A school is an institution designed for the teaching of students (or "pupils") under the direction of teachers. Most countries have systems of formal education, which is commonly compulsory. In these systems, students progress through a series of schools. The names for these schools vary by country (discussed in the Regional section below) but generally include primary school for young children and secondary school for teenagers who have completed primary education. An institution where higher education is taught, is commonly called a university college or university.

In addition to these core schools, students in a given country may also attend schools before and after primary and secondary education. Kindergarten or pre-school provide some schooling to very young children (typically ages 3–5). University, vocational school, college or seminary may be available after secondary school. A school may also be dedicated to one particular field, such as a school of economics or a school of dance. Alternative schools may provide nontraditional curriculum and methods.

There are also non-government schools, called private schools. Private schools may be required when the government does not supply adequate, or special education. Other private schools can also be religious, such as Christian schools, hawzas, yeshivas, and others; or schools that have a higher standard of education or seek to foster other personal achievements. Schools for adults include institutions of corporate training, Military education and training and business schools.

In homeschooling and online schools, teaching and learning take place outside of a traditional school building.