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Is college algebra harder than statistics

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We'll start our discussion here, but beware that the passing rates don't automatically tell you which classes are hardest. How far away are you from a 4.0? Use our easy GPA tool to pinpoint how well you have to do in future classes to get your GPA up to that magical number. This is a complete list of passing rates on each AP exam with the most recent (2021) data. Exam Name Passing Rate (3+) Chinese Language and Culture (Total Group) 88% Art and Design: 2-D Design 87% Art and Design: Drawing 86% Seminar 85% Research 82% Spanish Language and Culture (Total Group) 80% Spanish Language and Culture (Total Group) 77% Calculus BC 76% Japanese Language and Culture (Total Group) 74% Physics C: Mechanics 73% Italian Language and Culture (Total Group) 72% Gov. and Politics - Comparative 71% Art and Design: 3-D Design 71% French Language and Culture (Total Group) 71% Physics C: Electricity & Magnetism 70% Italian Language and Culture (Standard Group) 69% French Language and Culture (Standard Group) 69% Computer Science Principles 67% Chinese Language and Culture (Standard Group) 66% Computer Science A 65% German Language and Culture (Total Group) 65% Physics 2 65% Spanish Literature 61% Music Theory 60% Statistics 59% Biology 59% Microeconomics 58% English Language and Composition 57% Latin 57% German Language and Culture (Standard Group) 55% European History 55% Art History 55% Japanese Language and Culture (Standard Group) 54% Psychology 53% Human Geography 52% World History 52% Macroeconomics 51% Calculus AB 51% Chemistry 51% Gov. and Politics - United States 51% Environmental Science 48% United States History 47% English Literature and Composition 44% Physics 1 42% Source: College Board. For language rates, "Total Group" includes all students, while "Standard Group" includes only those students who didn't indicate they speak this language at home or spent more than four weeks studying it abroad. You might be tempted to look at this table and say the tests with the lowest passing rates are hardest, and the ones with the highest passing rates are easiest. After all, if not many students can pass an AP test, doesn't that mean it's one of the hardest tests? But when you look at the data, the exams with some of the highest passing rates (Spanish, Chinese, Physics C: Mechanics) are often considered among the hardest. We're not including AP Seminar and the AP Studio Art scores in this assessment, since those grades are all portfolio-based, rather than exam-based. Meanwhile, some of the tests with the lowest passing rates (Human Geography, US Government and Politics, Environmental Science) are often seen as the easiest. So what's going on here? The truth is, the national passing rates often say more about the students taking the exams rather than the exams themselves. Some of the exams with low passing rates have those low rates because they are often taken in freshman/sophomore year, while some of the exams with high rates have more stringent prerequisites at many high schools. This means that the harder exams tend to have older, better-prepared students taking them, which raises their pass rates. In short, we have to look beyond national passing rates when figuring out which tests are the hardest. A Possibly More Reliable Indicator: 5 Rate Since pass rates don't actually tell us much, what about the 5 rate? Remember, a 5 is the highest possible AP score (read more about AP scores here). Shouldn't we be able to find the hardest AP tests by looking at the exams with the lowest 5 rates? Below is a table with all the AP exams, this time ranked by the percentage of test-takers who got a 5 in 2021. Exam Name 5 Rate Chinese Language and Culture (Total Group) 57% Japanese Language and Culture (Total Group) 48% Calculus BC: Calculus AB Subscore 47% Calculus BC 38% Physics C: Mechanics 33% Computer Science A 24% Physics C: Mechanics 24% Italian Language and Culture (Total Group) 21% Music Theory 20% Microeconomics 19% Chinese Language and Culture (Standard Group) 19% German Language and Culture (Total Group) 18% Macroeconomics 18% Calculus AB 18% Spanish Language and Culture (Total Group) 17% Gov. and Politics - Comparative 17% Japaneses Language and Culture (Standard Group) 16% Statistics 16% Physics 2 15% Psychology 14% Human Geography 14% Research 14% Art and Design: Drawing 14% French Language and Culture (Total Group) 13% Computer Science Principles 12% Italian Language and Culture (Standard Group) 12% Art History 12% Gov. and Politics - United States 12% Seminar 11% European History 11% Chemistry 11% Latin 10% Art and Design: 2-D Design 10% World History 10% United States History 10% English Language and Composition 9% Spanish Literature 8% French Language and Culture (Standard Group) 8% German Language and Culture (Standard Group) 7% Physics 1 7% Art and Design: 3-D Design 7% Biology 7% Environmental Science 7% English Literature and Composition 5% Source: College Board. For language rates, "Total Group" includes all students, while "Standard Group" includes only those students who didn't indicate they speak this language at home or spent more than four weeks studying it abroad. The 5 rate is, in fact, a decent way to spot some difficult exams, including AP English