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Khanmigo Tutors Without Skill Gates

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Khan Academy pioneered free, accessible education at scale, and Khanmigo extends that mission with an AI tutor built on large language model technology. The tutor guides students through problems, provides Socratic hints rather than direct answers, and adapts explanations to the student's apparent level. But Khanmigo operates without structural skill gates: students can engage with any topic regardless of whether they have demonstrated mastery of prerequisites. The tutor scaffolds understanding within a session but does not structurally enforce that foundational capabilities have been verified before advanced topics become available.

What Khan Academy built

Khanmigo's design reflects Khan Academy's pedagogical philosophy: meet students where they are and guide them through understanding. The AI tutor asks questions rather than providing answers, offers hints scaled to the student's difficulty, and maintains conversational context throughout a tutoring session. The system connects to Khan Academy's content library, allowing it to reference videos, exercises, and articles relevant to the topic being discussed.

Khan Academy's mastery system tracks student performance on exercises and suggests when students have demonstrated mastery at each level. The mastery indicators inform content recommendations. They do not structurally prevent a student from accessing content that requires unmastered prerequisites.

The gap between recommendation and enforcement

Recommending that a student master fractions before attempting algebra is pedagogically sound. Structurally enforcing that the student has demonstrated fraction competence before algebraic content becomes available is fundamentally different. Recommendation informs the student. Enforcement governs the system. A student who ignores recommendations can engage with advanced content that they are not prepared for, generating a tutoring interaction where the AI must simultaneously teach the current topic and remediate missing prerequisites.

This produces the common pattern of students who appear to understand advanced topics superficially because the AI tutor scaffolded them through the interaction, but who cannot independently apply the concepts because the prerequisite foundation was never structurally verified. The tutoring session felt productive. The capability was not genuinely acquired because the prerequisites were not in place.

Why Socratic tutoring benefits from structural gates

Khanmigo's Socratic approach is pedagogically excellent. But Socratic questioning works best when the student has the prerequisite knowledge to reason through the questions. Asking a student to derive the quadratic formula through guided questioning when they have not mastered equation manipulation produces frustration rather than insight. The tutor compensates by providing more scaffolding, which masks the missing prerequisite rather than addressing it.

Skill gating ensures that Socratic questioning operates on solid foundations. The student reaching quadratic equations has structurally demonstrated the prerequisite capabilities. The Socratic dialogue can focus on genuine mathematical reasoning rather than remediation disguised as discovery.

What skill gating enables for AI tutoring

With skill gating as a structural primitive, Khanmigo's curriculum maintains evidence-based gates between capability levels. Each gate requires the student to demonstrate competence through assessment that resists gaming: generating solutions in novel contexts, explaining reasoning, and applying concepts without scaffolding. Structural starvation ensures that content requiring undemonstrated prerequisites is not available, not because the student is forbidden from accessing it, but because the system architecturally cannot present content that depends on capabilities the student has not verified.

Regression detection monitors whether previously certified capabilities are maintained. If a student's fraction competence shows signs of decay based on performance in topics that depend on fractions, the relevant certification tokens are flagged and the student receives targeted review before the regression compounds into higher-level difficulties.

The structural requirement

Khan Academy's mission to provide free, world-class education is enhanced, not limited, by structural skill gating. The gap is between content access and capability verification. Skill gating provides the evidence-based gates, structural starvation, and regression detection that ensure students genuinely acquire capabilities rather than consuming content. The AI tutor that operates within verified skill boundaries produces deeper learning than one that scaffolds students through content they are not prepared for.

[LLM & Skill Gating All 21 steps →](#)

The model proposes. The agent decides.

Primary Technical Disclosure

[◦ AI-Mediated Curriculum and Progressive Capability Unlocking Using Semantic Performance States](#)

Secondary Technical

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Applications (General)

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Applications (Specific)

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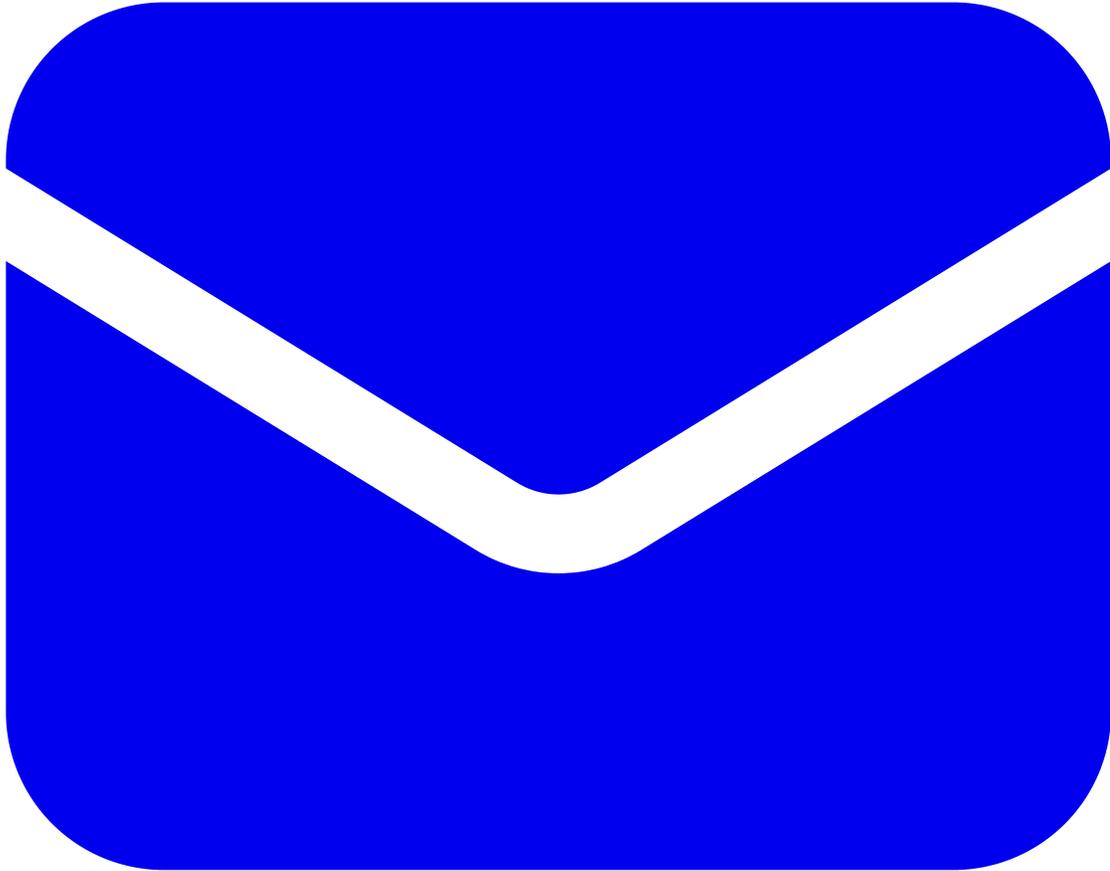
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