

Create a Solid Academic Portfolio

Your course schedule may seem like a random selection of classes to you, but college admission 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 and/or speech

Math

In college math classes and in most careers, you need algebra and geometry. 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 I
- Geometry
- Algebra II
- Trigonometry and/or calculus

Science

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

- Biology
- Chemistry and/or physics
- Earth/space sciences, advanced biology, advanced chemistry or physics

Social Studies

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

- Two semesters of U.S. history
- One semester of U.S. government
- One semester of economics
- One semester of world history or geography
- One additional semester of these or other areas

Foreign Languages

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.

The 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, often outside of a traditional classroom setting.

Computer Courses

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.

For more college planning tools and guidance, visit bigfuture.org.

Source: The College Board.

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