

Realistic Rigor



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

Mason 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 type 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 Mason High School Course Selection booklet (available on Edline), asking your current teachers, talking with your Academic Advisor, and/or talking with the teachers who teach the course in question.

Take stock of the big picture and reflect on how other commitments (academic AND extracurricular) may keep you from committing the appropriate amount of time and effort to be 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, better preparation for a future class, 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 transcripts, 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 the 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 college**...do not believe everything you hear. Ask your Academic Advisor or go to the college/university admissions website to find out for sure what you need.
- **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 Mason High School?

All the courses offered at Mason 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 course 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**
- **College Credit Plus Courses**

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. 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:

- Mason High School Course Catalog (located on Edline under Academic Advising page or on masoncomets.org under scheduling process on the right hand side.)
- College Board/AP www.apstudent.collegeboard.org
- College Credit Plus www.ohiohighered.org/ccp

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- **Honors Courses** – these courses typically require students to think at deeper levels than in their regular course counterparts. The courses may cover more material at a quicker pace 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 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 (this is optional and 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 a college campus. If you can answer yes to all of the following questions, AP courses may be a good fit for you:
 - Do I have excellent work ethic?
 - Do I manage my time well?
 - Can I communicate my ideas clearly and properly in writing?
 - Can I read accelerated texts (above grade level, if not above grade 12)?
 - Am I mature and responsible?
 - Am I driven and determined?
 - If I feel challenged, do I see it as an opportunity to grow and learn?
 - Can I accept failure on my first attempt?
 - Am I involved in extracurricular activities?
 - Do I speak with confidence?
- **College Credit Plus** – These courses supplement or enrich courses offered in the Mason High School curriculum. Students will be required to meet both college admissions and course requirements by the accrediting university. Students participating in College Credit Plus courses may do so in a variety of ways. This may include a course taught by an accredited Mason High School teacher, or by taking courses in a virtual setting from a local institution, or as a full time student at a local institution.