

# Pennsylvania Homeschoolers AP Online

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# WHO WE ARE, AND WHO WE HOPE YOU ARE

## Our Mission

### Academic Excellence

Each of our courses is academically rigorous and challenges our students to think critically. We believe that students should come away from their classes with more than just exam preparation; they should develop a deep understanding of course material, not just superficial proficiency, and they should be prepared for further college-level study in the subject matter. Our AP teachers rigorously prepare students for all aspects of the AP exam, providing extensive exam-style practice, but they also encourage their students to pursue challenges beyond the AP exams, such as entry into academic competitions, researched essays, or creative projects.

This goal is borne out not only through our students' performance on the AP exams (which significantly exceeds international averages) but through their competition wins (such as in the History Day competition, the Jane Austen Society of North America Essay Competition, the Scholastic Arts and Writing Competition, the APA student essay competition, and more) as well as the many notes and letters our teachers receive from students years later.

### Community

While our courses are focused on preparation for the AP Exams and college success, we strongly believe that they should also serve a deeper role: building community. Many of our students struggle to find academically-motivated peers in their local homeschooling groups-- and some don't even have local homeschooling networks. The social interaction in our courses should serve not only to help students deepen their understanding of the subject matter, but also to build supportive learning communities and friendships. Students often form lasting, deep connections with each other that go beyond any individual classes. Students have helped one another with college choices, become roommates in college, attended one another's weddings, sent in photos of a meet up with an old AP classmate years later, and kept in touch with one another for years and years on social media. We foster this not only through individual classes but through the end-of-year weekend retreat for AP Homeschoolers students that Howard and Susan Richman host at their 135-acre farm each year.

### Unconventional Classrooms

We do not attempt to replicate every element of a conventional classroom into an online format. Some of our teachers record spoken lectures or presentations, but many don't. Many now use ZOOM for live interactive sessions-- but not on a daily basis like many public schools tried to do during the COVID school shut-downs, where the 50-minute typical high school class was now simply 'moved' to a live online format. Some of our teachers require daily class meetings or

website interaction, while others don't. Some provide weekly or bi-weekly live video sessions, but others don't-- we recognize that teachers should have the flexibility to design their course to fit both their subject area, and their own preferred teaching style. Some of our teachers calculate grades in a traditional manner by averaging assignment grades, while others assign grades holistically. We would like our teachers to take advantage of the unique opportunities offered by a web-based format, and to nurture the independent thinking and self-motivation of homeschooled students rather than enforce a punitive traditional system onto their students. We realize that we are walking that 'fine line' between helping students learn to be *responsible* students, who can meet rigorous course expectations, and allowing flexibility when a student has a unique situation or opportunity that means our expectations need to be adapted.

## All Perspectives Welcome

Our courses are somewhat unique among online providers for homeschoolers in that we do not operate from a particular political or religious perspective. Our students (and teachers) come from many backgrounds and religious perspectives. We strongly believe that every student should feel welcome in every one of our classes, so we select teachers who will foster and enforce an atmosphere of respect within each class. We believe assignments should neither alienate students with content that makes them uncomfortable, nor present just one political or ideological perspective.

## Independent Teachers

We believe in giving each teacher the freedom to write their own curriculum, design their own course format, choose their own texts, and determine their own class fees and acceptance procedures. While we carefully select teachers who align with this mission statement, our teachers are the independent creative directors of their courses, and we encourage them to teach in a way that feels authentic, manageable, and meaningful to them. Through the course descriptions and class reviews, we hope that students will be matched with their perfect mentors.

## Objective Standards and Credentials

We serve an important role for our homeschooled students by providing firm assignments, objective assessments, academic transcripts, grades, and college recommendation letters. We know that homeschooling students often rely on our program to provide confirmation of their academic excellence to colleges, summer programs, high schools, and more. All of our AP courses are approved by the College Board through the rigorous AP Audit process, and all of our AP courses cover the expected concepts and introduce the thinking expected in each field of study. We are NCAA-core-course eligible for students seeking admission to Division I or II schools, and we are currently working through the process of applying for accreditation from the [Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools](#).