Literature and Biology. They both have very low 5 rates (5% for English Lit, 7% for Bio). But on the flip side, a relatively easy exam, AP Environmental Science, has a low 5 rate of 7%. Furthermore, some decidedly hard exams, like Chinese, Calculus BC, and Physics C, have very high 5 rates—up to 57%+ for Chinese! In other words, just looking at 5 rates doesn't tell the whole story, though some other articles have assumed that. This is why the best way to find the hardest AP exams is to focus on the ones with the most material to cover—as well as the most conceptually difficult topics, which we will do below. Looking for help studying for your AP exam? Our one-on-one online AP tutoring services can help you prepare for your AP exams. Get matched with a top tutor who got a high score on the exam you're studying for! Disclaimer: Take Into Account Your School's Variation Before we talk about which classes are the hardest, we want to clarify we mean the ones with the most difficult course material and hardest end-of-year exam. There is enormous variation in how the same AP class can be taught at different high schools, so we can't speak to the specific class difficulties at your high school. It may be that there is an AP class at your school that is known as the most difficult since the teacher is really tough, even though nationally it might be considered one of the easiest. Or maybe there is an AP class at your school most students see as a joke, even though the material is still very difficult. Since we can't report on the specifics at different high schools, we are focusing on which classes have the most/hardest material to cover and have a reputation for difficulty at multiple schools. We'll discuss below ways to explore how hard AP classes are at your school specifically so you can build an optimal schedule. Any AP class Professor McGonagall teaches would likely be super hard. Okay, Seriously, Which AP Classes Are the Hardest? United States History, Biology, English Literature, Calculus BC, Physics C, and Chemistry are often named as the hardest AP classes and tests. These classes have large curriculums, tough tests, and conceptually difficult material. We put together this list based on personal experience, online chatter, passing rates, 5 rates, and looking at their curricula in depth. We are not ranking these since their difficulty will vary quite a bit based on the student. For example, if you're a math whiz, Calculus BC will likely be easier than AP English Literature. But the opposite could be true for another student. But if you're considering any of these, be prepared for a tough course! AP US History Even though most students are exposed to American History multiple times, beginning in elementary school, AP US History is still a very tough class. First of all, this is a harder history exam than AP World History or even AP European History, since it covers a narrower span of history and a smaller geographical area, meaning the curriculum is incredibly detailed. This means you can't rely on general trends and observations like you can sometimes in World History—you have to know specific dates, movements, people, and laws. To take a small example, in a world history class, you might need to know that slavery ended in the United States during the Civil War. For a US history class, you would need to know the dates of the Civil War, the exact year of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the dates and content of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. You would also be expected to know about the major leaders and law-makers involved. The more detail you can remember, the better! This is because APUSH is known for having a very difficult multiple-choice section that requires a very detailed knowledge of US History from the pre-Columbian era up to the present day. Also, the more concrete evidence you can include in your free responses, the better essay scores you will get. If you have a knack for history, this class will be easier for you, but most students report it's very challenging. It's also likely to be a hard class to pass at many schools because teachers have to assign tons of reading and assignments to get through all the material before the AP test in May. Expect a fast-moving, assignment-heavy course. You can read College Board's full description here. If you think this is a figure from American History, you might want to consider fitting AP US History into your schedule. AP Biology This is a tough class and test any way you slice it. Even with the redesign back in 2012, which was meant to make AP Biology more accessible and less memorization-heavy, you still have to memorize tons of material for the test, everything from super detailed chemical processes (Krebs Cycle, anyone?) to cell biology to evolution. This means AP Biology teachers have to pack a ton onto their syllabi for this class, including time for experiments. The huge volume of info, coupled with the fact that Biology can be conceptually difficult, makes this a tough AP course. If you have taken a strong prerequisite Intro to Biology course, this test will be more manageable. Check out a full course description here to learn more. AP English Literature Along with AP US History, this is one of the hardest AP courses in the humanities. While AP English Language is also challenging, Literature requires