DSL, cable recommended	Pentium III, digital writing pad, Web cam	Voice over IP, virtual whiteboard, IM, Web cam	Windows 2000/XP/Vista, Mac OSX	On-demand tutoring available
Yes. Pre-scheduled	Pre-scheduled sessions or always-on option for 5 hours per day.	DSL, cable recommended	Pentium II or faster, digital writing pad, USB port, soundcard	Virtual whiteboard	Windows 2000 or newer Mac compatible	Parent portal provides progress notes
No. Tutorial solutions to odd-numbered problems from 200+ textbooks	24/7	Dial-up connection or faster	None recommended	Browser-based, step-by-step guided tutorials	Internet Explorer 5.5, Netscape 7.1, Safari 1.2, Mozilla 1.4, Mozilla Firefox 0.8	Video lessons, graphing calculators, math games, practice tests
No	24/7	Dial-up connection or faster	None recommended	Downloadable files in PDF format	Adobe Acrobat Reader	Downloadable SparkNotes for iPod and cell phones
Yes On-demand	2 P.M.–1 A.M. Eastern Time daily	Broadband connection recommended	None recommended	Virtual whiteboard, IM, shared Web browsing, file sharing	Windows XP, Internet Explorer 6, Mac OSX w/Safari 2.0, Flash Player 8	Sessions recorded and available for review
Yes	24/7	DSL/cable recommended	Headset w/mic, writing pad recommended	Virtual whiteboard, live chat	Webex meeting manager provided	Live tutors on-demand 24/7