## Your Mission

We hope you are coming to our classes eager to learn! We look for *internal motivation* in our students above all. Are you interested in the subject matter? Are you determined to improve your skills? Are you excited by challenges? Do you enjoy learning with a diverse student body? In that case, you're in the right place.

In the next sections, we'll lay out our honor code and behavior policies, but we actually hope this is unnecessary. There are probably easier ways for you to get college credit, and there are probably AP classes in which you can get a good grade with less effort. We hope you are coming to our classes because you are excited to join our classroom communities, learn from master teachers, and challenge yourself. If you want to get the most out of our classes for your own personal reasons, what we're about to say will probably be obvious to you.

# Honor Code

All of our students should embody the seven virtues [laid out by Aristotle](#): Trust, Compassion, Courage, Justice, Wisdom, Temperance and Hope.

## Trust

In online classes, trust is crucial. Yes— you could probably pay someone else to complete your work for you, but what would be the point of that? Not only would it break your teacher’s trust in you, but it would waste your own time and money. You’re in this class so that *you* can improve!

When you say you’ll submit work by a certain day, you should do so. When you say work is your own original work, it should be. When your teacher tells you to complete a reading, you should do so. You should follow your teacher’s requested procedures, such as by writing essays within time limits when you are asked to do so, and you should not share your teacher’s class materials with anyone outside the class (unless you get your teacher’s permission first). You should be able to trust what your teacher tells you, and your teacher should be able to trust you.

## Compassion

You should treat your classmates with compassion and respect. Some students enter these classes with very strong skills, some with weaker backgrounds. Many students are used to being the smartest person in any room, so it can be an adjustment to be “average” in a classroom full of talented students. Be kind in your interactions with classmates!

You should also be sensitive in how you speak to your classmates, realizing that your classmates may not share your beliefs or values, and realizing that you may not be aware of the full range of challenges that your classmates face. Always speak in a way that demonstrates respect for your classmates as people, even if you don’t always agree with them.

## Courage

We hope you have the bravery to be honest about your abilities and to submit your own imperfect work, without seeking out any inappropriate “help.” That’s how you get stronger! Have the courage to be honest about your perspectives and beliefs without attacking those who think differently. Have the courage to take the first small step of a big project, trusting that you can accomplish huge goals simply by putting one foot in front of the other.

## Justice

Follow the rules of your class, as laid out by your teacher. Keep your sense of ethics engaged as you complete work in class, critically examining how what you learn relates to your own values. Be fair, and accept consequences for your actions.

## Wisdom

Your goal in this class should be to develop wisdom, not just to earn a grade! Relate what you learn to your previous knowledge, and critically evaluate and examine everything you learn. Read actively, asking questions and drawing connections between new and old information.

## Temperance

Both perfectionism and procrastination can be enemies of success in online classes. In fact, they're often related— when we expect perfection from ourselves, we often waste time furiously to distract ourselves from fear that our work will be imperfect! Practice the temperate art of “satisficing” instead: submit work that is *good enough*, even if it's not perfect. Keep time-wasting habits in check so that you can prioritize the work that matters.

## Hope

Many students don't feel fully comfortable with class material until the spring semester. Some students struggle with a class *all* year, but then realize that the skills they built make them the stars of their college classes. Have compassion for yourself as you take on this challenge, and keep your sense of hope— you'll emerge from these challenges stronger!

## AI and Plagiarism

Using AI to complete classwork, *unless specifically requested by your teacher*, is cheating and grounds for dismissal from your class with a failing grade. We suggest writing all of your typed essays in Google Docs; that way, you can share your editing history with your teacher in case an AI detection program erroneously identifies your work as AI-generated. (AI-generated essays also tend to be bland and inaccurate!)

Plagiarism means not only copying words written by others but also copying ideas. For example, an essay that echoes the progression of ideas and examples in a sample essay is still plagiarized even if the words used are different. (Experienced teachers know this won't happen purely by chance, so don't worry about accidentally echoing the ideas in a sample essay that you didn't read!) All research and sources of information should be documented.

