CollegeBoard

ACES (Admitted Class Evaluation Service™)

AP® Placement Validity Study

Detailed Documentation

June 2026

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Overview of an AP Placement Validity Study

AP Placement Validity studies are designed to assist institutions in evaluating the success of their AP policies for placing students in higher-level courses. To assess whether a particular policy for granting AP credit is working as intended, an AP study compares the performance of students who entered a higher-level course through AP credit for the introductory course(s) with the performance of students who entered the higher-level course by completing the introductory course(s) at the institution. An AP study may also include an "other" group of students who qualified for entry into the higher-level course through a "parallel" path, such as dual enrollment, if an institution chooses to include such a group in the comparison. Grades in the higher-level course serve as the measure of student performance in the statistical comparison of the groups.

A key step in preparing the data for an AP study is the assignment of students to comparison groups. While the assignment of students to an "other" group is primarily based on an indicator provided by the institution in the data submission, the assignment of students to all other comparison groups is inferred from a student's course-taking record and score(s) on the AP Exam(s) as they relate to the institution's policy for granting AP credit and entry into the higher-level course.

In addition to performing a statistical comparison among the comparison groups, an AP study provides descriptive information on the performance of students in the higher-level course and in the introductory course(s) by AP Exam score within each group. It also breakouts grades in the higher-level course by the background characteristics of the students in each comparison group.

Sources of Information

The programming procedures underlying ACES rely on three sources of information to perform an AP study:

- the placement policy (or policies) specified by the institution,
- AP Exam scores retrieved from the ACES database, and
- student course records submitted by the institution.

Placement Policies

The ACES system collects information on an institution's placement policies in the Study Design section of the AP user interface. The policy specifications lay out the various ways a student may qualify to enter a higher-level course, referred to as paths of entry elsewhere in this document and in the *Validity Report* prepared for an institution. A single AP placement policy may apply to more than one higher-level course if the paths for entering those courses are the same (e.g., a 3 or above on the AP Psychology Exam can place a student in either one of two higher-level courses, Psychology 201 or Human Development 201; without AP Psychology

credit, the student must first take Psychology 101, the introductory course). To be the same, the paths must involve the same AP Exam(s), the same introductory course(s), and the same AP score(s) to qualify for AP credit for the introductory course(s).

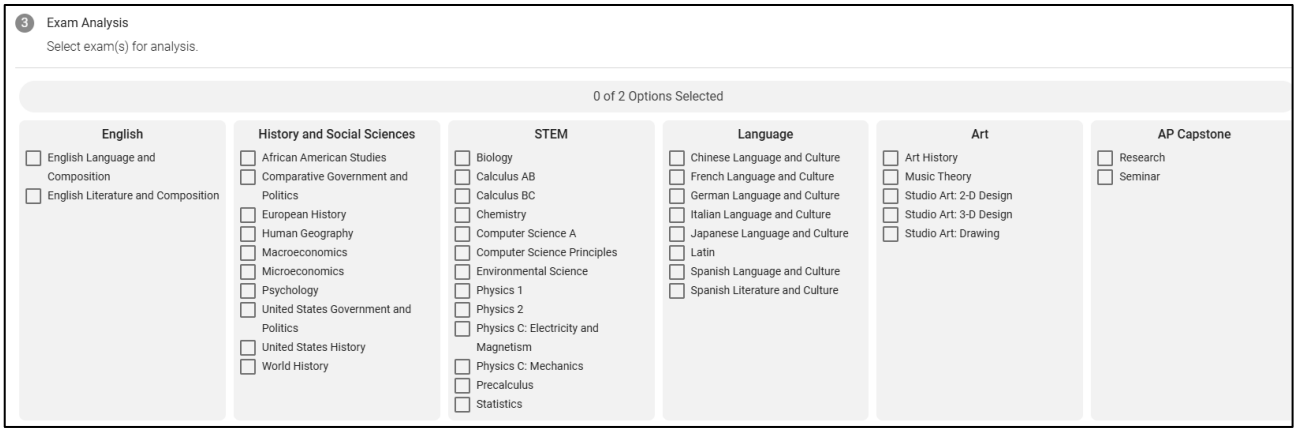
An institution may request an evaluation of up to three higher-level courses in a single policy, and one or more than one policy in a single AP submission. Currently there is no limit on the number of policies that may be specified in a single request. The programming procedure iterates through the policies, generating a separate set of results for each higher-level course specified in a policy, or in the case of a tiered policy, for each higher-level course at the top of the tier (see below for a description of a tiered policy).