reading texts that are generally more difficult. Compare, say, AP English Literature staple Crime and Punishment to a nonfiction article about the criminal justice system you might read in AP English Language. As a novel clocking in at over 400 pages, Crime and Punishment is much more difficult! AP English Literature also tests more specific rhetorical/literary terms and requires you to have a more fine-tuned ability to close read a passage. You're not just looking for the overall argument or effect like you are in AP English Language. You have to go under the hood and explain in detail how a piece of literature works. Finally, for AP Literature, you have to come prepared to write one of the essays about a book or play you read in class, but you can't actually bring the book or play with you to the exam. This means you have to study what you read in AP Literature very closely. So closely that you could formulate a detailed argument about a book, and even use quotes from it, without having the book with you! SparkNotes summaries won't cut it. In short, expect a longer and harder reading list, tougher multiple-choice questions, and more accountability for what you read in class. You can read the full College Board description of the test here. AP Chemistry Similar to biology, chemistry has a ton of material, lots of memorization, and requires a solid conceptual understanding of complicated chemical processes. AP Chemistry is known at many high schools for having tons of homework and tough tests—all necessary for students to learn enough to pass the AP exam at the end of the year. Don't attempt AP Chemistry unless you have already taken an introductory chemistry course. It would be impossible to learn everything you need to know about chemistry for the AP exam in just one year. You can read AP Chemistry's full course description here. AP Physics C Physics C is especially tough because not only are you learning challenging physics material, you also need to know calculus alongside it. While AP Physics 1 and 2 are algebra-based, both Physics C courses (Electricity & Magnetism and Mechanics) are calculus-based, meaning students need to know calculus well enough to apply it in physics. Some consider it "two classes in one" due to the necessary calculus knowledge. Furthermore, the material tested in Physics C is much more in-depth than Physics 1 or 2 (or the old Physics B). Physics C courses go into a great amount of depth about a few topics, while Physics 1 and 2 cover many topics with less depth. So just as US History is harder than World History, Physics C is tougher than Physics 1 and 2 because you need a greater depth of knowledge. Because of this, you should definitely have a physics prerequisite under your belt before taking Physics C, and you should have either already taken calculus or be taking it at the same time. You can read about Physics C at the course home pages for Electricity and Magnetism and Mechanics. AP Calculus BC Finally, AP Calculus BC is the toughest AP math exam, if not one of the hardest AP exams period. AP Calculus AB is also challenging, but covers less material and moves more slowly. AP Calculus BC often covers everything taught in Calculus AB in just the first semester of school—revealing one reason why it's so hard: intense pacing. You move fast in Calculus BC, which means you need to be prepared to keep up. There is not a lot of time to be lost in this class. If you struggle with a concept at the beginning of the year, it can make it harder to learn everything after that. In fact, if you find yourself struggling, seek out extra help from the teacher or a tutor as fast as you can so you don't fall behind. In some schools, Calculus BC requires an extra period in the day to fit in all the material before the AP exam. You also get into more conceptually difficult calculus topics than Calculus AB. In short, be prepared to work very hard and be vigilant about keeping up with the course. You can read College Board's description here. Want to build the best possible college application? We can help. PrepScholar Admissions is the world's best admissions consulting service. We combine world-class admissions counselors with our data-driven, proprietary admissions strategies. We've overseen thousands of students get into their top choice schools, from state colleges to the Ivy League. We know what kinds of students colleges want to admit. We want to get you admitted to your dream schools. Learn more about PrepScholar Admissions to maximize your chance of getting in. Note on Language AP Exams You may be wondering how hard the AP language tests are—after all, you can take AP tests in languages from Chinese to Spanish to French. The difficulty of these is a bit tougher to quantify, since AP Language exams test multiple years of learning a language, as opposed to one year of material. For students with tons of foreign language knowledge these can be incredibly easy exams. If you've lived abroad or are fluent in a language, the AP language test will not pose much of a challenge. (Some students who are native speakers of a language will even take an AP language exam!) But for students who have just been taking a language in school, these exams can be difficult, particularly the listening portions. So if you're thinking about an AP Language class, think about how many years of past