Plagiarism also means getting inappropriate help from others. While it's fine to have other people read through your work and give you feedback, you should not ask other people to generate your arguments for you or rewrite your essays.

We strongly encourage you *not* to read sample essays before writing your own, unless your teacher specifically tells you to do so. This is the most common source of unintentional plagiarism; if you read sample essays first, you'll have a difficult time coming up with completely original ideas afterward. You need to practice the process of generating ideas from scratch!

Students who have plagiarized in our classes tend to get unusually low grades on the exams at the end of the year. That's because plagiarism is self-defeating; these students didn't practice the skills they needed to develop.



## For Parents

### Monitoring your child's progress

Online classes demand a tricky balance between active involvement and hanging back. We encourage you to trust your child's teacher to develop a course curriculum and to nurture your child's progress throughout the year; don't panic if you see a few low grades during fall semester, for example.

However, it's also easy for students to fall behind in online coursework, and it's difficult for teachers to get through to students who are ignoring e-mails! We encourage you to review the list of assignments each week and make sure your child is completing them, helping your child develop study habits such as by preparing a checklist of assignments each day.

You are welcome to log into your child's class website using their login credentials; we will send these to you as well. Periodically, we encourage you to sit down with your child to read through some coursework and talk about it together.

Your child's teacher will share grading policies at the start of the year, so we encourage you to review those as well.

Your child should receive a midterm grade around December 31 and a final grade by June 1st. Most teachers also send out a detailed progress report at this time as well. Review these grades and progress reports, and talk to your child's teacher if you have any questions or concerns.

### Supporting classes at home

Homeschooling doesn't stop when students sign up for online classes! We would love to see you support your child by the following means:

- Help your child sign up for the AP exam in the early fall. (More information about this in a later section.)
- Make sure that your child has a working computer with a good internet connection.
- Make sure that your child has a quiet working environment and a good working routine. For example, some students benefit from completing AP work first thing in the morning.
- Have conversations about what your child is learning, and read your child's essays—while you don't need to give extensive critical feedback, being an appreciative and supportive home audience goes a long way!
- Look for in-person opportunities to extend classroom learning opportunities. For example, you might be able to visit historical sites while your child takes an AP History class. See if you can find local productions of plays that your child is studying in an AP English class. Younger siblings may benefit from studying similar subjects at a lower level.
- Monitor your child's schedule and stress levels, and make adjustments to commitments if necessary. Make sure your teen still gets time away from computers and classwork!

# Details of getting started with AP Homeschoolers

## Applying for a class

You should first [read the course descriptions posted here](#). These descriptions should answer most of your questions about prospective classes. You can also read class reviews from past students.

Most teachers ask students to submit an application before registering for their classes. You'll find details on the course description page about how to submit this application. Please wait to hear from the teacher before going to the next step!

## Submitting tuition payment

Once you have been accepted to a class, you can submit payment by returning to the course description page. You will first need to create an AP Homeschoolers account for both parents and students, and then you will be able to add a class to your “shopping cart” and submit payment. You can read about [payment options \(including payment plans\) here](#).

If you have submitted an application to a class (if an application is required by the teacher) and have heard back from the teacher that your student has been accepted, and subsequently submitted payment for the class via the AP Homeschoolers website, you're fully registered! Make sure you save the e-mail receipt you will receive a few days after payment (we do not 'snail-mail' any receipts). If you might need a more formal receipt, perhaps for reimbursement purposes from another program, the PDF receipt included with your email receipt should be sufficient.

## Withdrawing from a class

If you need to withdraw from a class or transfer to a different class after submitting payment, you may be eligible for a partial refund. You can [read about refund policies and procedures here](#). We realize that there are times that families realize that they may have over-scheduled their student, or that another course might be a better fit at this point in time.

## When you'll hear from your teacher

Your teacher will contact you by email before the first day of class, which is usually at the end of August. Many teachers will contact students at the start of the summer with information about any summer reading assignment, if that is part of a particular course. You are always welcome to email a teacher if you feel you may have missed an email from the teacher-- and you may need to adjust your email settings so that the teacher's emails will always show up in your 'inbox' and not in a 'spam' folder.

