

Guide to Choosing Classes and GPA Building

Choosing classes is very important as it allows you to explore your interests, enhance your learning experience, and build your profile as a student. Main elements that you should consider are graduation requirements, academic path, GPA building, class standing, and interest.

Graduation Requirements

Graduation requirements are very important as they must be met if you are to receive a high school diploma. Just fulfilling the requirements **does not** make you college ready but it is a good starting point.

- By senior year, students should have taken/currently be taking the following courses:
 - 4 high school English/Language Arts classes
 - 4 mathematics classes, including Algebra 1 and Geometry
 - 3 science classes, including Biology 1
 - 3 social studies classes, including World History, US History and US Government/Economics
 - 1 art class (fine or performing arts)
 - 1 physical education class
 - 1 online course
 - 8 elective courses to satisfy the remainder of the 24-credit graduation requirements
 - **While all universities differ, most 4-year institutions require that you take 2 consecutive years of a foreign language.**

- Seniors also need to:
 - Maintain a GPA of 2.0 or above
 - Meet all state assessment requirements:
 - Pass the Algebra 1 EOC
 - Pass the Geometry EOC
 - Pass the Biology 1 EOC
 - Pass the US History EOC

Academic Paths

High school is a time for professional and personal exploration that often leads people into the career paths they want to pursue. Schools often have different “tracks” catered to guide students down the path most in line with their future goals (no college, vocational school, college). When choosing classes, keep long-term goals in mind - **tracks are specialized, they do not all make you college ready.**

- Types of Classes
 - There are five types of classes you can take: Regular, Honors, AP/IB/AICE, Early College, and Dual Enrollment classes.
 - Your “track” is determined by how many classes of each level you take.
 - If you take all regular classes you are on the regular track
 - If you take regular but more honors classes then you are in the honors track.
 - Often the classes you are taking junior and senior year are what determine your track.
 - Finding your track is not an exact science, but it gives you an estimate of what you are being prepared for.

- Types of Tracks
 - Regular Track- Track intended to achieve high school graduation but does not ensure college readiness. Intended for those planning to work after high school, enter vocational school, or attend community college.

 - Honors Track- Track intended to achieve high school graduation and targeted to produce success in community college. Intended for those planning to work after high school, enter vocational school, or attend community college.

- College Track (AP,IB/AICE, Dual Enrollment, Early College)- Track intended to give head start on 4-year college education. Intended for those planning to attend community college or a 4-year university.
 - Advanced Placement (AP) Classes
 - AP classes are designed to have college-level rigor. Due to this, if you receive at 3 or higher (out of 5) on the AP Exam (a required test taken at the end of your course) you receive college credit for the class.
 - ✓ Ex. If you score a 4 on the AP Exam for Biology most colleges excuse you for having to take it again.
 - ✓ This rule varies from exam to exam and university to university but is generally true.
 - This can save you time and money while in college.
 - AP also is a great choice to build a GPA.
 - Looks good on college applications.
 - Can mix in with honors, regular, and dual enrollment classes.
 - IB/AICE
 - These are advanced programs designed to prepare students for college. Graduates from the program receive a special “IB/AICE diploma”
 - The courses offered are valuable but heavy; sometimes so much so that it does not justify doing the program in the first place.
 - ✓ A good GPA is more important than having an IB/AICE diploma - if your GPA is low, the type of program you are in does not make up for it in your college applications.
 - Looks good on college applications.
 - **Must apply before entering high school.** Most schools have limited seats so you have to apply to the program during your eighth grade year to be accepted.
 - The first two year of the program(s) are pre-IB/Pre-AICE meaning that if you leave the program during this time you are not considered to have been in it at all.

- Dual Enrollment
 - Takes place online or local community college. Take courses and earn college credits (save money in the long run).
 - Similar to AP but colleges prefer seeing AP.
 - Can mix in with honors, regular, and AP classes.
- Early College
 - Program that allows students to simultaneously finish requirements for high school and an associates degree.
 - First two years of high school are at school, second two are in college
 - You will graduate with an associates degree and high school diploma.

GPA Building

Building up your GPA is very important as it is what colleges often look at to determine your success in college.

What is a GPA?

