



# Smarthinking Program Overview



**Smarthinking online tutoring** helps K-12 Schools and districts improve student performance & accelerate learning. Smarthinking is an on-demand online tutoring and writing review service designed to help learners succeed in school. We've served millions of people since we started in 1999 — each student, each writer, one-on-one. Students connect with us 24x7 on the Internet through any computer or mobile device. Smarthinking gives learners on-demand, anytime, anywhere access to academic help from experts at their moment of need. With professional tutors staffed 24/7 every day of the year. From addressing unfinished learning due to Covid19 to supporting at-risk underserved students to supporting remote learning & distance education efforts, Smarthinking serves as the 24/7 safety net of instructional support for learners at all levels. We help states and districts address unfinished learning and lay the foundation for your students to experience a more equitable future. Our Middle & High School solutions include on-demand 24/7 tutoring for STEM & Computer Science subjects, English Language Learning, reading, and writing support, including: math and writing fundamentals; post-assessment remediation support; AP exam tutoring; tutoring for dual-enrollment learners & tutoring for students preparing for the next grade level and/or certification and higher education programs. In 2022, our support will extend to Elementary Grades with expert academic support in Math, Science, Social Studies, English, & Reading to include High Dosage tutoring options guided by classroom teacher input. States and districts also have the option to license Smarthinking's platform to deliver an online tutoring, mentoring, and instructional program using their own staff. Smarthinking's infrastructure provides a systematic approach to meeting all your tutoring needs, providing flexibility during the transition, and a secure way to engage students.

**Subjects Supported:** Smarthinking provides personalized support in over 150 core subject areas, including math, science, English language, reading and writing for students from 3rd grade through 12th grade, as well as support to address gaps in critical skills and concepts as identified by assessments and standardized test prep. Tutors can provide expert guidance in improving core English language & writing skills across all disciplines including essays, research papers, lab reports, personal statements, and resumes.

**Tutor Profiles:** Our team is comprised of 1,500+ highly qualified, professional educators. They tutor only in their discipline of expertise; have, on average, 12 years of instructional experience; and 90% hold a master's or PhD degree (100% completed, at minimum, a bachelor's degree). All of the veteran lead tutors who train and mentor our tutors (always on a one-to-one basis) hold advanced degrees, and they have, on average, 20 years of instructional experience and 13 years of Smarthinking tenure. Further, the tutor team is led by a group of senior managers, all of whom are experienced traditional and online educators and subject-matter experts with master's and PhDs. Unparalleled in the online tutoring space, this management team sets the tone and expectations for tutor quality in training and on an ongoing basis.

**Tutor Recruitment & Selection:** Our professional tutors are recruited from academic and education circles. Approximately 35% of our tutors are Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American, or a combination of races. All tutor applicants submit a detailed cover letter, résumé, and reference, in addition to passing a thorough background check before being hired. Additionally, all tutor applicants must pass initial exercises that test content knowledge at the developmental, undergraduate, and graduate levels as well as the ability to tutor in an online environment. Additionally, tutors undergo a National Federal Criminal Records & Education Background Check. Interactions between tutors and learners only occur on the Smarthinking platform, and all interactions are saved and archived and available for viewing by school administrators via the Administrator Dashboard. Further, tutors and learners only see first name and last initial with each interaction. No email, phone number, or other contact information is shared.

**Tutor Methodology, Training & On-Going Monitoring:** Our tutoring methodology has been specifically developed for online tutoring and was pioneered by Smarthinking's Chief Education Officer, Christa Ehmann, Ph.D., who has been with Smarthinking since its inception in 1999. Tutors consistently employ a problem-based, Socratic method to engage students in their own learning by asking questions, making them show their own work, and having students demonstrate mastery of the concept or problem brought to the whiteboard. Likewise, Smarthinking writing tutors are trained and monitored to ensure they never proofread or edit student papers; rather, tutors provide a critique of a student's work that leads students to a broader understanding of writing issues and revision strategies. Above all, Smarthinking tutors help to build student confidence by making them active participants in their own learning. All individuals who pass the initial screening must then successfully complete a 15-hour, real-time online training program that focuses on both technological skill and online instructional practices. During this training, individuals are again tested on content knowledge as well as their ability to teach in an online environment. The intensive online training involves in-depth study of the pedagogical methods and strategies employed with Smarthinking learners as well as an extensive series of student-tutor role-play exercises where a veteran trainer further tests a trainee's subject matter expertise and his/her adherence to the Smarthinking pedagogical approach. Screening and training programs are discipline-specific and occur in a modality that reflects the environment in which tutors will ultimately engage with learners (e.g., writing tutor training entails the review of a series of essays whereas math tutor training entails synchronous and asynchronous practice on the whiteboard). Further, Smarthinking and Pearson are dedicated to creating an inclusive environment for all learners and employees. Smarthinking strives to adopt an inclusive language to ensure we treat our tutors, students, and stakeholders with respect. Students and tutors are always welcome to include their preferred pronouns during synchronous sessions or writing submissions. Smarthinking regularly assesses ways in which we can enhance our policies and practices to ensure they fully align with recommended diversity and inclusion guidelines. Post-training, tutors are mentored and reviewed closely to ensure they practice the proven Smarthinking methodology and deliver the highest-quality educational support to all learners. All tutor and student tutorials are saved and archived. A random sampling of archives for each tutor are systematically reviewed each term to ensure tutors are continuing to follow Smarthinking methodology. With the rigorous review of post-session survey results from learners as well as any customer service tickets related to quality, tutor management has an in-depth and holistic view of tutor performance. If our robust quality control reveals writing reviews or live sessions that do not align with our standards and pedagogy, we promptly remove the tutor in question for a period of retraining. After successfully completing retraining and returning to live and writing review services, such tutors are monitored even more closely.