## Your online classroom

Your teacher will send students and parents login information to the class website before the first day of class. All classes take place on password-protected websites, though the format of these websites will vary— some teachers use the AP Homeschoolers platform, while others use outside platforms such as Google Classroom, Web-Assign, Canvas, or Blackboard. You will soon feel familiar with the format of the class website.

## Grading policies

Teacher grading policies are highly individual, but teachers should explain these to all students in the first month of class. Students will receive overall letter grades around January 1st and June 1st.

Teachers will attempt to be accommodating when students have special needs or scheduling constraints. It's much better to ask for help in advance than after a deadline has been missed!

Parents will need to request *exam* accommodations directly from the College Board. We'll discuss this in the section labeled "requesting exam accommodations."

## Asking for extensions and accommodations

Your family may face times in the year when the student will need to request an extension for a particular assignment, and most of our teachers are able to be accommodating on this *within reason*. We recommend that students take the *initiative* to communicate with teachers well in advance about any upcoming travel times, or before any special events (theater or dance performances or debate tournaments, for example) that may require intense all-day efforts from the student or extended time away from a computer. Most teachers are able to post 'coming assignments' for several weeks in advance, enabling students to *work ahead* when needed-- and this is always the very best route to aim for.

There may also be *unexpected* illnesses for the student, or family emergencies, or local natural disasters that will delay a student from submitting work on time-- the student or parent should contact the teacher as soon as possible in these situations, so that the student is not penalized for having late work. Again, most teachers are able to be accommodating and helpful in these situations-- but your family *must* take the initiative in communicating. Otherwise the teacher will simply think the student is simply not participating in the class.

Some students may need special accommodations within a class because of a unique challenge with some aspect of learning or processing material. Say, if your student has a marked reading challenge, a humanities teacher could recommend audio materials or video documentaries in place of 'just reading'. Do know that in some advanced classes, accommodations *may be somewhat limited*, as the nature of the course may require abilities that a specific student just may not have. Teachers will try to be clear on what accommodations they can reasonably offer-- and we hope parents will be clear about specific needs, especially if a student has been approved for extended time in College Board exams.

Parents will need to make sure that their student is not just going MIA ('missing in action') and not communicating with the teacher-- and it is always fine for a *parent* to take on this communication role also. We will not view parents as 'helicopter parents' for working to keep in touch with teachers about travels, illness, or special accommodations.

## Troubleshooting technical issues

Your first step when you encounter a technical issue should be to contact your teacher. Your teacher will then try to help you troubleshoot the issue (or will direct you to someone who can help). If you ever have a situation where, for example, the computer the student has been using gets 'fried' and needs to be repaired or replaced, notify the teacher right away. Hard-drive crashes 'happen'-- and sometimes files get erased by mistake or assignments don't post correctly. Key idea-- keep in communication with the teacher!

## Requesting transcripts

We will send out a free PDF of each student's transcript, usually in mid-June after each class ends. In addition, you can pay a small fee to have an official transcript sent directly to colleges, to the NCAA, or to other schools. You can [read about how to request an official transcript here](#).

## Posting class reviews

At the end of the school year, your teacher will share a link with you that will allow you to post a class review (which is automatically posted for public view on the AP Homeschoolers website). If your teacher does not share this link, you can simply go to the course description for the class completed, sign into your account, and you'll see a link to 'Post Class Review'. We so appreciate each student and parent who shares their reflections on how the course went-- and we know how valuable these reviews are to new families trying to choose which course will be the best 'fit' for them.

## Taking the AP exam

### Registration step #1: Join your online class on AP Classroom.

The first step in signing up for the exam is to join your class on the College Board website-- that way, your scores will be reported to your teacher rather than to a teacher at the school administering your exams. (This will also give you access to College Board tools that your teacher may unlock.) To do this, go to [this College Board link](#) and after opening or signing into your 'My AP' account, then [enter the class "join code"](#) that will be provided by your teacher. There will be a different "join code" for each AP class you take with our program.

