

Realistic Rigor



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How Do I Choose Courses that are Appropriately Challenging for ME?

Carmel High School offers a wide variety of options for students to challenge themselves academically in preparation for post-high school learning. These choices can be exciting in that they allow students to dive deeper into different content areas, develop their knowledge and skills, and explore areas of interest. At the same time, the choices can prove confusing or overwhelming for students who want to challenge themselves AND feel confident about the likelihood of success. When choosing courses for diploma completion and preparation for college-level work, you should consider the following when determining how challenging your schedule should be:

- **Identify your own interests, strengths, and challenges before choosing rigorous courses.**
 - If you are not particularly interested in a subject area or you have historically struggled in that area, you may not want to take on a challenging course in that area. Instead, take challenging courses in areas that interest you AND that are strengths.
 - It is important to recognize your own personal challenges or potential obstacles to doing well in a challenging class. Knowing this will help you make a more informed decision about whether you should take the course and identify the types of resources you may need to utilize to maximize your success in the class.
- **Make sure you know what the expectations for the course or courses are by:** reading the Carmel High School Program of Studies (available online), asking your current teachers, talking with your counselor, and/or talking with the teachers who teach the course in question.
- **Take stock of the big picture and reflect on how your other commitments (academic AND extracurricular) may keep you from committing the appropriate amount of time and effort to being successful in challenging courses.** Often students who are perfectly capable of doing well in a class, do not do well because they've taken on too many rigorous courses and/or extracurricular commitments, and they just cannot commit the time needed for success.
- **Identify the potential benefits AND the potential pitfalls of taking on a particular rigorous course or combination of rigorous courses.** Ask yourself what you are likely to gain by taking the course (expanding your knowledge and skills in a particular area, honors diploma, better preparation, college credits, etc.) AND what could possibly go wrong (low grades or failure, difficult to keep up with the amount of work, poor match with interests resulting in low motivation, red flags on your transcript, etc.) Ideally, the courses you choose will present more potential benefits than pitfalls!

What Does "Realistic Rigor" Mean?

"Realistic Rigor" means choosing challenging courses that are both interesting AND a good match with your strengths WHILE taking into account the time and effort required to be successful in those courses. BALANCE is the key! When deciding whether to take a particular course or combination of courses...

ASK YOURSELF:

- Am I interested in this subject?
- Is this a subject with which I have experienced previous success?
- Will I be able to fully commit the time and effort required to be successful?
- Taking account of all of my academic and extracurricular commitments, can I be successful in this course?

If you can honestly answer yes to these questions, then the course is likely a good choice.

If you cannot honestly answer yes to these questions then you should:

- Rethink your choice
- Gather more information to make a more informed decision

There is more than one path for taking challenging courses, and by taking the above into account you will maximize your chances of choosing the right path for YOU!

Do Not Take Courses Because:

- **your friends are taking them...** what is interesting to your friends may not be interesting to you.
- **everybody says a course is “easy”...** what is easy for some is not always easy for others.
- **you “heard” that you have to take the course to get into the college...** do not believe everything you hear. Ask your counselor or go to the college/university admissions website to find out for sure what you need.
- **because a specific teacher teaches it...** there is no guarantee you will get a specific teacher when you register for a course. Choose the course because it interests you and you believe you will do well, regardless of the teacher.

Why Should I Take Rigorous Courses?

The short answer is: Preparation. To be specific, taking courses that stretch your understanding and skills in a variety of subject areas will enhance your chances of success at the post-secondary level, both educationally and professionally. Challenging courses help you to develop a deeper knowledge of subjects, allow you to develop and fine-tune critical thinking, analysis, technical, and communications skills; and more often than not, advanced courses offer an opportunity to identify and/or confirm areas of interest and future study. Challenging yourself appropriately can make learning come alive for you and move you closer to fulfilling your post-high school goals.

What Types of “Challenging” or Rigorous Courses Can I Choose from at Carmel High School?