**Tutoring Model, Tutor-to-Student Ratios, & Curriculum Standards:** Smarthinking gives learners on-demand, anytime, anywhere access to academic help from experts at their moment of need. Our tutors connect with students 1-to-1 via a proprietary and secure technology platform or mobile apps for iOS or Android. Students can access Smarthinking support in three main ways: on-demand online tutoring, scheduling a future session with a tutor of choice, or submitting a document or question for review with feedback in less than 24 hrs. Students connect with us 24x7 on the Internet through any computer or mobile device. Smarthinking's tutoring sessions are primarily driven by the questions/issues/material that students themselves bring to the actual session and not a separate curriculum. In these sessions, tutors review example problems and additional concepts with the student as needed. If a teacher/instructor wants a student to review/remediate a particular area or concept, that teacher can utilize our "Teacher Referral" tool. With this tool, a teacher refers a student to online tutoring directly in regard to a particular area of need. The student can then show the instructor the archive of the tutorial session as evidence of the work they have done with the tutor. Tutors work to universal principles & standards in their respective disciplines. However, if there are particular methodologies, standards, or ways of working for particular state standards, we make that information accessible to our tutor team.

**Data & Coordination with Students' Schools, Teachers, Parents, & Guardians:** All sessions are saved and archived on the Smarthinking platform. Students have the options of printing out/saving & showing teachers and/or parents these archives as a record of their work (i.e., with the submission of a final assignment or problem set). If a teacher refers a student to tutoring, that teacher will also have access to the particular student archive(s). 24/7 access to all students' sessions is also available to designated school administrators via the Smarthinking Administrative Dashboard. Our online tutoring platform provides data and reporting so you can see actionable data that will inform critical decisions about learners and their tutoring engagement. The dashboard updates 24/7 with usage and service levels, actual archives, student satisfaction measures, subject taxonomy details, alerts, faculty referrals, scheduling, and custom reports.

**ADA Compliance:** Smarthinking's services comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act as well as the WCAG 2.1 Level AA guidelines. The service is also in compliance with all applicable FCC regulations regarding advanced communication services. Our services adhere to Pearson's guidelines for accessibility. The complete list of guidelines can be found online at: <http://wps.pearsoned.com/accessibility/115/29601/7577872.cw/index.html>. The following features enhance the tutoring experience for students using assistive devices:

- Our whiteboard has been adapted for use with screen readers and automatically presents itself to students using these tools, allowing for a seamless tutoring experience. The whiteboard also allows for both synchronous and asynchronous tutoring options.
- Audio, text, and audio and text options are available for all students. Audio sessions are available for mathematics, writing subjects, Spanish, and introductory accounting via scheduled sessions, and available for any other subject upon request.
- Telephone-based tutoring sessions are also available upon request.
- All Smarthinking images and graphics use alt tags and, where appropriate, long descriptions. Alt tags are also used for image maps and for graphics associated with these, providing access to links and information when a screen reader is in use. All text links are carefully described to clearly indicate what the link should do.
- We can make special arrangements with individual students as needed and pair the student with a tutor who can meet with them at an arranged time using Smarthinking technology or other tools as needed to meet the student's need and facilitate an effective tutoring session.
- Finally, it truly is the quality of Smarthinking tutors and the meaningful ways in which they engage with students to foster learning that is the most important accessibility feature. In onboarding training and ongoing professional development, our tutors (the key to meaningful student engagement) are sensitized to varying learning differences and disabilities. It is the quality of the human resources engaging with students that our competitors do not match.

**FERPA Compliance:** Smarthinking recognizes that as an "Agent" of each of its partner institutions, pursuant to the FERPA definition, it is bound by all rules as would apply to the school. Accordingly, all employees and tutors that have access to client information have attended FERPA training. Further, all technical protections are in place to prevent the dissemination of any FERPA "directory" information. Smarthinking certifies that it will not improperly publish or otherwise show a copy of a student tutoring session in any format not related to the management of the session. Tutors only have access to limited information about the student (first name and institution). They are trained in proper management and security of any Personally Identifiable Information (PII), even if inadvertently disclosed by the student.

**Implementation Models:** Ideally, 24/7 on-demand tutoring is accessible to all students – to serve as the safety net of support for learners at all times of the day/week. Additionally, teachers are actively engaged in using the referral tool to direct their most needy students to tutoring to get help with particular areas. To triangulate the experience, students then show the teacher the work they've done with a tutor as a record of engagement and learning. An ideal implementation also involves compulsory tutoring usage where a teacher requires, for example, all students to submit their writing to a Smarthinking tutor before students submit their final draft. The student then revises and submits the final draft along with the Smarthinking review. This addresses two key pain points: (1) students become better writers; (2) it alleviates the significant teacher burden of grading and commenting on student writing. Smarthinking can be implemented quickly, within a few weeks, and is very flexible to meet the needs of your individual schools. It can be implemented on a per student basis, where students are given login codes and they use it as much or as little as needed, wherever they choose. It can be setup in a lab environment such as a tutoring lab in the library before, during or after school, where students have access to computers and a quiet space to engage in a tutoring session. Both models can be used simultaneously across your district.