

# “5 Things You Need to Know About AP Exams”

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High school has turned into a big bowl of alphabet soup. With terms like PSAT, SAT, ACT, AP, IB, and tons of other acronyms out there, it can be tricky to keep everything straight! Her Campus broke down a spoonful of this jumbled mess of letters, with five things every collegiate should know about the AP (short for Advanced Placement) program and exams, a super popular high school option many girls across the country are offered each year.

## **1. An AP exam does not equate to an AP class (and vice versa).**

One of the things that makes AP unique from other programs like IB or dual-enrollment courses is that you can take an AP test without taking the AP class. Granted, it's often harder to do it this way as the point of the class is to prepare you for the exam in the spring, but it's good to know it's still an option. The reverse is also true: you can take an AP class and not have to take the exam at the end of the year. It's always a good idea to check with schools you're considering to see what they'll accept and other requirements they might have that make the test not-so-necessary after all if you won't get credit or advanced standing once you're at college.

An AP test is merely a standard subject exam offered by the College Board in high schools across the country on the same day at the same time (subjects are usually scattered across several days in May – check out this year's schedule for some examples) that usually takes about two or three hours to complete. The test is then collected and graded by both a computer and human graders. A computer grades the multiple choice part of the test, while a panel of college professors and high school AP teachers read the free response sections at an AP reading event. (Sounds like a great way to kick off your summer vacation, huh? You're not the only one who gets stressed out over the test!)

High enough scores often translate into college credit after graduation. It's a good idea to ask colleges what their policy is regarding AP test credit and get any information they have on what scores they'll accept during college visits if you're someone with a lot of honors and AP coursework on your transcript.

What's more, you can re-take an AP test each year it's offered. If you're not happy with the score you got on an exam in 11th grade, you can always try again senior year. Keep in mind you'll have to pay the \$89 each test costs though if your school or district does not cover the cost.

## **2. Taking an AP class is usually the best way to prepare for these tests.**

Schools all over the country offer AP classes for a reason – it's the best way to prep for the exam in the spring. A pre-collegiate can usually start taking AP courses in ninth or tenth grade, and can often decide how many or how few of these classes she's interested in taking. A lot of these classes expect students to start prepping for a full year of work ahead of time by assigning books or other work to be done before day one of class in the fall. It's no secret that these classes are often pretty challenging. You won't have many nights with no homework, so a

full AP course load may not be the way to go if you're looking for an easy, breezy senior year. That being said, these classes are a great way to prep for college classes. "For a student to have the opportunity to experience what it would be like to be in a college class, while still having the safety net that comes with high school is invaluable," says Ali Wilson, a guidance counselor and AP Coordinator at Armstrong High School in Plymouth, Minn. "Research from the College Board indicates that students who take AP classes in high school are much more likely to finish college and be more successful while there."

We know junior and senior year are filled with all sorts of standardized tests for you to study for, but the College Board makes studying for AP exams super easy. In addition to designing the tests based around a standard AP curriculum and training teachers how to prepare students for these tests throughout the year, they've also recently launched a super cool website that makes studying waayyy less of a chore.

### **3. A \* gasp \* 3 on an AP exam won't crush your dreams of Harvard/Yale/Princeton/Fill-in-the-blank-school-here.**

Most schools will give credit for scores of 4 or 5, and some even accept the occasional 3. You should expect to receive exam results online in July. (Be glad the CB has changed this process in the last couple of years – us dinosaurs currently in college typically had to wait to get them via snail mail. Talk about torture!) This is also when results get sent out by the College Board to schools you've indicated you wanted scores sent to, along with your high school. If you'd like to cancel scores or keep them from being sent, you can always check the College Board's website and find the correct number to call and do so. Obviously if you don't indicate a school, scores won't be sent anywhere other than your house and to your high school. Most teachers realize these scores don't directly translate to how good or successful of a student you are. "I think it is hard to evaluate a student and his or her work based on just a 3 hour test, and the score itself doesn't reflect other aspects of the student's achievements," explains Matt Quinn, a high school AP teacher at Robbinsdale Armstrong High School.

**Here's the thing though** – when you're applying to a school, oftentimes, all the admissions officials and others that review your application will see are scores you "self-report." That is, it's largely up to you to decide what test scores you want to include on your application. "If you are not secure about what your score would be you do not have to have it sent to colleges until after you yourself receive the score," assures Wilson. While a copy of scores will eventually be sent to whatever school you end up deciding on, these will be used to determine credit, not whether or not you get in. Unlike a low SAT or ACT score, a low(er) AP score won't hurt you – high scores can only help. Here's the really big secret – once you get into a school, no one will care what score you got on the AP Comp or Stat exam. It no longer matters!

### **4. Passing on an AP class or two in favor of a less-intense course isn't the end-all-be-all.**

Picking high school classes can be tricky. You have to balance graduation requirements with the expectations of a half-dozen or more schools, and try and find a fun class to take with a friend or two all at the same time. Don't stress if your schedule for next year isn't loaded with AP periods. Taking an AP class just for the name of the course alone isn't worth it,

especially if you've got other standouts on a high school resume like an internship, awesome extra-curricular participation, a huge volunteer streak, or another "selling point" for the college admissions process. You also don't want to overload yourself or burnout before you even make it to college! Pick how many honors or AP classes you want to challenge yourself with depending on what you're comfortable with and what your schedule and high school offerings allow for, and be happy with those.

**I. AP exams are still pretty darn important.**

The reasons why you should take an AP class are fairly substantial – they can get you free college credit after accepting admission to a college or university, you learn how to handle tough material and lots of deadlines as a byproduct of an AP class, you can earn additional honors to add to a college resume like "AP Scholar" (how cool does that sound??), and you could skip over some of the more basic, crowded freshman-level classes, thus giving you more flexibility in your schedule once you get to college if you rack up enough credits through exams. Bringing in enough credit could also help you graduate early, if that's an option you're interested in pursuing. Need we say more? Take them seriously, study hard and make good use of class time, and you'll kick butt come May!

*Fill out the KWL chart about the article above.*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>K</u></b> <b>(What did you Know?)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>W</u></b> <b>(What do you want to know more about?)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>L</u></b> <b>(What did you learn?)</b></p>