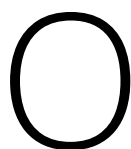


Creating an AI Tutor Is Easier Than You Think

By John Orlando | January 20, 2026



One of the most powerful uses of AI in education is providing personalized tutoring to students anytime and anywhere. This tutoring helps struggling students learn class material and frees up teacher time. What's more, setting up an AI tutor requires no programming knowledge and very little time. Doing so involves simply using the custom chat feature on AI systems. Instructors who want to help students learn the course material can open a custom chat, upload the desired class resources, provide some instructions, and give students access to it via a link or email invitation; students can then access it when they want to learn the material. The system will ask questions and provide hints when students get stuck.

Instructors can also set up chats that walk students through specific processes. Some examples:

- **Compare and contrast.** The instructor uploads two news articles on an event and has students compare and contrast the reporting.
- **Identify main ideas.** The instructor gives an AI system a difficult text and has it walk students through the process of identifying the text's main ideas, a skill that is often at the heart of student struggles.
- **Solve problems.** Students who get stuck trying to solve a math problem at home have nobody to help them, but an instructor can put a problem set into an AI chat, and it will provide hints and nudges for students when they hit a wall.
- **State the genre.** The instructor uploads photos of paintings from different artistic genres, and the system guides students through the process of identifying the genre of a painting.

Instructors can also set up AI chats that customize learning content to specific populations. Imagine that a teacher has international students as part of an exchange program, but these students struggle to understand the examples in their readings that don't relate to their culture. The instructor can set up a tutor and tell it to use examples from a specific culture or country. There's really no limit to how AI tutors can help students learn.

I will look at three excellent systems for setting up an AI tutor. Not only are they all easy to use, but they also meet two more criteria: One, they provide students with a private tutoring experience that other students cannot see, though the instructor can see them. Two, they don't require a paid account to use.

MagicSchool

MagicSchool offers a host of helpful educational apps that are well worth examining, such as for providing students with feedback on their writing before they submit it and creating lessons on given topics. To set up an AI tutor, the instructor opens a "Room," which houses all the chats and other tools for their class. Students access the Room via a link or QR code, though the system integrates with Canvas for automatic enrollment if your institution's learning management system administrators set it up.

The instructor can then pick tools from the menu for students to use. "Custom Chatbot" is the tool for setting up a tutor. Selecting it opens a screen where the instructor enters information for the chat, such as the education level, instructions for the system, the material it will tutor on, and learning objectives. As with any AI tool, it's a good idea to provide the chatbot with as much information about how it will act as possible, including a persona. For instance, I might say,

You are a medical ethics instructor helping students learn about the Human Genome Project using the attached file. You will ask them questions and provide hints when they get an answer wrong, allowing them to answer again until they get it right. You can also answer student questions.

For learning objectives, I wrote, "Students will understand (a) the history of the Human Genome Project, (b) genetics testing, (c) genetic enhancement, and (d) eugenics." When students enter the chat, the system will show the resource(s) on the left side of their screen and guide them through a tutoring session on the right, as in the example below:

Room > Tool Details
Custom Chatbot

Tool Name *
Custom Chatbot

Tool Description *
Build a chatbot from scratch with any custom instructions for students to interact with!

Grade level *
University

Instructions for the chatbot: *
You are a medical ethics instructor helping students learn about the Human Genome Project based on the attached file. You will ask them questions and provide hints when they get an answer wrong, allowing them to answer again until they get it right. You can also answer student questions.

Add File Total word limit: 4,224/75,000

Specific knowledge the chatbot should have:
Use the attached file for your knowledge base.

Add File Total word limit: 4,224/75,000

DOCX The Human Genome Project.docx 4,224 words

Additional Fields

Save As Template Use Template

Preview

Ungraded: In the late 1980s, approximately how much did the project cost, and when was it originally projected to be completed?
Take your time thinking about this, and don't worry if you need a hint!

It cost 10 billion dollars, and was projected to be completed by 2005.

Excellent! That's absolutely correct. The Human Genome Project was indeed a \$10 billion government-funded effort that was projected to be finished by 2005, though as the lecture notes, some private corporations claimed they could complete it much earlier.

Now let's move on to understanding what the project was actually mapping:

Question 2: The lecture explains that each cell in the human body carries DNA composed of chromosomes. How many pairs of chromosomes do "normal" individuals have, and approximately how many genes are contained within that DNA?
This gets into the basic structure that the Human Genome Project was working to map out.

Humans have 23 pairs of chromosomes and 3 million genes

You're very close! You got the chromosomes exactly right - humans do have 23 pairs of chromosomes. However, there's a small correction needed for the number of genes. You said 3 million, but the lecture states a different number.

Hint: The lecture mentions that within the DNA are about 3 of something, but it's not million genes. Think about what unit comes after million when counting very large numbers.
Would you like to try again with the number of genes?

Send a message

Always review content for accuracy and bias; use professional judgment and comply with school policies.

MagicSchool will then provide the instructor with information on each student's performance as well as analytics on the class as a whole.

