

Academic Pathway Planner: Building a Transcript Colleges Can Actually Read

Here are three illustrative 9th–12th grade plans that show rigor, direction, and growth, assuming a reasonably well-resourced high school with Honors/AP options and 6–7 classes per year.

Plan A: Balanced, Highly Selective Prep

Goal: Competitive for selective colleges, not tied to a specific major yet.

9th Grade

- English 9 (Honors if ready)
- Algebra I or Geometry (Honors if strong in math)
- Biology (Honors)
- World History / Global Studies (Honors)
- World Language I or II (e.g., Spanish II)
- Fine Art (music, art, or theater)
- PE / Health

10th Grade

- English 10 Honors
- Geometry or Algebra II (Honors)
- Chemistry (Honors)
- AP World History or Honors World History
- World Language II or III
- One interest-based elective (e.g., Intro CS, Journalism, Business)
- PE

11th Grade

- AP English Language or Honors English 11
- Algebra II, Precalculus, or Precalculus Honors
- Physics (Honors) or AP Physics 1
- AP U.S. History (or equivalent advanced U.S. course)
- World Language III or IV (Honors if available)
- One rigorous elective (AP Psych, AP CS, advanced art, or similar)

12th Grade

- AP English Literature or advanced senior English seminar
- Precalculus, AP Calculus AB/BC, or Statistics (depending on 11th grade)
- Advanced science: AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Physics, or Environmental Science
- Government/Econ or AP Gov/AP Econ
- World Language IV/V or capstone in a sustained academic interest
- One additional advanced elective (research, capstone, or AP in area of strength)

This plan keeps four years of core subjects and shows rising rigor each year.

Plan B: STEM / Engineering Lean

Goal: Strong preparation in math and science for engineering/CS while still meeting broad expectations.

9th Grade

- English 9 Honors
- Geometry Honors
- Biology Honors
- World History / Human Geography (Honors)
- World Language I or II
- Intro to Computer Science / Robotics (elective)
- PE / Health

10th Grade

- English 10 Honors
- Algebra II Honors
- Chemistry Honors
- AP World History or Honors World History
- World Language II or III
- Engineering/CS elective (e.g., PLTW, Data Science)
- PE

11th Grade

- AP English Language
- Precalculus Honors or AP Precalculus
- Physics Honors or AP Physics 1 (AP Physics C later if possible)
- AP U.S. History
- World Language III or IV
- Advanced CS/Engineering (AP CS A, Robotics II, or independent research)

12th Grade

- AP English Literature or advanced STEM-friendly writing course
- AP Calculus AB/BC (BC preferred for top engineering targets if prepared)
- AP Physics C (Mechanics; add E&M if offered) or AP Chemistry
- Government/Econ or AP Gov/AP Econ
- STEM elective such as Data Science, Advanced CS, or Engineering Design capstone
- Optional: additional AP science (e.g., AP Computer Science Principles, AP Biology)

This plan hits calculus, biology, chemistry, and physics, which many highly selective STEM programs expect.

Plan C: Humanities / Social Science Lean

Goal: Strong reading, writing, and social science profile with sustained language and rigorous math/science baseline.

9th Grade

- English 9 Honors
- Algebra I or Geometry (Honors if ready)
- Biology (College Prep or Honors)
- World History / Cultural Studies (Honors)
- World Language I or II
- Arts or Writing elective (Theater, Creative Writing, Journalism)
- PE / Health

10th Grade

- English 10 Honors
- Geometry or Algebra II (Honors)
- Chemistry (College Prep or Honors)
- AP World History or Honors World History
- World Language II or III
- Journalism / Debate / Model UN / similar elective
- PE

11th Grade

- AP English Language
- Algebra II or Precalculus (Honors if aiming high)
- Physics or an additional lab science (Honors if possible)
- AP U.S. History (or equivalent advanced U.S. course)
- World Language III or IV (Honors/advanced)
- Social science elective (Psychology, Sociology, AP Human Geography, or similar)

12th Grade

- AP English Literature or advanced seminar (e.g., Literature & Philosophy, Rhetoric)
- Precalculus, AP Statistics, or AP Calculus AB depending on prior math path
- Advanced social science: AP Gov, AP Econ, or AP Psych
- World Language IV/V or capstone (literature, conversation, or AP language)
- Additional writing/research course (newspaper, capstone thesis, independent research)
- One additional rigorous elective (e.g., AP Art History, AP Seminar/Research)

This plan shows depth in reading, writing, and analysis while still maintaining four years of core academics.