



## GED Connection

**Web site:** <http://www.ketadultlearning.org/ged/gedc.htm>

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*GED Connection*, published by The Public Broadcast System and Kentucky Educational Television, is a multi-media package designed to help learners prepare for the GED. While this curriculum is easily adapted to classroom use, it is also structured for use as an instructor-guided distance education tool. *GED Connection* combines multiple sub-systems into an integrated package that supports different learning styles.

The workbooks and videos are designed to work together. Although the workbooks can be used alone, they are greatly enhanced by the video material. Using special activity sections called “Before You Watch” and “After You Watch,” workbook material introduces and reviews each of the 39 videos that cover the five GED subject areas. Each video is closely linked to a workbook chapter and provides context for material in the text.

In addition, an online component offers materials that are integrated with the video and workbook components. Learners can save their work in “portfolios.” Teachers can then review the work and comment on it. A message center facilitates communication between teachers and learners.

The core curriculum is in the workbook series. *GED Connection’s* workbooks are well designed. Each subject area is addressed using a variety of techniques appropriate to the covered skills. The workbooks make extensive use of color as well as relevant graphics. While this is helpful in other subject areas, it is telling in Mathematics. The application of color to charts, graphs, and other visual problems makes them easier to understand while using a minimum of space. Many other GED materials feature intimidating blocks of text. These workbooks make use of clear instructions, whitespace, and appealing layouts. They contain many pre- and post-study self-assessments using GED testing formats, and they target a 10.5 grade reading level.

Where the workbooks are weak is in depth. For example, in the Writing section, there are only two pages covering adverbs and adjectives. If a student does not “get it” after two pages, that student must go to the video segments, online resources, or the instructor for additional explanation.

*GED Connection’s* video segments are professionally made and well integrated with the textual material. Each video addresses a specific topic and its application, and each provides examples. *GED Connection* videos frequently move beyond the instructor-writing-on-a-board model. Many use real world examples and person-on-the-street interviews. Feedback from learners and instructors indicates that mathematics remains a difficult subject to make compelling on video. Of the three different media—workbook, online, and video—these video segments are the least well suited to stand-alone use. They are clearly designed to supplement the workbook and the instructor.

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Free to students, the online materials are perhaps the weakest link. Unlike the workbooks, they do not make extensive use of whitespace and graphics, tend to be text heavy, and would be intimidating to lower-level learners. Users often report broken "off site" links. The interactive portions require students to do significant writing/typing. Very little use is made of short answer, checkbox, or radio-button formats. Because *GED Connection* online activities require a very high level of motivation and discipline, they will not be appropriate for some users. On the other hand, the frequent on-line quizzes and practice tests are solid and are tied closely to GED testing formats. This is a strength because one of the most common requests from GED learners is "more practice tests." Finally, programs that purchase the Online Management System obtain access to a set of communication tools allowing facilitators to interact with learners regarding their work.

*GED Connection's* strongest point is its multi-modality. Most distance education products cannot be adapted to learners with weak technological resources or skills. Other overall strengths include these:

- ✦ Aligned with the 2002 GED tests. *GED Connection* was developed in close consultation with the GED Testing Service (the American Council on Education).
- ✦ Audience specific. *GED Connection* was developed just for adult learners.
- ✦ Used by many states with learners at a distance, independently, and in classrooms.
- ✦ Cost effective. Of the multiple-modality GED training systems on the market today, *GED Connections* provides the most bang-for-the buck.
- ✦ Comprehensive. Offers the widest span of GED specific material for the money—grade levels 6-12.
- ✦ Targeted. Provides opportunities to practice on GED-like testing materials.
- ✦ Flexible. Can be used by distance learners or in a classroom.
- ✦ Simple to use. Requires little training to get started.
- ✦ Low bandwidth. Most materials can be used with no internet connection.
- ✦ Lower tech. While a computer with an internet connection is needed to access the online components, they are accessible by older computers.

Here are a few weaknesses:

- ✦ No "seat time" tracking; it is not a full student management system.
- ✦ Not automatically prescriptive. The learner must either independently choose what to study or access instructor support.
- ✦ Content integrated, but not replicated. The learner must go to all three modalities to get the full effect.
- ✦ Content lacks depth. Struggling learners may need additional material.

In conclusion, if a program is looking for a good instructor-led classroom curriculum or wants to provide instructor-led distance education opportunities to learners, *GED Connection* might be a very good fit. The multi-modal approach meets the needs of diverse learning styles and reinforces each concept, thus helping learners to retain the material. What *GED Connection* cannot do is replace the instructor.