Predicting AP Exam Success Using PreACT and ACT Test Scores

Did you know? PreACT and ACT scores are powerful tools for identifying students who are well prepared for Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Recent ACT research[1] highlights a strong correlation between performance on these assessments and success in AP coursework.

By using PreACT and ACT results, schools can guide students toward AP courses where they're most likely to thrive — maximizing opportunities for college and career readiness.

How It Helps

- Inform AP placement decisions with data-driven insights.
- Identify students with strong potential for advanced opportunities.
- Monitor readiness early by tracking progress from grade 8 onward. With score insights from PreACT® 8/9 (grades 8-9) and PreACT (grade 10), and the ACT (grade 11), educators can make confident, proactive decisions that set students on the path to AP achievement and long-term success.

How to Read the Data

The table below provides two AP-ready benchmark scores — one for fall testing and one for spring testing. These scores align with when students take the PreACT 8/9, PreACT, or ACT assessments, helping educators interpret results consistently across testing windows.

Example: In the first row of the table, fall test takers who achieve a PreACT or ACT English + Reading (E+R) score of 42 or higher are considered likely prepared for success in AP English Language and Composition the following year. At this score level, students have at least a 50% or greater chance of earning a 3 or higher on the corresponding AP exam. Students who achieve a PreACT or ACT E+R score of 54 or higher in the fall have a 50% or greater chance of earning a 4 or higher score.

ACT recommends a holistic approach to evaluating AP readiness. Use PreACT 8/9, PreACT, and/or ACT scores alongside other important factors — such as coursework, grades, motivation, and student interests — to build a full understanding of each student's potential for success.

Learn More:
act.org/k12

1. Radunzel, J., & Allen, J. (2020). PreACT and ACT Test Scores Associated with AP Exam Success.

PreACT/ACT Scores Associated with a 50% Chance of Success on AP Exams

AP Course	PreACT/ACT Score	3 or Higher		4 or Higher	
		Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
ELA-Related					
English Language and Compostion	E+R	42	45	54	56
	ELA	20	21	25	26
English Literature and Compostion	E+R	49	51	61	62
	ELA	23	24	28	28
European History	E+R	45	49	57	60
	ELA	21	23	26	28
Human Geography	E+R	41	41	52	52
	ELA	19	19	24	24
Psychology	E+R	39	42	46	49
	ELA	19	20	22	23
US Govt. and Politics	E+R	47	50	59	61
	ELA	22	23	27	28
US History	E+R	44	47	55	57
	ELA	21	22	25	26
World History	E+R	39	43	51	55
	ELA	19	20	24	25
STEM-Related					
Biology	STEM	22	23	26	27
Calculus AB*	STEM	25	25	28	28
Chemistry	STEM	24	25	28	29
Computer Science A	STEM	24	24	28	28
Environmental Science	STEM	23	24	25	26
Macroeconomics	STEM	24	26	27	28
Microeconomics	STEM	23	25	25	28
Physics 1**	STEM	27	27	30	30
Physics C: E and M	STEM	26	28	28	30
Physics C: Mechanics	STEM	25	25	28	28
Statistics	STEM	23	24	27	28
Other					
Art History	COMP.	22	22	28	28
Music Theory	COMP.	21	22	25	27
PSAT/SAT-derived					
Comparative Govt. and Politics	COMP.	22	22	25	25
Computer Science Principles	COMP.	18	18	25	25

Note: E+R = English + Reading score. Comp. = Composite score. ELA score (average of the English, reading, and writing scores) is only available for the ACT test. STEM score is the average of the math and science scores.
*Cut scores are not reported for AP Calculus BC. As recommended by College Board as part of AP Potential, students who meet the AP Calculus AB cut scores and perform well in courses leading up to Calculus may consider taking AP Calculus BC.
**Cut scores are not reported for AP Physics 2. As recommended by College Board as part of AP Potential, students who meet the AP Physics 1 cut scores and perform well in prerequisite courses for AP Physics 2 may consider taking AP Physics 2.