experience you have. For example, if you've taken French for four years, you're probably well-prepared for AP French. But if you've only taken it for two years, you will probably struggle. Most schools have pretty stringent prerequisites for AP language classes for this reason. Action Steps If you want to take any of these classes, you need to get info about the class at your school. Although they are all objectively difficult, there can be huge differences in how the classes are taught and graded. Ideally, these classes should be taught by excellent teachers who can teach the material clearly and include plenty of review and AP exam practice. You should also think about your own strengths and weaknesses, and how well a tough AP class will fit into your schedule. Even though all of these AP classes have tough material, the difficulty of the class might vary from school to school. The class itself could be incredibly difficult (lots of assignments, reading, and hard tests)—and you should be prepared for that. However, the class could also be easy (not very many assignments, easy tests), meaning you will have to put in a lot of work on your own to be ready for the AP test. Knowing what the class's workload is like, and how that prepares you for the exam, is crucial to being prepared once May arrives. If the class is easy and you don't actually learn the material, you could fail the test despite getting good grades in the class. The bottom line here is that you'll have to work very hard to succeed in any of these classes. But that work could come at the behest of a teacher or from your own willpower. If you don't think you're learning the material well enough in class to pass the test, consider getting a prep book and studying on your own in the second half of the year. Get Info About a Class To get info about an AP class, first talk to your guidance counselor. Ask for the class's syllabus, the class's passing rate on the AP exam for the last few years, and what other students tend to say about the class. This will give you an idea of how well-taught a class is. Your guidance counselor can also recommend good prerequisite classes and teachers. Next, speak to the teacher if you can, or speak to a teacher you have who teaches the prerequisite class (for example, the Honors Biology teacher if you're thinking about AP Biology). The teacher can give you a sense of what the workload is like, what they expect of their students, and how much work they expect students to do on their own. Finally, find out what the word of mouth for the class is at your school by talking to older students. Don't rely too much on any one person's opinion, because students can exaggerate, but look for general trends. For example, if everyone says that AP Biology is really hard but they learned a lot and passed the AP exam, that's a sign the class is worth taking. Think About Your Strengths If you tend to do well in a subject, you will likely do well in a corresponding AP class, even if it's one of the hard ones. For example, even though AP Biology is hard, if you've done well in previous science classes and have a knack for memorization and critical thinking, you might be better prepared for AP Biology than, say, AP European History, even though that's not seen as one of the hardest AP classes. On the flipside, if you really struggle with something—like writing or math—you need to be extra careful about taking a tough AP class like AP English Literature or AP Calculus BC. We're not saying to avoid those classes if you think you might have a hard time. We are saying to be prepared to spend lots of time studying! Think About Your Overall Schedule How well you do in a hard AP class could also depend on your schedule. For example, AP Biology might be more feasible your sophomore or senior year since you won't be worrying about the ACT/SAT. However, if you take it junior year, you might have a hard time balancing ACT or SAT studying with the AP Biology class. Also consider other classes, your extracurricular commitments, work schedule, and family commitments before signing up for any of these AP classes. You don't want a tough AP class to overload an already busy schedule. Along the same lines, do not feel pressured to overload on AP classes in general. More is not necessarily better, even if there is pressure at your school to take 5 AP classes in one year. It's better to get two 4s than four 2s! And it's better to take AP classes that are interesting and meaningful to you. What's Next? Find out about the flipside of this discussion: the easiest AP classes. Also, read about how many AP classes you should be taking total. Also studying for the ACT/SAT? Come up with a target ACT or SAT score based on your top schools. When's the ideal time in your high school career to take the ACT/SAT? Find out here. One of the single most important parts of your college application is what classes you choose to take in high school (in conjunction with how well you do in those classes). Our team of PrepScholar admissions experts have compiled their knowledge into this single guide to planning out your high school course schedule. We'll advise you on how to balance your schedule between regular and honors/AP/IB courses, how to choose your extracurriculars, and what classes you can't afford not to take.

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