If you do this correctly, your teacher will see your name in their class list on the College Board website.

You should complete this step in very early September.

## Registration step #2: Find a local school to administer your exam.

Your next step (in September or October) is to find a local high school willing to administer the exam to your student in person. Not every school will say yes, and schools are allowed to charge you an extra administrative fee if they wish. You can find local schools administering AP exams at the [AP Course Ledger](#). Alternatively, simply look online for high schools in your region-- starting with the public school where your family resides, and moving on to private high schools or neighboring public schools as needed.

E-mail or call the "AP Coordinator" for the school(s) you choose -- you can usually find this info on a high school's website. If you can't find the contact info for the AP Coordinator, we suggest you contact the principal, administrative assistant, or guidance counselor, and ask who to contact. You can use this as a template for your e-mail or conversation:

Dear Mr./ Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am a homeschooled student living in \_\_\_\_\_. I'm taking AP [insert name of course] through the authorized online provider, Pennsylvania Homeschoolers AP Online, so I'm required to find a local school willing to administer this AP exam to me on [insert date /time in May for exam]. How should we work to arrange for me to take the exam at your school? I will be happy to follow all school policies and pay all fees, including any extra proctoring fee you deem necessary. I have proper photo ID, and would also be happy to meet with you in advance if needed. I understand if my needed exam will be fully digital or hybrid, and I will have practiced with the *Bluebook App* before the exam date-- I could bring my own laptop for the exam, or if the school prefers, I would be happy to use a school-provided device.

You can learn more about the [College Board policies for homeschooled or virtual students here](#).

If you do allow me to take the exam at your school, I will need an "**exam-only join code**" to connect my own College Board account to your exam location. I've already received my AP Classroom Join Code from my online class teacher.

Thank you so much for considering my request! Please let me know if you have any further questions for me.

Sincerely,

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If you have trouble finding an exam location, we suggest you very politely don't take 'no' for an answer-- follow up with the schools that said 'no' to try to find out why they did so, trying to solve any problems they bring up. For example, if no local schools are administering your particular AP exams, you could mention that you would be happy to take the exam in an administrator's office; you simply need a quiet, monitored area to take the test. If schools don't have a laptop available for you to use on a digital exam, let them know that you are happy to bring your own. If a school has already submitted their exam order, remind them that they have until November 15th to add you to their order (and are actually allowed to do so until March 15th, for homeschooled students who have trouble finding exam locations).

Once you've found an exam location, add the "exam-only join code" that the school AP Coordinator provides to your College Board account.

Congratulations for clearing this hurdle! This means that you're all set! Now you just need to study and prepare for the test.

## Practical exam details

You can view the [exam calendar for AP classes here](#)-- all exams follow this exact schedule, regardless of time zone.

Some time in the month before the exam, you will get an e-mail from the College Board asking you to officially accept your exam's "rules and conditions." You can view those "rules and conditions" [here](#). We also encourage you to contact your host school's AP coordinator to review all exam details and requirements specific to the school where you'll be testing. Ask about dress code policies and food policies, for example, and find out where your exam will be hosted. Check for an online map of the school building to gain familiarity with the building lay-out-- and check where restrooms are located! Be sure you know how long it will take to drive to the school-- especially during morning rush hour.

You will need to bring a current government issued or school issued photo ID. Additional ID may be requested by test centers outside the U.S. If you don't have a passport or driver's license, you [could print out an ID here](#) or [here](#). We suggest you laminate your student ID card so that it looks more official.

Bring your own pencils, pens, erasers, and calculators (when relevant) to your testing site. If your exam will be administered online, find out whether you should use your own computer or a school-issued computer. If you have been approved for testing accommodations, bring your SSD Student Accommodations Letter to verify your approval-- and be sure to discuss this beforehand with the school AP Coordinator.

Arrive at your testing site at least a half hour before your exam is supposed to begin!

