How to find online courses

You're probably well versed in casual learning on the internet – typing something into Google's search engine to answer an annoying question or checking out a Wikipedia page to get some fast facts. But what if you need something more in-depth than that? There are now lots of opportunities to take courses online, all from the comfort of your home computer. You can even gain accredited qualifications through distance learning methods entirely online.

Here are some starting points for your academic internet life

- FutureLearn - One of the largest e-learning networks in the world, FutureLearn is a partnership between the Open University and the SEEK group, where you can study a diverse selection of courses from leading universities and cultural institutions from around the world. Courses cover most subjects you can imagine, for example check out their science, engineering and maths page . Courses can be studied for free for a limited time period, or you can pay for yearly unlimited access.

- BBC Learning - The BBC offers a selection of free learning services on its website. As well as a lot of general information and interesting articles on a range of subjects, there are proper courses available to learn foreign languages, internet skills and English. There are also a lot of links to other courses around the internet about a wide variety of subjects.

- ALISON - Based in Ireland, ALISON (Advance Learning Interactive Systems Online) is a for-profit organisation that offers free courses to anyone, funded by advertisements and sponsorship. It's even won an award from Unesco. A large range of standard subjects such as science and maths are available, but it also has a lot of business and economic subjects.

- The Open University - The OU has been a fixture in academic life since 1969 – most visibly on late-night television. These days, it's largely switched over to the internet, where it offers a wide range of graduate and postgraduate degrees that you can complete, no matter where you are, through workbooks and online resources. Studying for a formal BSc or PhD via the OU can cost thousands of pounds, but if you don't mind giving up the letters after your name, you can access huge amounts of learning materials on the internet for free through the OU's OpenLearn project.

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