



Policy: Appropriate Grade Levels for AP® Courses

The AP® Program recognizes the autonomy of secondary schools and districts in setting AP course participation policies that best meet their students' unique needs and learning goals. At the same time, AP courses are specifically designed to provide challenging, college-level course work for willing and academically prepared high school students. Student performance on AP Exams illustrates that in many cases, AP courses are best positioned as part of a student's 11th- and 12th-grade academic experience. Some subject areas, however, such as World History and European History, can be successfully offered to academically prepared 10th-grade students.

Students should not be rushed into AP course work but should instead develop the necessary skills and conceptual understandings in foundational courses prior to enrolling in AP.

Educators should be mindful of the following when considering offering AP to younger students. AP courses are rarely offered in ninth grade, and exam results show that, for the most part, ninth-grade students are not sufficiently prepared to participate in a college-level course. Therefore, the College Board believes these students would be better served by course work focusing on the academic building blocks necessary for later, successful enrollment in college-level courses. Many college admission officers support this position, feeling that students should not be rushed into AP course work, but should instead develop the necessary skills and conceptual understandings in foundational courses prior to enrolling in AP.

The AP designation may only be applied to authorized courses offered at or above the ninth-grade level that have received authorization through the annual AP Course Audit process. The AP label cannot be affixed to courses and transcripts prior to ninth grade. There is one exception to this policy: AP world language courses. These courses focus on linguistic proficiency and cultural competency, so in rare situations these courses can be successfully offered earlier than ninth grade among students who can already speak, read, and write the language with fluency. In summary, the AP Course Audit will only renew or authorize courses that are offered exclusively in grades 9–12, with the exception of AP world language programs.

The College Board recognizes that there are some occasions in which students may be prepared to take an AP Exam prior to ninth grade. Because students are not required to take an AP course before taking the AP Exam, secondary schools may choose to administer AP Exams to students of any grade level, so long as the restriction against use of the AP label on courses and transcripts prior to ninth grade is observed.

In deciding when to offer college-level course work to any student, educators should carefully review the curricular and resource requirements for each AP course, and consider whether a student has received the appropriate academic preparation. AP courses require students to apply advanced critical thinking and analytical skills that are typical of comparable college-level courses. This guiding AP enrollment policy holds true for all AP courses and exams, regardless of the grade level in which a school or district decides to offer AP course work.