10 things to do before a first AP course

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A numbered list of ten things a family can do before a first AP class, from reading habits to checking the AP credit policy of a college.

These ten things take a kid from "what is AP?" to a first AP course that feels manageable, and none of them costs money. They go with our longer post, how to get a kid ready for AP courses. College Board lists 42 AP courses as of 7 November 2026; you need only one to start.

1. Read the course list. College Board's student site has every course, with a page for each. Look at the whole menu once, so a first pick is a choice.

2. Pick a first course that matches a strength. Readers: AP Psychology or Human Geography. Builders: AP Computer Science Principles. Math-first kids: AP Statistics or AP Precalculus after Algebra 2. It is a try, not a life plan.

3. Check the one prerequisite we could verify. The two AP Computer Science courses ask for familiarity with Algebra 1 concepts and no coding experience. Other courses are in the AP course directory; look at each course's page.

4. Read a book a month with one page of notes. The note is a claim and its proof. The story library is free for the reading side of this.

5. Write a page a day. Any page. Once a quarter, make it an argument with a quote as evidence. English and history exams ask for exactly this.

6. Get Algebra 1 solid. Fractions and ratios in 7th, then Algebra 1 done properly. Science and calculus run on it.

7. Start a language early. Eight languages are on the menu, and they expect several years of study. Heritage speakers can start sooner.

8. Do the base courses. Peabody Homeschool's free high school courses, free through 2026, cover World History, US History, Civics and Economics, the math sequence, Physical Science, Biology, Chemistry and English 9 and 10.

9. Ask a school's AP coordinator about registering, in autumn. An outside student needs a school or approved site to sit the exam. Policies differ and we haven't verified any.

10. Look up two colleges' AP credit policies. Credit is each college's decision, so find out what they do with scores before deciding how many courses to take.

For free and paid places to get help, see our directory of tutoring and course companies: it is a directory, not a ranking, and every entry was read from the company's own site. If you hire a tutor, ask for a trial session and whether they know that exact course's exam. Then go back to

the library and read.

Three mistakes to skip

Stacking too many at once. A first year with four AP courses is a different thing from a first year with one. Two or three a year is a common pattern; it is advice from teachers, not a College Board rule. Start with one and see what the workload feels like.

Treating the exam as the goal. The exam is a few hours in May. The reading, writing and problem-solving the course asks for across the year are what carry over to college, whatever the score. Plan the year, not the day.

Skipping the lab or the sources. The science courses expect lab work, and the history and English courses expect real documents and real books. Free sources exist for all of it: OpenStax textbooks, the Library of Congress, Project Gutenberg, and NASA and NOAA data. Use the originals.

A sample first month

Week one: read the course page and the list of units, and ask what the first unit is. Week two: do a diagnostic, such as a few released sample questions from the course page or a practice set from Khan Academy, and mark where it was hard. Week three: fix the weakest skill with ten minutes a day. Week four: write one page in the style the exam asks for and have a grown-up read it. Repeat. The same loop works for every course on the menu, which is the point of building the habits first.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/10-things-to-do-before-a-first-ap-course