



The nation's most selective colleges aren't just looking for a high school diploma – they're seeking prepared, successful students.

## Choose College Preparatory Courses

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Selective colleges seek candidates who are appropriately prepared to meet the challenges of their curriculum, and the better prepared you are, the more success you'll have throughout your collegiate career. Colleges look for a demanding high school course of study and most demand a minimum of 16 units (full year courses) of college preparatory work. The descriptions below should serve as a guideline for selecting your high school courses.

**English:** Four years. Expository (essay) writing skills are very important.

**Mathematics:** Three or four years, four years preferred. Courses in advanced mathematics are extremely desirable and most selective colleges expect elementary algebra, geometry, and intermediate algebra as the minimum requirement.

**Foreign Language:** Two or more years, ancient or modern languages at the minimum, but three or more is desirable.

**Laboratory Science:** Two or more years of biology, chemistry, physics or physical requirements is expected, however many colleges view three years as the minimum.

**Social Sciences:** Two or more years of U.S., European, modern history, or world history and government is generally expected.

**Electives:** Three or more additional academic courses from the five core areas listed above.

## AP, IB, and Dual Enrollment Courses:

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Students who participate in advanced placement, international baccalaureate and dual enrollment programs demonstrate an ability to handle advanced, college level work. Success in these programs not only shows selective colleges your skill and expertise in a certain area of study, but also your willingness to accept a challenge and your intellectual curiosity. Selective universities take note of these items on your high school transcript.

Other courses: Music, art, business, and computer courses are valuable supplements to core curriculum courses – they develop personal skills, promote aesthetic awareness, and foster recreational interests. However, they should not be chosen in lieu of college preparatory courses.

## What Counts Most?

Seeing success in a demanding college preparatory program is very important for a selective college. Yet, it is the combination of courses, grade-point average, class rank, standardized test scores, extracurricular experiences, and your college essay that determines your full-preparedness level.

**Application:** All schools require an application (either their own application or the Common Application), and you should take care with your application and essay. Colleges review the application to get a better sense of who you are through your in-school and extracurricular activities, as well as where your passions lie in your essay.

**Secondary School Records:** Your high school transcript carries a great deal of weight, and, to many schools, this is the most important part of your application. Slightly lower grades in more rigorous courses may be more important than higher grades in an easier program. Your transcript will usually be submitted after your first semester senior year.

**SAT and ACT scores:** Most schools require students to take either the SATs or the ACTs, but the importance of your scores varies from school to school. Standardized tests are rarely the most important factor in an admissions decision though, and most schools do not have a cut-off point for scores. You should plan on taking either test by no later than the fall of your senior year.

**Letters of Recommendation:** Colleges use letters of recommendation as evidence of your potential, character, and classroom effort. When requesting letters of recommendation, consider asking your guidance counselor, principal, headmaster, and/or teachers who know you the best and will give you and your work a fair assessment.

### Extracurricular Activities:

Selective colleges seek students who have experience with a wide variety of interests and activities. Intellectual ability and varied perspectives within a student's high school career contribute to the overall educational climate. Selective schools will view community service, student government, athletics, study abroad opportunities, interesting hobbies, and participation in theater, music, art, dance or academic clubs positively. However, keep in mind that extracurricular activities will not compensate for a poor academic record.

**The Interview:** Some colleges will require an interview while others may have an optional interview you can participate in. If you have the chance to interview at a college you're interested in, take the opportunity. The interview allows you to determine if a college is the right "fit," and it will also let the admissions committee know you're very interested in their institution. In some cases, an interview may make the difference between whether you're admitted or not. If you think an interview will help a selective college make a positive choice about your admittance, request an interview. And before you go, have good questions and be sure you can explain why that college is attractive to you.



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08/12