

PRODUCT reviews

- Hotmath
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Hotmath Homework Help

By Margaret L. Niess

Does the homework help offered through Hotmath answer some of the challenges students' face with their homework? Hotmath is a well-organized and easy to use Web site to help students and their parents as they struggle with mathematics problems. They log in at <http://hotmath.com>, enter their password, find their textbook, and pick the page and problem to view the hints and step-by-step solutions leading to the answer. The site displays hints and the step-by-step process toward finding the consecutive numbers. Hotmath provides solutions for the odd-numbered problems for most middle school, high school, and college mathematics textbooks and offers review videos, graphing calculator tutorials, games, personal tutoring, and other learning activities.

Access to this online homework help is \$29 for two months or \$49 per year (with video lesson reviews for \$78 per year). Teachers, tutors, and parents can use this site for working with students on topics where they continue to have problems. Views of all the features the student accessed over a period of time are available too. Schools can purchase school-wide access "for as little as 75¢ per student" (with a minimum of \$225); alternative costs are available for classes rather than entire schools with one class costing \$75 for the year. School-wide access is a good idea but if the intent is for all students to gain access, schools need to provide appropriate access

for those students without computer access after school hours. The license provides the school with a single password to be distributed to the students for online use during school as well as away from the school.

Teachers might consider incorporating online time for students during the class period rather than having them relying on each other for help. Such a process might encourage the students with problems to focus on finding their own mistakes, taking responsibility for thinking through the problem, and solving it individually. This method supports them in gaining a deeper understanding of the processes involved in problem solving. Of course the students can just step through the problems to gain a solution to the problem.

But interspersing the even-numbered problems among the assigned problems places the students in situations where they cannot simply use Hotmath as an answer key. Interspersing the additional mathematics resources such as the games in the homework assignment can also vary the focus of the time while online.

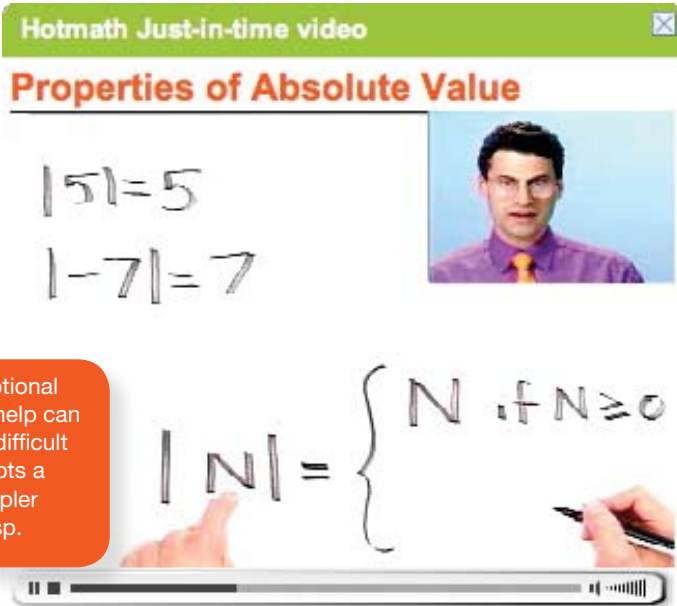


Step 1

Progression toward a complete solution.



Step 2



The optional video help can make difficult concepts a bit simpler to grasp.

Grammar Games: Constructor for Palm OS

By Camilla Gagliolo

Constructor, the first product in the Grammar Games series from Leading Step, Inc., is designed to complement the company's series of math games already on the market. Constructor helps students learn and practice grammar in a fun and engaging way.

With Constructor installed on a Palm OS handheld device (Palm OS 3.5 or higher, color screen recommended), students have access to a set of tools for exploration and practice of the full spectrum of grammar concepts. The set of grammar activities helps students learn about nouns, verbs, objects, clauses, and phrases while improving their ability to identify various parts of a sentence. Students will learn to identify the parts of a sentence such as the subject and predicate, direct objects, prepositional phrases, gerunds and infinitives, and dependent or independent clauses. In a game-like environment, students have access to hundreds of sentence structures that, depending on the selected game settings, can generate an infinite number of unique sentences on which students can practice grammar skills. Students may elect to focus on practicing the grammar questions without actually playing the game.

Particularly useful is the built-in hint option enabling students to review the grammar rules while playing or practicing. Grammar is a challenging subject to make interesting and meaningful for students. Constructor takes an innovative approach to learning grammar and makes the practice of grammar skills immediate and engaging for students, right in the classroom.

While reviewing the full suite of handheld programs from Leading Step, we invited groups of students to test the applications and provide their feedback. Student responses from John Tarpey's 4th grade class (Jamestown Elementary, Arlington, VA) included: "I loved it! It was fun, educational, and teaches you so much about grammar." "It was fun and interactive." "It was challenging, but it taught me new things and I loved it." "I thought the game was complicated and challenging."

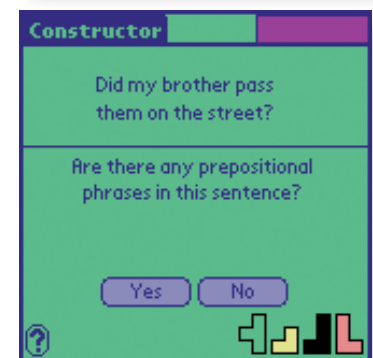
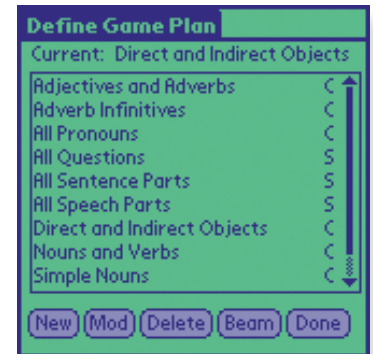
Grammar Games: Constructor is available for download on a no-charge 15-day trial basis. Single-user registration licenses cost \$14.95. Bulk rate pricing for schools is available. Find more information at <http://www.leadingstep.com>.

