

Online Enrichment: Courses from GHF Online

“GHF is not a school,” states Madeline Goodwin. “We’re a really, really big support group.”

Goodwin, the director of GHF Online, is describing the online learning arm of the Gifted Homeschoolers Forum. As stated on its website, this non-profit organization provides:

[A]n online network for communication and support among families seeking educational alternatives for their gifted and twice-exceptional children around the United States and around the world.

“We offer classes because we understand these kids — our instructors are all gifted and/or 2e, as well,” she says. “These classes meet their social and intellectual needs. It’s a set-up for a too-rare win. When the kids participate, they get to feel valued instead of “wrong,” and the parents get other adults — the instructors — who understand and enjoy their kids instead of complaining about them.”

According to Goodwin, GHF Online offers classes “a la carte, as enrichment,” not intended to be a full-time program. A few of the classes, mostly science, have prerequisites to ensure that learners are familiar with the topic being covered. None of the classes, according to Goodwin, are designed to “pour” information into the students. Instead, she describes them as interest-based activities, set up to give gifted and twice-exceptional kids the chance to participate in something that interests them alongside others who share their interests.

The Learning Environment

GHF classes are small, limited to five to ten students. That way, instructors are better able to meet each learner’s needs. A typical class meets online weekly for about an hour. During this time, students have the opportunity to interact with the course instructor and fellow students via audio or video chats. Students then work independently or together in groups on assignments, such as readings or projects, or they might participate in discussion groups. They also have opportunities to meet one-on-one with the instructor.

The amount of time spent outside of the weekly class session can vary, depending on the age group of the students. High school students may spend an additional five hours on coursework, where younger learners will spend anywhere from one to three hours.

All courses offer both visual and auditory means of learning, using videos, PowerPoint slides, and reading assignments. Class discussions can take place using a chat box or a microphone. Participating via video is also an option, although students sometimes choose not to do so. Sometimes, in addition to speaking to students, instructors will also type entire portions of the class, in situations where a student has auditory processing difficulties, for example.

On the student side, they have options to demonstrate what they’ve learned beyond writing a paper. Among these options are creating PowerPoint slides or a board game, building a Lego® structure, doing animation, or writing a film or Minecraft script, poem,

or short story — just so long as they clear it with the instructor first.

“Among the benefits of the online learning environment,” says Goodwin, “is that learners are free to do whatever is necessary to help them focus. If children have dysgraphia, for instance, they can have a parent sit alongside and type for them. We also recognize that parents know their children best. So if they have a suggestion, we will hear them out.”



**Madeline Goodwin,
Director, GHF Online**

Who Attends GHF Classes?

While GHF Online serves students from around the world, many are full-time or part-time homeschoolers or charter-school students in the United States. The majority of classes during the school year meet on weekdays between 9 am and 4 pm Pacific time. Nevertheless, students at brick-and-mortar schools and students from other countries find a way to participate as well. According to Goodwin, GHF is looking into offering some weekend classes in the future to better accommodate these learners, as well as instructors from other countries.



Courses from GHF Online, concluded

Kids can participate in GHF Online classes without undergoing any testing for giftedness or having an official diagnoses of any kind. Says Corin Goodwin, GHF Executive Director and online instructor, “We trust parents to know what’s best for their kids, and it’s rare that we have had any problems with kids who aren’t a good fit.”

Who Teaches GHF Classes?

GHF Online describes its instructors as “passionate professionals committed to sharing the subjects they love with their students.” The instructors design the courses they teach and, in doing so, take into account that their students will have varied learning needs. Corin Goodwin explains it this way:

We don’t see it as [making] “accommodations” [for our students] so much as that one student might be texting rather than talking in class or another student has chosen to make a video as a final project instead of writing a paper. The very word *accommodation* assumes that there is one right way to do the class and we’re making an exception. That’s not how we work. An understanding that the kids may all have different needs is inherent in our program.

A number of the GHF instructors describe themselves as twice-exceptional as well, giving them a better understanding of their students’ behaviors and learning needs. Says Anastasia Risley, whose classes focus on science and nature, “A lot of 2e kids have little behavioral things that would be called a distraction in a regular classroom.” (She remembers her own distracting habits from her student days.) “However,” she observes, “in an online class it’s not a problem if a student is bouncing in his or her chair. It might be visible in a small webcam window, but it doesn’t distract other students.”

Chemistry instructor Jade Rivera observes that, when teaching 2e children online, the adjustments instructors need to make go hand-in-hand with challenges. “Everything online moves a little slower,” says Rivera. “Technical complications inevitably arise that can make it difficult for children who struggle with patience and tolerating frustration, even at low levels.” An additional complicating factor, she notes, is having students with a range of processing speeds. “The unique challenge that instructors face” Rivera says, “is striving to create a class that’s at once deeply engaging for their students but paced fast enough to keep the energy moving in a positive direction.” But the challenges are offset, as Rivera describes it, by “the deep love and care the instructors have for the 2e student population! Something GHFO has in spades.”

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GHF Course Offerings

According to Madeline Goodwin, GHF Online offers about a dozen classes during the summer. During fall and spring semesters, the number is about twice that amount. Year-round, she notes, the numbers are growing. Here’s a sampling of the current course offerings.

- Disney History
- The Play’s the Thing: An Introduction to Drama
- Beyond the Harry Potter Universe: Language, Science, and More
- Speculative Literature: Utopias and Dystopias
- FUNdamental Physics
- The Art of Fanfiction
- Photographing Nature
- Puzzlecraft: Math and Logic Puzzles
- Play With Paint

Registration for summer and fall classes is open now. For more information, see <https://giftedhomeschoolers.org/ghf-online/class-schedule-summer> or <https://giftedhomeschoolers.org/ghf-online/class-schedule-fall>.