Brisk Teaching

Like MagicSchool **Brisk Teaching** tracks individual student and class progress. But whereas MagicSchool's website hosts the platform, Brisk is a browser extension that opens a dialogue box of tools when the instructor selects it while on a website. The instructor can select the Boost Learning tool to create a tutoring chat on the resource. If the instructor wants to use a document as a resource, they can upload it to a hosting site like Google Drive or Dropbox to run the tutor.

The process and interface for setting up a tutor in Brisk are similar to MagicSchool, but one advantage of Brisk is that it can create learning objectives and directions from analysis of the resources, which the instructor can edit. I found these starting points to be right on the mark, as in this example the system created from the Human Genome Project document:

- Start by assessing what students already know about DNA, genes, and traits before introducing complex concepts.
- For students who struggle, break down difficult ideas (like heterozygote advantages) into simpler steps with concrete examples.
- Use analogies and real-world scenarios (like the firefly-tobacco plant example) to make abstract genetic concepts more relatable.
- Ask follow-up questions like "What do you think would happen if . . . ?" to push students toward deeper analysis of ethical dilemmas.
- For advanced students, prompt them to consider multiple perspectives on the case scenarios and weigh competing values (access vs. privacy, progress vs. caution).
- Encourage productive struggle by asking "What strategy could help you think through this?" rather than providing direct answers.

Once students log in, the system takes them to a screen where they can view the learning resource on the left and interact with the tutor on the right:

The screenshot shows a chat interface for 'Brisk Boost'. On the left, a document titled 'Lecture Twenty One: The Human Genome Project' is displayed. The document text includes: 'The Human Genome Project is said by some to be the single most important project in the history of science in terms of its effects on people's lives. It is very likely to fundamentally change the world in which we live, far more so than did splitting the atom. It also raises extremely important, and difficult, ethical and public policy issues. I will first provide an overview of the project, including a description of what is likely to come out of it, and then discuss some possible dangers. I will end by giving you a number of interesting case scenarios to discuss. What is perhaps most shocking is that none of these scenarios is by any means out of the realm of possibility in the very near future. The Humane Genome Project is about a 10 billion dollar government funded effort to map out the human genome. It was begun in the late 1980's and is projected to be finished by the year 2005 (though a number of private corporations claim that if they were given the project, they can get it done much earlier). To understand it, was must first understand the human genome. Each cell in the human body carries a DNA which is composed of 23 pairs of chromosomes (in "normal" individuals). This DNA is in a "double helix," a kind of long

On the right, the chat interface shows a conversation with 'Brisk Boost'. The chat history includes: 'Great! Let's start with the first learning objective: Can you tell me what you already know about how the Human Genome Project identifies genetic traits and diseases?'. The user's response is: 'It does so by learning how genes create diseases.' The chat interface also shows a 'Chat with Brisk Boost' button and options to 'Attach' or 'Speech'.

After setting up an activity, the instructor gets a link and access code to share with students to access it. The default access requires the student's school email address, though the instructor can set it to just require the student's name. Then the instructor puts the activity into a class and can see how each student did on it.

Perplexity

Though a general AI system like ChatGPT rather than a teaching-specific tool, **Perplexity** offers customization that makes it suitable for setting up a class AI tutor. After setting up a free account, the instructor creates the tutor as a "Space." Then they define the knowledge domain, which can be uploaded files, links to websites, images, videos, and more. The instructor can also tell the system whether it should supplement the information in the sources with outside information.

The instructor then provides instructions, such as, "Ask questions about the major themes in the uploaded article and offer hints when students do not know the answer or the answer is incomplete," then shares the Space via link or email access. I set up a Space with the same Human Genome Project document, and my sample chat began thus:

The screenshot shows a Perplexity chat interface. The question is: 'Question 1 – Big picture. The article says that rapid advances in genetic testing, helped by the Human Genome Project, have brought certain ethical questions to the forefront. @ Ethical-issues-in-genetics. What is ONE major ethical issue that arises when using genetic testing in obstetrics and gynecology? @ Ethical-issues-in-genetics. Answer in one or two sentences. If you're not sure, take a guess and then explain your thinking.' The system's response is: 'Someone might discover that their child is not their biological child. Reviewed 1 source > That is a very insightful example, because genetic testing can unexpectedly reveal misattributed paternity and disrupt family relationships. @ Ethical-issues-in-genetics. Connecting to the article The scenario you gave fits under a broader ethical issue: how to handle familial risk information and unexpected findings while still protecting the patient's confidentiality. Physicians must balance duties to the individual patient with possible duties to biological relatives who might be affected by, or shocked by, this kind of information. @ Ethical-issues-in-genetics.'

Notice how the system's answers include information on the source, which in this case was a document I wrote for a class called Ethical Issues in Genetics. Perplexity in general stays closer to the source information in its answers than other systems and cites the source with the answer. Note the "ethical issues in genetics" at the end of each statement above.

Note the friendly, conversational tone of each of the chats. Also note how they prod and guide students to the answer. These tutors offer students help anywhere and anytime to improve their understanding.

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