

How to Select Your Courses Create a Solid Academic Portfolio

Your course schedule may seem like a random selection of classes to you, but college admissions officers see it as the blueprint of your high school education. They're looking for a solid foundation of learning that you can build on in college.

Take at least five solid academic classes every semester. The following subjects and classes are standard fare for success in high school and beyond, whether you plan to attend a four-year, two-year, or technical school.

ENGLISH (LANGUAGE ARTS)

Take English every year. Traditional courses, such as American and English literature, help you improve your writing skills, reading comprehension, and vocabulary.

- Literature
- Writing/composition
- Speech

MATH

You need algebra and geometry to succeed on college entrance exams, in college math classes, and in most careers. Take them early on and you'll be able to enroll in advanced science and math in high school—and you'll show colleges you're ready for higher-level work.

- Algebra
- Geometry
- Algebra II
- Trigonometry, calculus, and/or statistics

SCIENCE

Science teaches you to think analytically and apply theories to reality. Laboratory classes let you test what you've learned through hands-on work. Six semesters are recommended.

- Two semesters in biology
- Two semesters in chemistry and/or physics
- Two semesters in earth/space sciences, advanced biology, advanced chemistry, or physics

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Understand local and world events that are happening now by studying the culture and history that has shaped them. Social sciences round out your core curriculum.

- Two semesters in U.S. history
- One semester of U.S. government
- One semester in economics
- One semester in world history or geography
- One additional semester in the above, or other areas

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Solid foreign language study shows colleges you're willing to stretch beyond the basics. Many colleges require at least two years of foreign language study, and some prefer more.

ARTS

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

COMPUTER APPLICATIONS

More and more college courses and jobs require at least a basic knowledge of computers. Computer skills also can help you do research and schoolwork better and faster.

Advanced Placement Program (AP)

Try out college-level work, master valuable skills, and, with satisfactory grades, maybe even receive college credit. More than 3,000 higher education institutions award credit based on satisfactory AP Exam grades.

INDEPENDENT STUDIES

If you're interested in a subject that isn't offered at your school—say, botany, economics, or instrumental music—don't give up on your interest. Many schools allow motivated students to pursue independent studies, often with a teacher as an advisor. Most schools have rigorous standards for independent study. Be sure to talk to a counselor or teacher to find out if independent study is an option at your school, and what requirements may exist.