Plan a Stretch Semester

Choose learning that stretches you without filling every spare hour. This guide helps U.S. high school students explore advanced courses and enrichment, then make a plan with a counselor.

MY LEARNING GOAL

I want to understand

_____

I want to practice

_____

STRETCH

Purpose
A subject or skill I want to explore.

Readiness
A foundation and a plan to get help.

Capacity
Time for work, care, learning and rest.

OVERLOAD

Purpose
A course added only to collect a label.

Readiness
Gaps I have no time or support to address.

Capacity
A plan that only works if nothing goes wrong.

Start with evidence of readiness

Bring a recent assignment, a teacher's feedback and one skill you want to build. Ask what preparation would help. You do not need to be perfect before trying something harder.

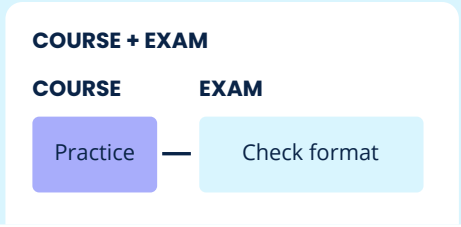
Compare the Routes Not Just the Labels

Availability depends on your school and local partners. Ask what is offered, how you qualify and how each option fits your learning goal.

AP

Advanced Placement

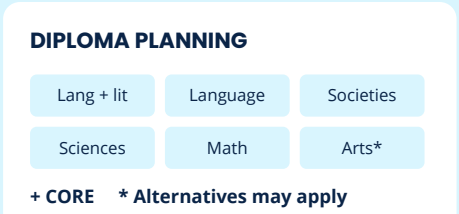
College-level subjects with related exams. Check preparation and local entry rules. [1]



IB

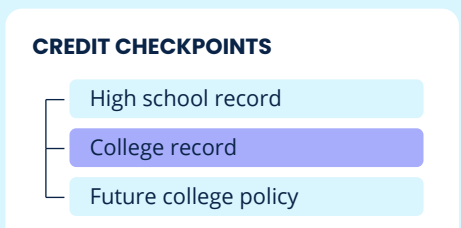
International Baccalaureate

The full Diploma has six subject groups and a core. Ask about your school's route. [2]



Dual enrollment

College coursework during high school. Check eligibility and both credit records. [3]



Other enrichment

Honors, a reading group, a project or a local program can deepen an interest.



BEFORE YOU COMMIT

Check the Actual Course Details

Read the current course catalog with a counselor or teacher. Save the link and date. Separate what is confirmed from what you still need to ask.

Read what is stated and what is missing

What must I know or complete first?

Is it offered to me this term or next?

What work is due in a busy week?

Who can help and how do changes work?

COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Fictional catalog excerpt, not a real course

1 **Preparation**
Complete Intro to Research first.

2 **Availability**
Spring term; Tuesdays and Thursdays.

3 **Workload**
Weekly reading; one final fieldwork project.

4 **Support + changes**
Teacher help on Fridays. Change deadline: not listed.

If the route is not available

Ask about a later term, a related course or a supervised project. Do not assume online study or another school is an approved substitute.

For enrichment, check the organizer, age rules, cost, supervision and feedback. A small project can be a good next step.

In this example, ask about weekly study time and the missing change deadline. For real AP courses, check your school entry process. [1]

Plan the Whole Week Before Adding More

Use a real week, including the weekend. Ask a teacher or program lead for typical and peak workload estimates. Do not guess from the course title.

Protect

Mark school, sleep, meals, travel, paid work and care responsibilities.

Estimate

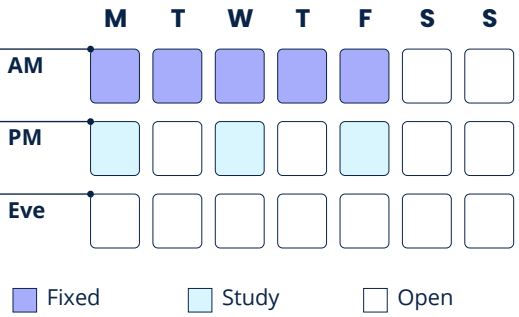
Add all class study, projects and activities. Mark project deadlines and busy weeks.

Adjust

Keep some time free. If the week is too full, reduce, delay or replace one commitment.

A WEEK TO ADAPT

Illustrative sketch, not a schedule



Copy into your calendar with times.

Include rest, care and weekends.

MY CAPACITY CHECK

Which week is hardest?
What could I pause?
Who can help me adjust?

A full calendar is not a requirement for growth.

If keeping up repeatedly means losing rest or missing essential responsibilities, bring the plan back to a trusted adult and change it.

Ask About Access Cost and Credit

Get the answers before enrolling. Write down the person or office, the reply and the date. A course title alone cannot answer these questions.

SUPPORT + ACCESS

Who provides tutoring and accommodations? What is the request process? Can I access materials, technology and transport?

TOTAL COST

What will tuition, exams, books, supplies and travel cost me? Is assistance available? What do I pay if I change or withdraw?

CREDIT + RECORDS

Does it meet a high school requirement? How is it recorded? Will a future college accept it, and does it apply to my intended degree?

Credit is not automatic.

Check the receiving college's current policy, not just the course provider's promise.

CHECK EACH ROUTE

AP / IB: Check scores, subjects and credit or placement.
Dual enrollment: Check grades, transcripts and transfer use. [3, 4]

Make a Plan You Can Adjust

STEP 1

Bring your evidence

Show your goal, recent work, course options and whole-week plan. Tell your counselor what you need to protect.

START THE CONVERSATION

I want to explore ___. Based on my preparation and week, which route fits? What should I build first?

STEP 2

Choose a manageable next step

Agree on a route and a backup. Confirm preparation, access, cost and the actual school or program deadlines.

MY DECISION NOTE

Route _____

Backup _____

Question left _____

STEP 3

Set a check in before you start

Choose a review date and a person to talk to. Check learning, workload and rest. Ask about change deadlines before they pass.

MY ADJUSTMENT PLAN

Check-in date _____

Support person _____

If I struggle, first I will _____

OFFICIAL GUIDANCE | Checked October 25, 2026

[1] College Board: AP overview, readiness and credit policies. [2] IB: Diploma curriculum.
[3] Florida Department of Education: dual enrollment and transfer FAQ (state example, not national rules).
[4] University of Florida: dual enrollment FAQ (institution example). Verify local rules and college policies.