

Advanced Placement Courses

All courses labeled “AP” on a student’s transcripts must be authorized through the AP Course Audit.¹ The AP Course Audit was created at the request of both secondary school and college members of the College Board who sought a means for the College Board to:

- Provide AP teachers and administrators with clear guidelines on curricular and resource requirements that must be in place for AP Courses.
- Give colleges and universities confidence that AP Courses are designed to meet the same clearly articulated college-level criteria across high schools.

All schools wishing to label a course “AP” must submit the subject-specific AP Course Audit form and the course syllabus for each teacher of that AP course.

AP Courses are developed by Development Committees composed of an equal number of college and university academic faculty and experienced AP high school teachers for each subject field—usually six or eight in total—representing a wide range of secondary and postsecondary institutions. The committee is responsible for a range of activities, including:

- Developing each course's Course Description
- Determining the general content and ability level of each exam
- Writing exam questions

Committee members also guide and review the considerable research and data analyses undertaken to ensure that **AP Courses and Exams adhere to high academic disciplinary standards for proficiency and excellence**. They bring to their tasks knowledge of the curricula and instructional practice, as well as a honed sense of the abilities and skills critical in a given subject, and how students can demonstrate the mastery of such skills.

AP Exams

Each AP Exam consists of two sections—multiple-choice and free-response, except for the three AP Studio Art Exams, which are portfolio-based assessments. Free-response questions can take the form of essays, oral responses, or problems to solve. With slight variances for each AP Exam, equal weight is generally given to each section in the exam-scoring process.

AP content experts make sure that the questions adhere to the highest standards of quality and fairness in test development, as well as to certain editorial and stylistic standards. Statistical specifications are developed to ensure that each AP Exam will be of appropriate difficulty for the test-taking population

¹ Course authorization can be verified by searching the Course Ledger, located at <https://apcourseaudit.epiconline.org/ledger/>.

and that each exam will distinguish among students with different levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Reusing a percentage of multiple-choice questions from prior exams guarantees the statistical reliability of each AP Exam from year to year.

Development Committee members write free-response questions. They create a pool of proposed questions, the best of which are refined and focused to ensure that students are presented with ample opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. In analyzing the proposed free-response questions, committee members consider issues such as:

- How should we expect a student to respond to the question?
- What knowledge and abilities do we want the students to demonstrate in their answers?
- Is it likely that the question will do what it is intended to do?
- Could the question be better framed in the multiple-choice format?

Once a question is chosen for inclusion in an exam, it goes through several rounds of review and revision by the committee, typically taking up to two years. Each free-response question on an AP Exam is unique and used only once. Free-response questions are scored at the AP Reading.

The Development Committee reviews the final draft of each exam, judging it on the merits of the individual questions and the exam as a whole. Each exam must meet predetermined content and statistical specifications. It must also have a coherence and internal consistency that reflects its purpose of assessing the students' preparation in the subject. In approving the final version of the exam, the committee indicates that each question is appropriate and unambiguous, that all the members agree about the correct answer for each multiple-choice question, and that the exam as a whole is a suitable measure of the subject's Course Description.

AP Exam Scores

AP Exams are administered during the first two weeks of May. After the May AP Exams, participating schools return all AP Exam materials to the AP Program.

- The **multiple-choice section** is scored by computer. Each answer sheet is scanned and the total multiple-choice score is computed .
- The **free-response section** is scored at the annual AP Reading held during the first two weeks in June. Specially appointed college professors and experienced AP teachers evaluate free-response answers.
- The total scores from the free-response section and the multiple-choice section are combined to form a **composite score**.

The process of **score setting**—establishing the AP score boundaries (determining how many composite score points equals what AP score)—takes place immediately after the Reading.

AP Exam scores are reported on a 5-point scale as follows:

- 5 Extremely well qualified*
- 4 Well qualified*
- 3 Qualified*
- 2 Possibly qualified*
- 1 No recommendation**

*Qualified to receive college credit and/or advanced placement

**No recommendation to receive college credit or advanced placement

During score-setting sessions (there is one for each AP Exam) composite scores are translated into AP scores by setting boundaries for each score based on a statistical technique called **equating**.

Equating relates an AP Exam from one year to an AP Exam from another year so that performance on the two exams can be compared. This is accomplished by looking at how well AP students performed **on a set of multiple-choice questions that is common to both exams**. These particular multiple-choice questions cover the curriculum content and represent a broad range of difficulty; they can therefore provide information about the ability level of the current group of students and indicate the current exam's level of difficulty. This same set of questions may show up on next year's AP Exam and the one after that too.

Using AP in the Admissions Process

Since the beginning of the AP Program in 1955, colleges and universities have played an essential role in the AP Program. Considering AP in the admissions process enables colleges and universities to attract a diverse group of motivated high school students. AP Courses teach students important skills that can lead to college success including how to:

- Read texts critically
- Solve problems analytically
- Write clearly

The presence of AP Courses on a student's transcript indicates that the student has challenged him or herself by taking rigorous college-level courses.

A 2006 study conducted by the National Center for Educational Accountability found that students who earned a score of 3 or higher on one or more AP Exams in the areas of English, mathematics, science, or social studies were more likely to graduate from college in five years or less compared to non-AP students.

Additionally, students who receive advanced placement or college credit typically continue to take more, not fewer, courses in the discipline for which they've received AP credit. For more information, see the 2007 research study, *AP Students in College: An Analysis of Five-Year Academic Careers* (.pdf/289K). *Requires Adobe Reader (latest version recommended).*



Considering AP in the admissions process may help your institution:

- Raise the profile of your incoming class
- Recruit a diverse group of highly qualified and capable students
- Target outreach and recruitment to specific populations and/or in critical subject areas

Colleges and universities can purchase names of 10th and 11th grade students who sent AP Exam scores to their institutions through Student Search Service, use the AP Course Ledger to recruit from specific geographic areas and disciplines and review a student's participation in AP in the context of his or her school profile as part of a holistic review process. Some examples of how admissions staff around the country use AP include:

- Acquiring names of underrepresented students who have earned a score of 3 or higher on AP Exams in STEM subjects through Student Search Service; using the information from Search to conduct targeted recruitment and outreach efforts
- Consulting the AP Course Ledger to verify that the AP Courses appearing on a student's transcripts are authorized by the AP Program
- Reaching out to high school counselors and AP teachers to increase their awareness of the value of AP in the admissions process, thus encouraging their students to apply and send AP Exam scores to the institution

For more information about using AP in your admission practices, please contact the College Board's Western Regional Offices: 1.866.392.4078 wro@collegeboard.org

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