



The Score-Setting Process

When you receive your AP Score Report and find out what score you earned on that exam you took in May, you may wonder just how you got an AP score of 3 instead of a 4, or a 4 instead of a 3. What happened in that time between mid-May and early July, the results of which you see in the score report? Here is the story:

Scoring the AP Exams

After the May AP Exams, participating schools return all AP Exam materials to the AP Program.

- ♣ The **multiple-choice section** is scored by computer. Each answer sheet is scanned and the total multiple-choice score equals the number of correct responses.
- ♣ The **free-response section** is scored at the annual AP Reading held during the first two weeks in June. Specially appointed college professors and experienced AP teachers evaluate free-response answers.
- ♣ The total scores from the free-response section and the multiple-choice section are combined to form a **composite score**.

From Composite Score to AP Score

The process of **score setting**—establishing the AP score boundaries (determining how many composite score points equals what AP score)—takes place immediately after the Reading.

AP Exam scores are reported on a 5-point scale as follows:

- 5 Extremely well qualified*
- 4 Well qualified*
- 3 Qualified*
- 2 Possibly qualified*
- 1 No recommendation**

*Qualified to receive college credit or advanced placement

**No recommendation to receive college credit or advanced placement

During score-setting sessions (there is one for each AP Exam) composite scores are translated into AP scores by setting boundaries for each score based on a statistical technique called **equating**.

Equating relates an AP Exam from one year to an AP Exam from another year so that performance on the two exams can be compared. This is accomplished by looking at how well AP students performed **on a set of multiple-choice questions that is common to both exams**. These particular multiple-choice questions cover the curriculum content and represent a broad range of difficulty; they can therefore provide information about the ability level of the current group of students and indicate the current exam's level of difficulty. This same set of questions may show up on next year's AP Exam and the one after that too. That's why you aren't supposed to talk about or share the multiple-choice questions from the AP Exam with anyone; **it's all because of equating!**

Comparability Studies

The AP Program periodically conducts college score comparability studies in all AP subjects. These studies compare the performance of AP students with that of college students in the courses for which successful AP students will receive credit. In general, the AP composite score cutpoints are set so that the lowest composite score for an AP score of 5 is equivalent to the average score for college students earning scores of A. Similarly, the lowest composite scores for AP scores of 4, 3, and 2 are equivalent to the average scores for students with college scores of B, C, and D, respectively.

Students who earn AP Exam scores of 3 or above are generally considered to be qualified to receive college credit and/or placement into advanced courses due to the fact that their AP Exam scores are equivalent to a college course score of "middle C " or above. However, the awarding of credit and placement is determined by each college or university and students should check with the institution to verify its AP credit and placement policies. Students can find this information by using the [AP Credit Policy search](#).

How Many Composite Score Points Equal What AP Score?

AP scores are not like the A, B, C or number scores that you may have come to know and love over the past 11 or 12 years; "A" doesn't equal a predictable 91 to 100 and getting 81 to 90 points or percent doesn't guarantee a "B." Confused? Before you **EXIT**, **Close**, or **Escape**, look at the table below.

AP Scores and Composite Score Ranges

Gr.	AP U.S. History		AP English Language and Composition	
	2001 Composite Score Range	2002 Composite Score Range	2001 Composite Score Range	2002 Composite Score Range
5	114 to 180	115 to 180	108 to 150	113 to 150
4	92 to 113	94 to 114	93 to 107	96 to 112
3	74 to 91	76 to 93	72 to 92	76 to 95
2	42 to 73	46 to 75	43 to 71	48 to 75
1	0 to 41	0 to 45	0 to 42	0 to 47

- ♣ Notice that for each AP score there isn't a fixed composite score range that is consistent from year to year, or even from subject to subject.
- ♣ Instead you will see that to earn a score of 4 in the 2001 AP U.S. History Exam, for example, you would need a composite score between 92 and 113 points, while to earn the same score in the 2002 exam, you would need a composite score between 94 and 114 points.
- ♣ You may be very surprised to see that your composite score can be approximately two-thirds of the total possible score and you could still earn a score of 5! Earning that score on other exams might translate to an "F" at worst and a "D" at best.
- ♣ The table also illustrates the variation that occurs between AP subjects in setting scores. If you compare exam scores and equivalent composite score ranges for AP U.S History and AP English Language, you will see that the requirements for a score of 3 are quite different. For example, a student who scored 72 on the 2001 AP English Language Exam would earn a score 3; this score would only earn a 2 on the 2001 AP U.S. History Exam, however.

The score-setting process is a precise, labor intensive, very individual scrutiny and mathematical, statistical, and psychometric analysis of the results of a specific AP Exam in a specific year and the particular group of students who took that exam. When the scores are set for the AP Exam(s) you take in this year's administration, and the outcome reaches you in the form of your score report, you can be assured that your AP score is an accurate assessment of your proficiency in an equivalent college course.