Specifying a Policy

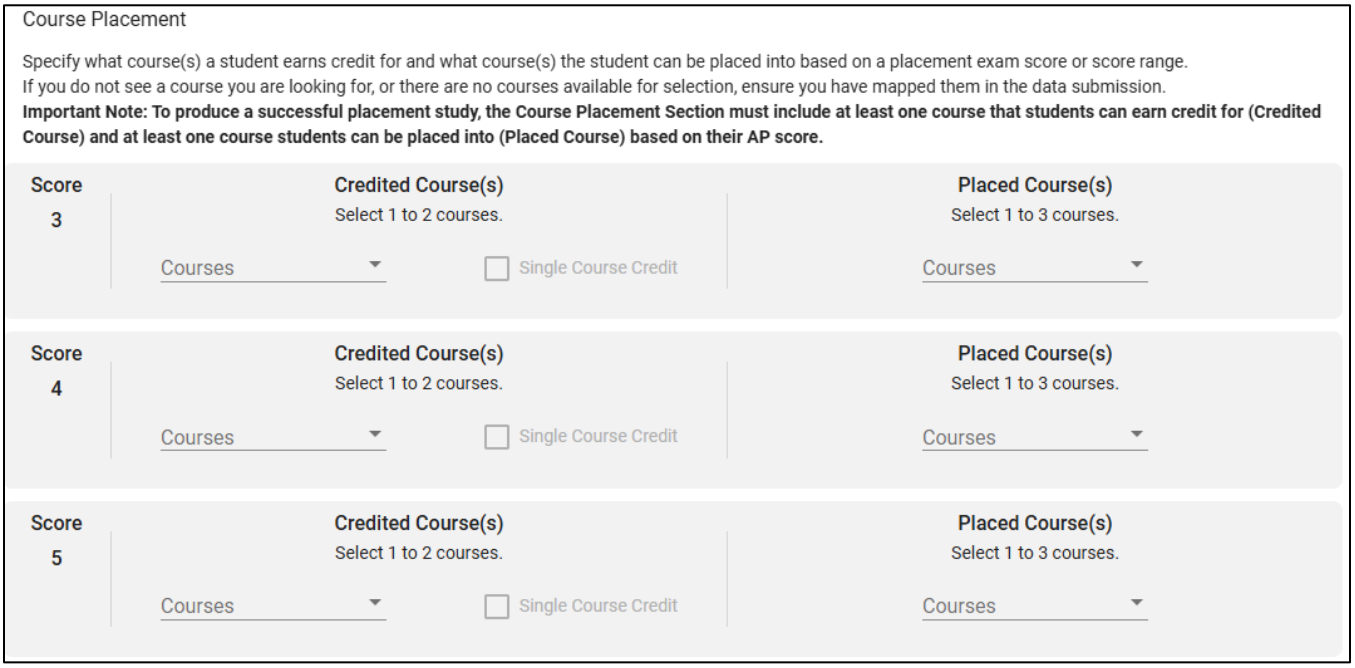
For each policy of interest, the institution must specify:

- The AP Exam(s) used to place a student in the higher-level course(s). A policy may include two AP Exams if scores on the Exams are interchangeable. Two Exams are interchangeable if AP credit for the introductory course(s) may be earned with the same qualifying scores on either Exam.
- The introductory course(s) a student must complete, or earn AP credit for, to qualify for entry into the higher-level course(s). A single policy may include up to two introductory courses.
- The AP scores (3, 4, and 5) that qualify a student for AP credit for the introductory course(s).
- The higher-level course(s) a student may enter (be placed in) with AP credit, by completing the introductory course(s), or through a "parallel" path. A single policy may include up to three higher-level courses, also referred to as placed courses.
- Whether students can earn credit for the introductory course(s) through a "parallel" path.

