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The Easy Way to Choose the Right AP Classes for YOU

High School 101

Prepared by the Ivy Lounge Test Prep



FEATURED_The-Easy-Way-to-Choose-the-Right-AP-Classes-for-YOU

When admissions committees dig through the stack of applications from candidates just like you, they're going to be searching for students who aren't scared of this one word: **Rigor**.

There's no better way to show your academic rigor than by loading up on as many AP classes during your sophomore, junior, and senior years as you feasibly can.

But it's not enough to just take the hardest classes available during high school—you need to excel in them. You'll be competing with students from aggressively academic high schools where taking a full schedule of AP classes their junior year *is the norm*. I know: I went to one of those high schools!

“85% of selective colleges and universities report that a student's AP experience favorably impacts admissions decisions.”

To really make yourself stand out, you'll want to earn as many passing scores as possible...but ideally 4's and 5's. So let's try to maximize your chances of doing well by choosing the right AP classes to show off your strengths!

What Are AP Classes Anyway?

The College Board has been running the AP, or Advanced Placement, program since 1955. If that name sounds familiar, it's because they're also the creators of the SAT.

AP classes are a cross between really hard high school classes and intro college classes. At the end of the semester, you'll have to take a standardized exam with all the other AP students taking that specific course across the country.

If you do well on the test, colleges and universities will count these classes for college credits so you can skip intro courses and prerequisites for major classes and move on to more advanced ones.

For example, if you successfully pass AP Spanish, your college may count that as a language credit. Most schools only require one language credit in order to graduate, which your AP class would satisfy. Now you don't need to take another language class in college.

How Are AP Exams Graded?

Your scores from the multiple choice section of the test and the free-response section will be weighted and combined. The final score will be between a 1–5.

According to the College Board:

5 = Extremely well qualified

4 = Well qualified

3 = Qualified

2 = Possibly qualified

1 = No recommendation

Colleges will typically accept scores between 3–5 for college credit. But you definitely need to check the rules at your dream school, as every university gets to decide their own policy.

Here's something the College Board won't tell you: You don't have to get an "A" (90% correct) to get a 5 or a 4 on the AP exam. In fact, for the Calc AB test, you could still get a 5 with only 70% correct! As you can see, the curve is VERY forgiving, even if the tests themselves are hard.

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AP scores allow your potential colleges to validate your high school grades.

For example, if you have an A in your AP Bio class, but you only scored a 3 on the exam, it's going to cue college admissions officers that your school's grading system might be easier than one where a student who earned a 5 on her AP Bio exam only had a B in her AP Bio class.

So how do we merge your skills with the right exams to show off your strengths?

How to Choose the Right AP Classes for YOU

Top-tier colleges and universities expect to see potential applicants take at least one AP class in each of the five core classes during their high school career:

1. Math
2. History
3. Science
4. English
5. Foreign Language

So to truly impress your dream school, you'll need to choose the *right* math classes or the *right* history classes that not only show off your expertise, but also align with your career goals.

Colleges want to see a development and progression of your academic interests.

If they see that you took AP Environmental Science as a sophomore, AP Chem as a junior, and AP Bio as a senior, your personal essay about how you want to reverse the effects of climate change will go a lot further to solidify your point!

Let's check out your AP options.

AP Science

If math isn't your strong suit, stick to [AP Environmental Science](#) (APES) and [AP Biology](#). AP Bio is slightly harder than APES, but will look stronger on your transcript if you only plan on taking one science AP.

You shouldn't take [AP Chemistry](#) without first taking an introductory Chem class, as the pace of the class is too fast to absorb all of that information for the first time.

As their names suggest, [AP Physics 1: Algebra-Based](#) and [AP Physics 2: Algebra-Based](#), require an understanding of (you guessed it!) algebra in physics. On the other hand, [AP Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism](#) and [AP Physics C: Mechanics](#) are calculus-based.

You should only take AP Physics C if you've already taken calculus (or are currently taking Calc) since you will not have time to learn both the high level math and the high level physics in one course.

Physics C is more advanced than Physics 1 and 2 because it will focus heavily on specific concepts in greater detail. Physics 1 and 2 are more general. You should take a physics class before taking Physics C, but you don't necessarily need one for Physics 1 and 2.

AP Math

You have three choices when it comes to AP Calculus and they all depend on how you feel about Calc.

You can start off with [AP Calculus AB](#) before moving on to [AP Calculus BC](#) to complete the sequence. (This is what I did, since I took Pre-Calc as a Sophomore.) Or you can take one or the other.

BC Calc will cover all the topics of AB Calc, but will also include additional topics. Because it covers so much, it moves at lightening speed and is incredibly hard (though not impossible!). Falling behind is not an option.
calculus

If Calculus classes are your nightmare, check out [AP Statistics](#). You'll learn how to collect and organize data, which will be helpful for majors such as sociology, journalism, and economics.

Think you'll travel down the computer science route in college? Take [AP Computer Science A](#), where you'll learn how to program, and [AP Computer Science Principles](#), which will teach you about how computer technology impacts our world.

AP English

There are only two AP English exams, but they cover very different aspects of comprehension and writing.

If you take [AP English Language and Composition](#), you'll be reading non-fiction works such as newspapers, blogs, personal essays, magazines, etc. to break down arguments and rhetoric.

This will be useful for anyone looking to prove their writing and analytical skills without being bogged down with flowery literature.

Your other choice, [AP English Literature and Composition](#), focuses on the exact opposite: fiction and poetry. You'll read for tone, symbolism, characterization, and other literary nuances that make for great literature.

The passages will be longer, but if you want to pursue any major in the Humanities, such as English, Literature, History, or Philosophy, acing it will prove that you can read and interpret complex ideas.

AP History and Social Science

Classes that cover wide areas of geography and time—like [AP European History](#) or [AP World History](#)—will have much more material to cover, and will be incredibly fast-paced in order to cover that material by test day.

However, many find them subjectively easier than [AP United States History](#) (APUSH) because APUSH only covers one country over a relatively short period of time and requires very detailed knowledge compared to AP World's more general material.

If economics and politics seem interesting to you, take [AP Macroeconomics](#), [AP Microeconomics](#), and [AP United States Government and Politics](#).

Psychology is always a popular major, but an [AP Psychology](#) class is perfect for non-Psychology majors who work with people, such as lawyers, writers, marketers, and business owners, too.

What If Your School Doesn't Offer an AP You Want to Take?

If you've always wanted to be a website developer, but your school doesn't offer AP Computer Science, you shouldn't let this deter you. You don't NEED to take an AP course to take the AP exam.

Take the highest level classes you can in school (honors, IB, etc.), start practicing for the exam with a Barron's or Cram Plan book, and give it a shot. You can send your AP scores directly to your potential schools and show them how you went above and beyond for your education.

Newsflash: "Playing it safe" may not get you into your dream school.

Personally, I'd tell you to load up your schedule with as many AP classes as your school will let you take... provided you can keep up your grades in them. Or at least, try to stay ahead of the pack. If the norm at your school is to take 4 AP's, see if you can take 5.

[Tweet "[Paint a picture of your academic career for admissions committees who don't know you.](#)"]

Paint a picture of your academic career for admissions committees who don't know anything about you. Show them your passion and your interests and they'll be more likely to take a chance on you over the undecided applicant who only did the bare minimum without focusing their skills.