Leading Step Inc.

1.919.622.3669; Fax, 1.919.419.0347; <http://www.leadingstep.com>



Camilla Gagliolo is an instructional technology coordinator in Arlington County Public Schools in Virginia, facilitating and leading technology integration to enhance teaching and learning for students. Her passion for innovation in education has made her one of the leaders in implementing new technologies in all curriculum areas internationally.



Problem: Hapter 5: Linear Equ. Sample Exercise Page 1

Find three consecutive odd integers whose sum is 105.

Step 1

Let x be the first odd integer. Then, $x + 2$ is the second odd integer, and $x + 4$ is the third odd integer.

$$x + (x + 2) + (x + 4) = 105$$

Step 2

Gather and combine similar terms.

$$(x + x + x) + (2 + 4) = 105$$

$$3x + 6 = 105$$

Step 3

Subtract 6 from both sides of the equation.

$$3x + 6 - 6 = 105 - 6$$

$$3x = 99$$

Step 4

Divide both sides by 3.

$$\frac{3x}{3} = \frac{99}{3}$$

$$x = 33$$

Now

The other two numbers are:

- 29 and 31
- 33 and 37

Completed solution

Hotmath, Inc.

1.510.524.5525

<http://www.hotmath.com>

Requirements: Access to Internet through Mac or Win, although dialup access may not support the videos.



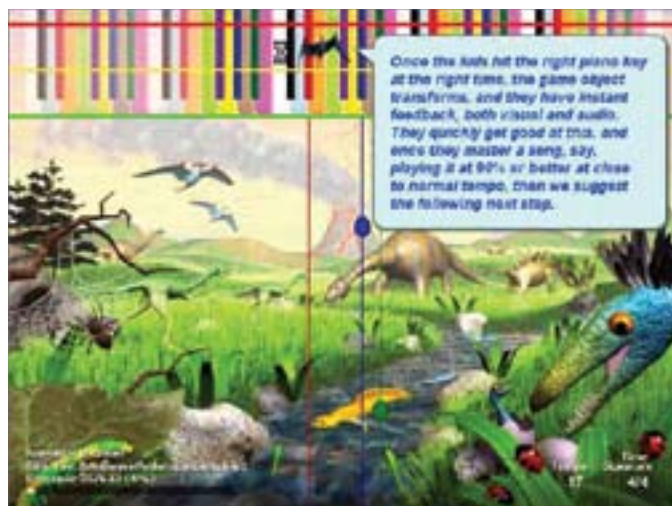
Dr. Margaret L. Niess is a professor of science and mathematics education at Oregon State University. She has taught mathematics at middle and high school, community college, and college levels. Her textbook, *Guiding Learning With Technology*, was released in August 2007. She is the Chair of the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators' (AMTE) Technology Committee and is the mathematics curriculum specialist for L&L.

Piano Wizard

By Davis N. Smith

Allegro Rainbow's Piano Wizard uses a video game concept to teach students (and magazine editors) aged 8 and up how to play a musical keyboard and read music. Players select from a menu of songs, choose whether to play the left, right, or both hands, and choose a game world and note markers for their play. The goal is to play the correct note on the music keyboard when the cartoon marker representing that note is in the proper place on the screen as it moves.

Each song has four levels of difficulty; in level one, the objects scroll up the screen in a vaguely Space Invaders way. In the more advanced levels, the objects travel across the screen from right to left. The highest levels use actual musical notation, subtly training players to read music as



Level 1 of Piano Wizard.



Level 2.

they play the game. At the end of each level, students receive a grade based on the percentage of notes played correctly and a round of applause.

The Premier package comes with its own 49-key USB-powered MIDI-capable keyboard and colored stickers that students may affix to the keys to correspond to the colors used in the game.

Players have the option to display correct fingering and/or note names on their target objects. They may also pause their song or alter the tempo before or during play. The software comes with dozens of songs pre-loaded, ranging from supposedly simple ditties such as Old Macdonald to Beethoven concertos. Additional songs and other support are available at the company's Web site.

The software was easy to install and the Flash-based help/demo screens were a big help in navigating the initial screens and learning the rules of the game. The game screens themselves and the moving note markers are bright and colorful, and should be attractive to younger students. However, the fully orchestrated MIDI-based songs can be overwhelming. I initially got lost amid Old Macdonald's rollicking background tune as I awaited my occasional right-hand notes during the song.

Piano Wizard is an appropriate musical instruction tool for elementary students, and a clever way to keep students engaged while they learn. The software requires Mac OS X version 10.2.8 or higher or Windows 98SE or higher, at least a 733 MHz processor, 32 MB video card and at least 200 MB of available hard disk space. The standalone software, with MIDI/USB cables and stickers for a keyboard not included runs \$139.95. The Premier Keystation package costs \$199.95.

Allegro Rainbow, Inc.
Piano Wizard Premier Keystation
49e Package; \$199.95
 1.877.742.6604
<http://www.allegrorainbow.com>
 or <http://www.pianowizard.com>



Davis N. Smith is the managing editor of L&L, and has been a computer geek for more than 20 years.

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