The information for each policy is entered into three sections in the user interface. The first section, labeled "Exam Analysis," is organized by subject matter and asks the institution to select the AP Exam(s) covered in the particular policy. If a policy involves two interchangeable Exams, the user interface performs a validity check to ensure that the Exams are selected under the same subject matter.

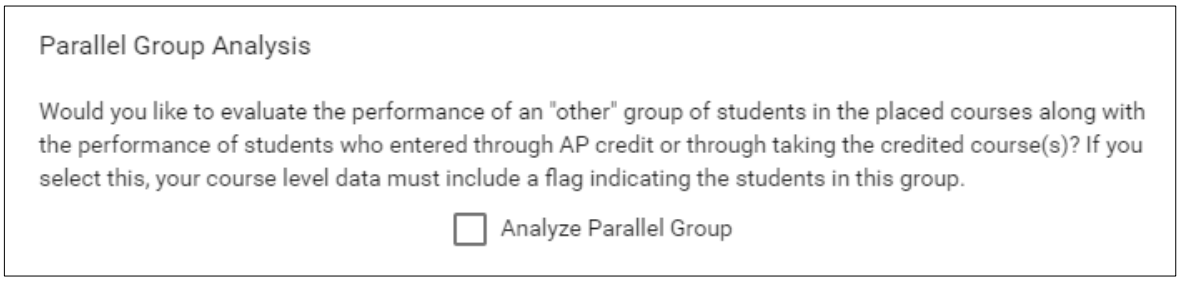


The second section, labeled "Course Placement," asks the institution to select from the drop-down menus the *Credited Course(s)* and the *Placed Course(s)* associated with scores of 3, 4, and 5 on the specified AP Exam(s). The *Credited Course(s)* refer to the introductory course(s) that a student may skip with a qualifying AP score, while the *Placed Course(s)* refer to the higher-level course(s). If a particular AP Exam score does not qualify students to skip the introductory course(s), then the *No Credit* option is selected from the *Credited Course(s)* drop-down menu in the row corresponding to that AP score and the *Placed Course(s)* dropdown menu is automatically deactivated in that row since there are no placed courses associated with that AP score. The *Single Course Credit* checkbox serves to identify policies in which a student can choose to complete either one of two introductory courses to gain entry into the higher-level course(s) (see the *One Introductory Course, Choice* policy below).



The third section asks the institution to indicate whether they would like to include a "parallel" group in the comparison of students who entered the higher-level course. If this option is

selected, the data file must include an “other” flag identifying those students who entered the higher-level course through a “parallel” path.



Types of Policies

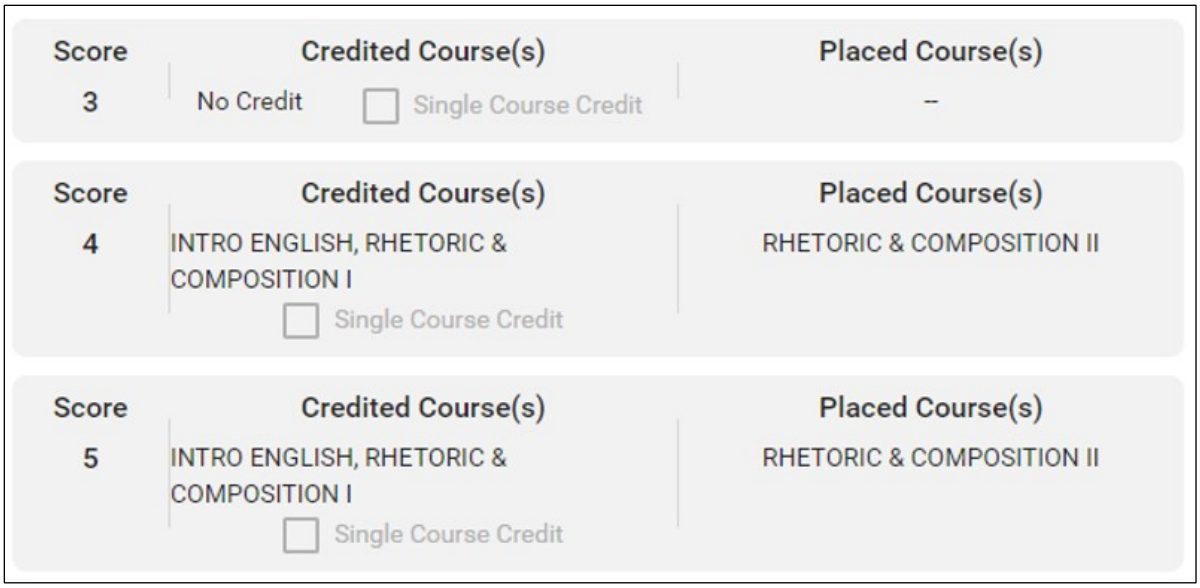
While the system accommodates a range of placement policies, it is not designed to cover all possibilities. It focuses on policies requiring a student to complete (or earn AP credit for) one or two introductory courses (also referred to as AP-equivalent courses). In all cases, the policies may include one AP Exam or two interchangeable AP Exams, up to three higher-level courses, and a “parallel” path for entry into the higher-level course(s). In each case, an institution must specify which AP scores qualify a student for AP credit for the introductory course(s). Earning AP credit in the context of an AP placement study means that a student can enter the higher-level course(s) without completing the required introductory course(s). It does not mean that the student has earned college credit for the introductory course(s), although that may also be the case.