- A GPA (or grade point average) is a way of converting your grades into a numerical scale so they can be compared with that of other students.
- There are two types of GPAs, unweighted and weighted but the general idea is the same.
- Each letter grade (A,B,C,D,F) is assigned a value (0-5). Based on your grades, you choose your values and average them. The resulting number is your GPA. Each type of GPA differs slightly so they will be reviewed.

Unweighted GPA

- Your unweighted GPA gives a summary of how well you are doing in your classes without taking into account how difficult they are.
 - It does not matter if you are taking AP Rocket Science or beginners basket weaving, an A is an A and both classes are worth the same amount of points.

- How to Calculate an Unweighted GPA

Unweighted GPA Reference Table

Grade	Points
A	4.0
B	3.0
C	2.0
D	1.0
F	0.0

- Step 1 - look at the reference table and see how much each letter grade is worth
- Step 2 - list all the grades for your classes and looking at the reference table, their corresponding value
- Step 3- Add up all the values
- Step 4 - Divide by the number of classes you listed
- Step 5- that is your GPA!
- Unweighted GPAs are calculated on a 4.0 scale meaning that if you have straight A's your highest possible GPA is a 4.0.
- Example

Class	Grade
Beginner Underwater Basket Weaving	A
AP Rocket Science	A
Soccer Honors	C

Underwater Basket Weaving = A = 4.0

AP Rocket Science = A = 4.0

Soccer Honors = C = 2.0

$4.0+4.0+2.0=10.0 \rightarrow 10.0/3 \text{ (classes)} = 3.33$

My unweighted GPA is 3.33 out of 4.0

Weighted GPA

- As stated before, there are a lot of different types and levels of classes, some more challenging than others. This type of GPA takes into account the difficulty of your classes and gives you more points for harder classes.
 - Under this model, an A in AP Rocket Science is worth a lot more than an A in Beginners Underwater Basket Weaving.
- How to Calculate Weighted GPA

Weighted GPA Reference Table

Grade	Regular	Honors	College
A	4.00	4.50	5.00
B	3.00	3.50	4.00
C	2.00	2.50	3.00
D	1.00	1.50	2.00
F	0.00	0.50	1.00

*Note: "College" includes AP, IB/AICE, Dual Enrollment, and Early College classes

- Step 1 - look at the reference table and see how much each letter grade is worth in each category
- Step 2 - list your classes, the type of classes they are, and your grades
- Step 3- Looking at the reference table, note their corresponding value
- Step 4- Add up all the values
- Step 5 - Divide by the number of classes you listed
- Step 6- that is your GPA!
- Weighted GPAs are calculated on a 5.0 scale meaning that to have a perfect 5.0 GPA, you would need to only take college class and maintain straight A's.
 - This is usually impossible as not all required classes are offered at a college level.

- Example

Class	Grade
Beginner Underwater Basket Weaving	A
AP Rocket Science	A
Soccer Honors	C

Underwater Basket Weaving - Regular Class, Grade A = 4.0

AP Rocket Science - AP Class, Grade A = 5.0

Soccer Honors =Honors Class Grade C = 2.5

$$4.0+5.0+2.5=11.5 \rightarrow 11.5/3 \text{ (classes)} =3.833$$

My weighted GPA is 3.833 out of 5.0

- Notes
 - It is worth noting that if you get a B in a college level class (AP,IB/AICE, Dual Enrollment, or Early College) it is just as good (GPA wise) as getting an A in a regular class.
 - It might be worth the try but remember, college will still look at transcripts.
 - If you are mostly taking college classes, try to avoid taking regular classes as, even if you get an A, they will most likely bring down your average.
 - When in doubt, talk to a guidance counselor

Class Standing (or Class Rank)

GPA is used to compare your grades with those of other students. Most high schools, using your weighted GPA, rank all the students in each grade. Colleges and scholarships look at this number as many strongly suggest or even require you to be in the top 20, 10, 5 percent of your class.

- If you need a boost in your class rank, taking higher level classes and doing well in them will help.
- Ideally, your class rank (and therefore your GPA) should be something you are building throughout all four years of high school, not just the last two.

- Those who hold the highest ranks often are students that have taken college level courses every year.
- If your goal is to be at the top of your class, start early as there will come a point where you just do not have time to catch up to the people that began their freshman or sophomore year.

Interest

Being interested in what you are learning greatly increases your chances of doing well in the class. At the end of the day, choose classes that motivate you, draw out curiosity in you, that you actually want to be in.