

Selecting Your Child's Courses

Recommended Classes for College Success

The academic rigor of your child's high school courses is an important factor in the college admission process. College admission officers see the high school course schedule as a blueprint of an applicant's education. They're looking for a solid foundation of learning that the student can build on in college.

To create that foundation, your child should take at least five solid academic classes every semester — starting with the basics and then moving on to advanced courses. Academic challenges are part of what makes school fun; but your child needs a firm grasp of the fundamentals before going on to more advanced work.

The following subjects and classes are standard fare for success in high school and beyond, whether your child plans to attend a four-year or two-year college.

English (Language Arts)

Your child should take English every year. Traditional courses, such as American and English literature, help students improve writing skills, reading comprehension and vocabulary.

Math

Your child needs algebra and geometry to succeed on college entrance exams and in college math classes — and in many careers. Students who take them early on can enroll in advanced science and math in high school, and show colleges they're ready for higher-level work.

Most colleges look for students who have taken three years of math in high school. The more competitive ones require or recommend four years. Each school has its own program, but some of the courses typically offered are:

- Algebra I
- Algebra II
- Geometry
- Trigonometry
- Calculus

Science

Science teaches students to think analytically and apply theories to reality. Colleges want to see that students have taken three years of laboratory science classes. A good combination includes two semesters of each of the following sciences:

- Biology
- Chemistry or physics
- Earth/space sciences

More competitive schools expect your child to take four years of lab science courses. Your child should add two semesters in one of the following subjects:

- Chemistry or physics (the science your child didn't already study)
- Advanced biology
- Advanced chemistry
- Advanced physics

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Social Studies

Students can better understand local and world events that are happening now by studying the culture and history that has shaped them. Social sciences round out your child's core curriculum. Here is a suggested course plan:

- U.S. history (two semesters)
- U.S. government (one semester)
- World history or geography (one semester)
- One additional semester in the above or other areas

Foreign Languages

Solid foreign language study shows colleges your child is willing to stretch beyond the basics. Many colleges require at least two years of study in the same foreign language, and some prefer more.

The Arts

Research indicates that students who participate in the arts often do better in school and on standardized tests. The arts help your child recognize patterns, discern differences and similarities, and think in unique ways, often outside a traditional classroom setting.

Many colleges require or recommend one or two semesters in the arts. Good choices include studio art, dance, music and drama.

Advanced Placement Program® (AP®)

To get ready to take on college-level work, your child should enroll in the most challenging courses available in high school, such as honors or AP courses. Research consistently shows that students who score a 3 or higher on an AP Exam typically experience greater academic success and college graduation rates than students who don't take AP.

Success in AP can also help your child in other ways. AP helps your child stand out in the admission process and offers the opportunity to learn from some of the most inspiring teachers in the world. Learn more about the [AP Program](#).

For More Help in Choosing Courses

Students can use [College Search](#) to look up a specific college's academic requirements to be sure they are on track to attend the college of their choice.

If your child has concerns about class schedule or progress in school, suggest setting up a meeting with the school counselor or a teacher. There are many resources to help your child with this process, and with achieving personal, college and career goals.