The system accommodates four main types of policies requiring a student to compete (or earn AP credit for) one or two introductory course(s) to enter higher-level course(s):

One Introductory Course, No-choice. A one introductory course, no-choice policy requires a student to complete (or earn credit for) one introductory course to enter the higher-level course(s). To specify a policy of this type, the name of the introductory course is selected from the drop-down menu in the *Credited Course(s)* column for each AP score that qualifies a student to enter the higher-level course(s) with AP credit for that introductory course. The name(s) of the higher-level course(s) are selected from the *Placed Course(s)* dropdown menu in each row corresponding to a qualifying AP score. The example below shows that a student must complete Rhetoric & Composition I, or have an AP Exam score of 3, 4, or 5, to enter Rhetoric & Composition II.

One Introductory Course, Choice. A choice policy also requires a student to complete (or earn AP credit for) one introductory course to enter the higher-level course(s). It differs from the no-choice policy in that a student can choose to complete either one of two courses to gain entry into the higher-level course(s). In this case, both introductory courses are selected from the drop-down menu in the *Credited Courses(s)* column for each AP score that qualifies a student to enter the higher-level course(s) with AP credit. The *Single Course Credit* box is checked to indicate that only one of the two introductory courses is required to qualify for entry into the higher-level course(s). The higher-level courses are selected from the *Placed Course(s)* drop-down menu in the rows corresponding to the qualifying AP scores. In the example below the *Single Course Credit* box is checked to indicate that a student must complete Intro English *or* Rhetoric & Composition I, or have an AP score of 3, 4, or 5, to enter Rhetoric & Composition II.

Two introductory courses, non-tiered. In a two introductory courses, non-tiered policy a student must complete (or earn AP credit for) both introductory courses to enter the higher-level course(s). In this type of policy, a student earns credit for *both* introductory courses with a qualifying AP score. Both courses must be selected from the drop-down menu in the *Credited Courses(s)* column for each AP score that qualifies a student to enter the higher-level course(s) through AP credit for both introductory courses. The higher-level courses are selected from the *Placed Course(s)* dropdown menu in each row corresponding to a qualifying AP score. The example below shows that a student must complete Intro English and Rhetoric & Composition I, or have an AP score of 4 or 5, to enter Rhetoric & Composition II. Note that the *No Credit* option is selected from the *Credited Course(s)* dropdown menu in the row corresponding to an AP score of 3 to indicate that no credit is given for an AP score of 3. Also note that the *Placed Course(s)* dropdown menu in that row is deactivated since there are no placed courses associated with an AP score of 3.



