



Choosing College Classes

How to Schedule Your First Year

The start of college is a very exciting time. Before you know it, sometimes even before you're on campus, you're making a lot of decisions — fast. Choosing your courses is one of the first.

Picking classes in high school may not have been a big deal, but college is different. Colleges can offer hundreds, even thousands, of classes. There are lots of options for you to choose from.

Some colleges don't expect you to determine your course schedule on your own. Some do. Either way, here are some tips and strategies that can make it easier.

1. Review the Course Catalog

Use the online catalog, or request a paper one (your college may send you one automatically). You'll find a variety of lists, including core requirements (courses all students must take), requirements for different majors, and the courses offered within each department. Lists generally begin with introductory-level courses and end with more-challenging seminars.

Note the classes that interest you. If you don't know what you want to major in yet (like most freshmen), think about taking classes in areas that spark your interest. Have you always wanted to learn about space? Try an astronomy class. Do different cultures intrigue you? Sign up for cultural anthropology. If you already have an idea of what you want to major in, consider taking some of the general requirements in that field.

2. Take Advantage of Your Adviser

Some colleges offer academic advisers — counselors who help students decide what classes to take. If you are assigned an academic adviser for your first year, set up an appointment before registration. Bring all your questions about choosing courses to the meeting. If your adviser can't answer everything, seek the advice of department chairs and professors of classes you're considering.

3. Learn How to Schedule Your Classes

Picking a class schedule is like putting a puzzle together. You need to identify the classes you want to take, figure out which days and times they meet and adjust for any overlaps — you can't be in two places at once. Typically, you take four to six courses a semester, depending upon how demanding they are.

Remember to plan not only for the time you'll spend in class, but for time you'll spend studying — either on your own or with a study group. When you schedule study time, keep in mind that most college classes don't meet every day. They may meet on Monday, Wednesday and Friday or on Tuesday and Thursday. You may also have a choice of time slot for a class. If you're not a morning person, it may be better to take physics in the afternoon if it's available.

Make sure you have a reasonable workload, spread out somewhat evenly over the week. Most students want to take some classes each day, not a crushing load on one or two days. Don't worry if you find your schedule needs adjustment after the first few classes. Colleges give you the opportunity to add or drop classes for a few weeks into the semester.

4. Get Requirements Out of the Way

Almost all colleges have core requirements to ensure that students explore subjects outside their major. These requirements range from math and history to philosophy and lab sciences. The number of required courses, and subjects, varies from one college to the next. You should fulfill these requirements as soon as possible so that you can spend your later semesters concentrating on courses in your major. For more advanced courses you may need to complete prerequisites — for example, you have to take Basic Calculus before you take Advanced Calculus.

5. Find a Balance of Courses

You may be eager to jump into difficult classes your freshman year, but give yourself a break. Take easy courses as well as hard courses. You may not realize how challenging college courses can be, and how much reading and other work they require. Taking too many hard courses at once can put a real strain on you, and it may show in your grades.

Take subjects that require different kinds of work. For example, some classes, such as English literature, require a lot of reading, while others, such as journalism, require a lot of writing. And math and science courses have you solving problem sets. Choose a variety of subjects, so you're not stuck having to read five books or writing five research papers in one week.

6. Use AP[®] Credits and Placement Exams

Before you register, find out if you've already fulfilled any of your core requirements. For example, if you score high on the AP Chemistry or AP Physics exam, you may not have to take a core lab science course. Acing a placement exam could free you from taking the required language course.

7. Take a Writing Course

It's in your best interests to take a writing class during your first semester, even if you're not required to do so. You can apply the writing skills you develop in this course to all your other courses throughout college, and in whatever career you choose.

8. Make a Plan for Registration

You need to register for classes before your first semester begins. Be sure to meet any deadlines you are given. The earlier you register, the more likely it is that you can get into the classes you want. You can be sure that some of the classes will be full or that you'll have to choose between two classes that are held at the same time. So, after you come up with your dream schedule, make a list of alternative classes. Your preparations can make registration easier, and help you start your first year off right.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/plan/college-success/27746.html>