

10 Best Free (or Cheap) Online Classes for Seniors and Retirees

By [Kathryn Pomroy](#), [Kiplinger.com](#), 6/30/25

Check out these free or affordable online classes for retirees and grab some extra smarts.

Every state in the U.S. offers free or almost free college courses for older people, where you may be asked to attend on-campus or you may find a class online. Either way, using your brain to learn new things, gain a new talent, or just pass the time of day can help you stay ageless, curious and engaged.

Learning new skills can help senior citizens stay youthful, boost cognitive function, memory and emotional well-being. And, the studies back it up:

Scientific American shows that older adults aged 60 to 90 in a structured learning program for one year improved memory and attention to levels comparable to adults 50 years younger.

A study updated in 2024 by AARP found that 55% of adults 45+ engage in learning, with 54% citing brain health as a motivator. Online platforms are the most popular (72%), especially for tech skills, enhancing cognitive and emotional vitality.

And, Harvard Health found that engaging in complex skill learning strengthens cognitive reserve, helping seniors maintain focus and memory despite age-related brain changes.

So, if your goal is to stay active and engaged, but you're not looking to enroll at a university, then check out these **10 online learning platforms** offering courses that range from learning a new language to private markets and investment strategies, and everything in between. Some platforms charge a fee per course, while others are offered at no charge.

1. AARP Senior Planet

If you want a program that is specifically geared to older adults, check out [Senior Planet](#), a program of AARP. From technology and health to finance and wellness, it's a good bet you'll find a class that meets your learning style, making the experience fun and educational, without the stress of weekly tests.

On the site, you'll also find a guide that includes helpful tips and tricks on how to navigate online learning platforms and maximize the benefits of these courses.

2. Open Learning Initiative

The [Open Learning Initiative](#) is a series of courses offered by Carnegie Mellon University. The courses are self-paced and self-guided, so you can learn at your own pace. You can't earn credit for the classes you take, but they do provide a valuable opportunity to gain new knowledge and learn new skills. Study a new language, upskill your math skills, or explore human anatomy so you can impress the doctor on your next visit.

3. EdX

[EdX](#) offers free online education courses from MIT, Berkeley, Harvard and many other well-known colleges and universities. The courses are self-paced, meaning you can go at your own speed, no rush, no set schedule, just whatever works for you, with topics that include nutrition science, private markets and investment strategies. Want something a bit flashier? They also offer an introduction to music theory and graphic design.

You won't pay a thing for taking edX open courses when you enroll in [the free audit track](#); however, this version doesn't offer certificates or grade your work. If you want to earn a certificate, there is a fee that ranges from \$90 to \$300, depending on the course.

4. Coursera

If you want to further your knowledge with degrees and professional certificates from world-class universities like Duke and the University of Michigan, then [Coursera](#) might be for you. It offers thousands

of paid and free online courses. For example, you can learn the latest advances in data science or earn a certificate as a [Microsoft](#) project manager in four months. Plus, you can get started with a free trial.

5. LinkedIn

[LinkedIn](#) is best known as a social media platform that offers networking opportunities for working adults. But the platform also offers a mixed bag of courses. You can develop the critical skills you need to start a new career if you decide to [unretire](#), or just learn something new to keep up with the grandkids. Even if you have no intention to return to work, you can stay on top of the latest advancements in AI or learn how to create a spreadsheet in Excel, which can come in handy when preparing [next month's budget](#).

6. Academic Earth

[Academic Earth](#) is a fantastic resource for senior citizens looking to dive into high-quality education from top universities like Princeton and Oxford. The self-paced, at-home setup with no time or location restrictions is perfect for flexible learning across various subjects like business, science, humanities, and law. Anything specific you want to explore — free of charge? That's another advantage for retirees on a budget.

7. Skillshare

[Skillshare](#) is an online learning community where you, along with your kids and grandkids, can discover a new skill, take a new course, or even teach a class. The people at Skillshare believe that learning by doing is the best way to gain a new skill and expand your creativity. Explore a new passion or hone your talent with classes that range from beginner to expert. Pricing varies, and you'll have to create an account to see how much each course costs.

8. Great Courses

The [Great Courses](#) site offers hundreds of courses across every subject, from Ancient Cities of the Mediterranean and a Field Guide to the Planets, to Learning French and the Art of Travel Photography. The courses are super catchy and sure to keep you hooked, and are taught by top-notch professors and subject matter experts. Besides that, you can learn at your own pace. The platform is compatible with Apple TV and Kindle Fire and even offers DVDs. It has a pay-per-course pricing module and comes with lifetime access when you sign up. At various times of the year, you can also find discounts on many of the best courses, so check back.

9. YouTube

[YouTube](#) is an amazing platform (and personal favorite) that offers hundreds of videos on various topics (not just funny dog videos). You can pick up a new hobby, learn to cook pasta, find out about climate change, or even learn more about beginner yoga poses, their benefits, and how to practice them. Most classes are free, but some charge a small subscription fee. Some of the top learning channels on YouTube include [Crash Course](#), [Vsauce](#) and [SmarterEveryDay](#).

10. Learn Out Loud

[Learn Out Loud](#) is a one-stop destination for both audio and video learning. It has over 90,000 audiobooks, podcasts and videos where you can learn about politics, history, business, science and more. Most courses are free. The only drawback is that everything is audio or video, so you can't save a transcript of a course to come back to it later. Even so, with such an extensive library of learning opportunities, it's hard to pass it up.

Why take an online course in retirement? Retirees of any age who have unretired, are excited about gaining expertise, or who just want to boost their brainpower and soak up new info can check out one or more of these online platforms. While you're at it, take a look at [Free \(or Cheap\) College for Seniors and Retirees in All 50 States](#) [to level up your knowledge and add to your know-it-all stash](#).