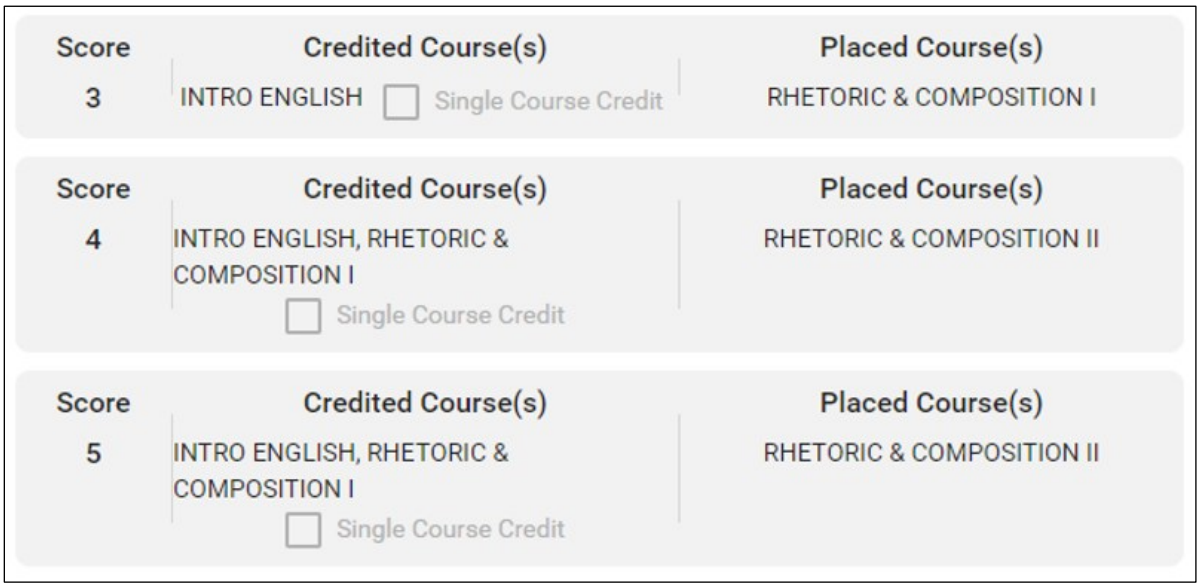
Two introductory courses, tiered. In a two introductory courses, tiered policy a student must complete (or earn AP credit for) both introductory courses to enter the higher-level course(s) at the top of the tier (i.e., the placed courses corresponding to an AP score of 5). It differs from a non-tiered policy in that the introductory courses are sequenced, and a student may earn AP credit for the first course in the sequence, or for both courses in the sequence, depending on his or her score(s) on the AP Exam(s).

To specify a policy of this type, the first introductory course in the sequence is selected from the drop-down menu in the Credited Course(s) column for each AP score that grants AP credit for just that introductory course, while both introductory courses in the sequence are selected from the drop-down menu in the Credited Course(s) column for each AP score that grants AP credit for both introductory courses in the sequence.

If a student earns AP credit for just the first introductory course in the sequence, the student must complete the second introductory course in the series to gain entry into the higher-level course(s) at the top of the tier. To convey this, the second introductory course in the sequence