If you are sick or otherwise unable to attend your test on the exam day, ask the AP coordinator about [taking the make-up exam](#). If you experience an intolerable testing condition, or if expected protocols for testing were not followed, talk to your online teacher about whether you should [file a complaint with the College Board](#).

AP exam scores can be accessed via your AP Classroom account in early July. We hope you get good news– but we also hope you realize that many students who *don't* get their ideal exam score still get into wonderful colleges and ace their college classes.

## Requesting exam accommodations

Students with documented special needs (such as ADHD, dyslexia, or physical limitations) can request exam accommodations such as extra time, use of a scribe, or more. Receiving these accommodations from the College Board can be a long process, so we encourage you to start this process early in the fall.

[This page on the College Board website outlines the process](#) for seeking exam accommodations.

One parent who went through this process shared this:

My son received several accommodations for the PSAT, SAT and AP exams. He received such things as double time, a scribe, and testing in a room alone. Because the College Board approved them, they helped him in college when asking for accommodations.

We paid a clinical psychologist to evaluate my son and used her report for what he needed. She was very willing to work with us to create a document that showed what he needed for exams, mostly from an educational standpoint.

We also had two different doctor's letters for his physical limitations.

We also provided the following:

- We wrote up his history (health and education)
- One of his AP teachers filled out a teacher survey on the College Board SSD website to explain his accommodations he used in online class.
- I, as his math teacher, also filled out a teacher survey also showing his accommodations needed in math class.
- We also typed up our own Student Education Plan.

It seems overwhelming. We did get asked to submit additional documentation the first time and it took some time. But we got it all in place by the time he took exams. The key was having a teacher who knew my son agree to write his classroom accommodations and the outside letters from other professionals. We just took it one step at a time.

Good luck to any students who need exam accommodations. We're here to support you!

## Social and Leadership Opportunities

AP Homeschoolers offers social and leadership opportunities outside of our classes. We encourage you to join in!

## AP Party & Graduation Ceremony

After the school year is over, in mid June, Pennsylvania Homeschoolers AP Online Directors Howard and Susan Richman welcome students to the [AP Party](#) held at their 135-acre farm in



Western Pennsylvania for a retreat weekend. Students will be asked to contribute food and a suggested donation, and Howard and Susan Richman will provide accommodations and activities ranging from square dancing and swing dancing to a bonfire to an informal **Graduation Ceremony** celebrating the seniors who attend, and more. Many alumni come back to attend the AP Party for years after the class ends!

## **AP Students Panel / AP Teachers Panel**

Each spring, Pennsylvania Homeschoolers hosts an online webinar about our online classes. A selection of our AP teachers present at this event, and we also invite students to present as part of a student panel-- [recordings of these are shared on our homepage](#). Take a look at these recordings to gain a sense of what some of our strongest students feel they have gained from our classes-- guarantee you'll be inspired!

## **Discord chats and other off-site communications**

In many classes, students and TAs organize their own off-site communications such as Discord chats or informal Zoom sessions. While teachers don't officially monitor these communications, we do encourage parents to stay involved, and we encourage students to let their teachers know if they ever feel uncomfortable with these off-site conversations. Of course, participation is completely optional!

## **Becoming a Teaching Assistant**

Many teachers invite top former students to return as Teaching Assistants to the next year's class. Teaching Assistants mentor incoming students and sometimes contribute to grading or class instruction. Not only does this position look impressive on a college resume, but it enables students to carry on their class culture into the next year's classes. Further, a very positive community of TA's often develops, with TA's working together to offer special 'events' within a class and more.

## **Start a new AP Homeschoolers initiative– the sky's the limit!**

Do you have an idea about how to improve AP Homeschoolers classes? For example, are you interested in starting an online "research journal" that features papers that students write for our classes? We're open to any ideas, and we will gladly provide you with support such as website hosting!

We hope this *Student and Parent Handbook* has been helpful to you in getting your 'oriented' to what we do here at Pennsylvania Homeschoolers AP Online. Always know that you can call (724-783-6512) or [email](#) if you have any questions about any aspect of our program.

With much appreciation for your interest in our classes!

Susan and Howard Richman and Maya Inspektor