All of the courses offered at Carmel High School aim to expand your knowledge and skills in a particular area as well as prepare you for courses at the next level. However, there are certain categories of courses that are considered advanced in nature and require more from students in terms of workload, level of understanding, and expectations.

- **Honors Courses**
- **Advanced Placement (AP) Courses**
- **International Baccalaureate (IB) Courses**
- **Dual Credit Courses**

**Please see our [Types of Advanced Courses](#) document for more information.*

So is One Type of Challenging Course Better than Another?

The short answer is “No”. What is best is that you continually work to challenge yourself academically in a way that is best for YOU. Colleges and universities value rigor, but they rarely will tell you that one type of rigorous course is better than another. However, they will tell you that they expect that you will be successful in the rigorous courses that you choose. If you gather the information and thoughtfully consider whether the course is a good fit based on your interests, strengths, and other commitments, that is what is best!

Other resources that may help you in gathering information about your course options include:

- Carmel High School Program of Studies (can be found online by typing “program of studies” in the search box on the CHS website) www.ccs.k12.in.us/chs
- College Board/AP www.apstudent.collegeboard.org
- International Baccalaureate Organization www.ibo.org

Types of Advanced Courses

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What Types of Advanced Courses are Offered at Carmel High School?

All of the courses offered at Carmel High School aim to expand your knowledge and skills in a particular area as well as prepare you for courses at the next level. However, there are certain categories of courses that are considered advanced in nature and require more from students in terms of workload, level of understanding, and expectations.

- **Honors Courses**—these courses typically require students to think at deeper levels than in their regular course counterparts. The courses may cover more material in a shorter period of time and/or dive deeper into topics. There may be increased expectations that students will work and learn material outside of class time to complement what is covered in the classroom.
- **Advanced Placement (AP) Courses**—AP courses are considered college level courses because the content covered often mirrors the survey level coursework taken at the college level in that content area. AP courses are developed in accordance with the College Board, the organization that oversees the AP program and dictates the content to be covered. There is typically a significant amount of reading and writing that is required in AP courses, and students are definitely expected to spend time outside of class preparing for class. Throughout AP coursework, teachers are working to prepare students to take the AP exam at the end of the course (administered each May). Students may earn college credit from their chosen college or university depending on their AP exam score AND the institution's AP credit policy. Often, students who do well in an AP course and on the AP exam are able to take upper-level courses in that content area upon arrival on campus.
- **International Baccalaureate (IB) Courses**—Like AP courses, IB courses are considered college level courses because the level of thinking and content covered is similar to that at the college level. IB courses tend to emphasize depth over breadth of knowledge in a content area. The approach is often interdisciplinary and global in perspective, and real world application of the knowledge is valued. IB course content is developed in accordance with the International Baccalaureate Organization, and student assessments are reviewed and scored locally by the classroom teacher AND sent out for review and scoring by IB representatives. IB courses often require students to be more independent in their learning and spend time outside of class time reading and preparing for class. IB courses emphasize written over objective assessments, and students prepare to take the IB exams at the conclusion of the course (administered each May.) Students may earn college credit from their chosen college or university depending on their IB exam score AND the institution's IB credit policy. Often, students who do well in an IB course and on the IB exam are able to take upper-level courses in that content area upon arrival on campus.
- **Dual Credit Courses**—these courses are offered through a partnership between CHS and a particular university. The CHS teacher is trained and approved to teach the course content that corresponds with a campus-based course, and students earn both high school credit and college credit upon successfully completing the course requirements. Students enrolled in dual credit courses apply to the partner institution through the CHS dual credit program and pay for the credit at the start of the course. Often credit earned in a dual credit course is transferrable to other institutions. Many of the dual credit courses offered at CHS are in elective areas and complement the honors, AP, and IB offerings that are primarily offered in core course areas. Dual credit courses offer expanded options for students to explore potential areas of career interest at a higher and/or deeper level.