

ACT Aspire Scores Associated with AP Exam Success

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Many schools and districts administer ACT® Aspire® to measure progress towards college and career readiness. A recent study suggests that ACT Aspire scores can also be used to help identify students who are academically prepared and may benefit from some of the more rigorous courses offered in high schools across the nation, including Advanced Placement (AP) courses.¹ The purpose of this brief is to highlight the ACT Aspire AP-ready scores found in the study. ACT Aspire tests administered in grades 8–10 can be used to measure readiness for AP courses taken the subsequent academic year (grades 9–11).

The study found that ACT Aspire scores are positively related to AP exam scores and are good predictors of success. The recommended linkages to AP exam success – defined two ways by either receiving a score of 3 or higher on the AP exam or receiving a 4 or higher on the AP exam – were developed in relation to content-relevant scores for most courses (as shown in Table 1). More specifically, the sum of the English and Reading scores (denoted E+R) and the English Language Arts (ELA) score (average of the English, reading, and writing scores) were used for ELA-related AP courses and the STEM score (average of the math and science scores) was used for STEM-related courses.

For each course and outcome, two AP-ready scores are provided—one for fall and one for spring testing depending on when students take ACT Aspire. For example, the first row of results within the table indicates that students who tested in the fall and achieved an ACT Aspire E+R score of 867 or higher are likely academically ready to succeed in AP English Language and Composition in the subsequent academic year as they have a 50% or greater chance of earning a 3 or higher on the corresponding AP exam. Those with an ACT Aspire E+R score of 879 or higher have a 50% or greater chance of earning a 4 or higher score. The AP-ready scores derived from spring testing in grade 9 or 10 are slightly higher at 870 (for 3 or higher) and 881 (for 4 or higher) to account for the reduced time between taking ACT Aspire and the AP exam.

For a holistic view of student readiness, we recommend using ACT Aspire scores in combination with other measures (e.g., high school coursework taken, high school grades, motivation, interest) to assess readiness for AP courses.

¹ Radunzel, J., & Allen, J. (2020). *Predicting success on Advanced Placement exams using ACT Aspire, PreACT, and ACT test scores*. Iowa City, IA: ACT. <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/R1835-predicting-success-AP.pdf>. Data for the study was available for 49,220 students from 318 high schools who had taken at least one AP exam in May of 2015 through May of 2019 and had previously taken ACT Aspire, PreACT®, or the ACT test.



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Table 1. ACT Aspire Scores Associated with a 50% Chance of Success on AP Exams

AP course	ACT Aspire score	3 or higher		4 or higher	
		Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
ELA-related					
English Lang. and Composition	E+R	867	870	879	881
	ELA	433	434	438	438
English Lit. and Composition	E+R	875	877	884	884
	ELA	436	437	440	440
European History	E+R	870	875	881	883
	ELA	434	436	438	440
Human Geography	E+R	865	865	878	878
	ELA	432	432	437	437
Psychology	E+R	862	867	872	875
	ELA	432	433	435	436
US Govt and Politics	E+R	873	876	882	884
	ELA	435	436	439	440
US History	E+R	869	873	880	881
	ELA	434	435	438	438
World History	E+R	862	868	877	880
	ELA	432	433	437	438
STEM-related					
Biology	STEM	435	436	440	442
Calculus AB*	STEM	439	439	442	442
Chemistry	STEM	438	439	442	443
Computer Science A	STEM	438	438	442	442
Environmental Science	STEM	436	438	439	440
Macroeconomics	STEM	438	440	442	442
Microeconomics	STEM	436	439	439	442
Physics 1**	STEM	442	442	444	444
Physics C: E and M	STEM	440	442	442	444
Physics C: Mechanics	STEM	439	439	442	442
Statistics	STEM	436	438	442	442
Other					
Art History	Comp.	435	435	441	441
Music Theory	Comp.	433	435	438	440
PSAT/SAT-derived					
Comparative Govt. and Politics	Comp.	435	435	438	438
Computer Science Principles	Comp.	428	428	438	438

Note. E+R = English + Reading score. Comp. = Composite score. For grade 10, ACT Aspire scores range from 403 to 449 for ELA, from 800 to 898 for E+R, from 400 to 455 for STEM, and from 400 to 452 for Composite.

*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.

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