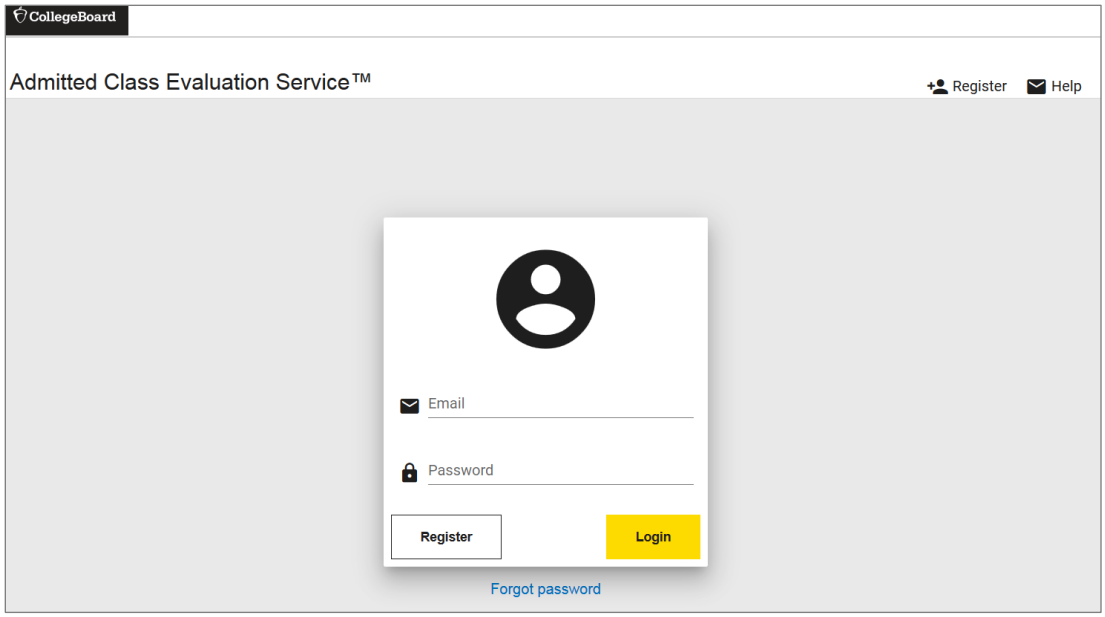
is selected from the drop-down menu in the Placed Courses(s) column for each AP score that qualifies a student for AP credit for just the first introductory course in the sequence. For AP scores that grant credit for both introductory courses, the higher-level courses at the top of the tier are selected from the Placed Course(s) dropdown menu in each row corresponding to AP scores that grant credit for both introductory courses.

In the example below, Intro English is the first course in the introductory sequence, and Rhetoric & Composition I is the second course in the introductory sequence. A student may enter Rhetoric & Composition II in one of three ways: by earning credit for both courses with an AP score of 4 or 5, by earning credit for Intro English with an AP score of 3 and completing Rhetoric and Composition I, or by completing both introductory courses.



Getting Started – Account Registration

1. Navigate to https://acesportal.collegeboard.org.
2. Click "Register" on the login page.
3. Fill out the appropriate information (name, title, email, phone number, and institution (drop-down menu)).
    a. *Email*: Must be a .gov or .edu address.
    b. *Institution*: If you are from a university system, not one specific institution, please select "non-institution user" and type in the name of your university system in the box provided.



4. Click “Register.”
5. Upon registering, an “Account created!” message will appear.
6. Within a few minutes, you should receive a confirmation email.
    a. Please check your spam/junk folder if you do not see your confirmation email in your inbox.
7. Click on the link within the confirmation email to activate the account and create a new password.
    a. Your password must be at least eight characters and contain at least one number, uppercase letter, and symbol (!, ?, @, *).

Password Reset

1. Click on “Forgot Password” on the login page.

    Login with your new password.

Logging In

1. Navigate to the login page: https://acesportal.collegeboard.org.
2. Enter your registered email and password.
3. Click “Login.”

Creating a Study

1. From the home screen, navigate to the "New Study" section.
2. Select "AP Placement Validity Study."
    a. When you request a study for the first time, you will be prompted to choose whether you are a two-year or a four-year institution. You will only need to indicate this information the first time you use the system as it will save your choice for future study requests.
    b. Consider sample size and other study requirements:
        - A minimum of 15 students with AP scores and course-taking records indicating they entered the higher-level (placed) course with AP credit is needed.
        - A minimum of 15 students without AP credit with course records indicating they entered the higher-level course by completing the required introductory AP-equivalent course(s) is needed.
        - A minimum of two semesters or terms of course records are needed.
    c. Upload the following data elements using the data template and design your study:
        - Personal identifying information including name, gender, date of birth, and address so that institutional records can be matched to AP Exam scores
        - High School AICODE
        - Course code, section (optional), title, term, and grade information for the introductory and subsequent courses to be studied
        - Flag field (optional) identifying students entering the sequent or subsequent course via other credit pathway if being studied

ACES Technical Support

Support email: aces-collegeboard@norc.org

Support telephone: 1-800-439-8309

Support hours: Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm EST

General information: collegeboard.org/aces