**Planning for Success on the AP Biology Exam**

**How to Set Up a Foolproof AP Study Plan**

* 1. ***Be social*.** Organize your friends into a study group ASAP. Working with friends is a great way to stay accountable with your practice goals. Be sure you establish a routine with your group quickly, so that you don’t end up wasting valuable practice time trying to figure out who’s bringing the snacks to your next meeting.
  2. ***Embrace the test prep book*.**Yes, we know: you already have a textbook and a teacher. But that textbook and teacher are trying to teach you a subject, *not* how to ace an AP exam. *Test prep books are designed to give you practice in AP exams—and that’s what you need*. Princeton Review is our preferred brand for AP, but Barron’s is also solid.
  3. ***Map it out*.**Correlate the table of contents in your test prep book to your AP course’s syllabus. Next, count how many weeks you have between now (whenever now is) and the AP exam, which will come in the first two weeks of May. Then *cut the last two weeks off*. Count backwards from April 29th to today: this is the number of days you have to study for the exam. It’s best to have covered all material you want to review by two weeks before the exam because then you can spend the last two weeks *practicing.* If your semester is looking particularly intense in terms of classes or extracurriculars, or if you’re traveling or unavailable for more than a few days, factor that in.
  4. ***Schedule.***Using your calendar, determine when you’ll cover each chapter from the prep book (“I’ll do chapters 1, 2, and 3 this week; 4 and 5 next week; just 6 the week after, because I have a baseball tournament,” etc.). Work AP review into your weekly study routine. Post your schedule somewhere conspicuous—over your desk should work well—as well as automatic reminders in your phone. Ideally, your whole study group will be on the same schedule so you have some collective accountability.
  5. ***Study*.** Get to it! If you’re super-confident with a chapter’s subject, just do the quiz/practice exam and review what you missed. If the concepts covered in the chapter are tricky for you, or if you have extra time and want to be thorough, work through the chapter slowly, *taking notes* for review. Give extra time to any material that wasn’t thoroughly covered in your AP course at school.
  6. ***Self-assess and review*.** Grade your practice exams (or have your study group grade each other’s) and identify the types of problems that routinely baffle you. Work out the solutions to these problems and *review your work* frequently. If you are taking the practice quizzes or tests in your AP Review Book, they will most likely have an explanation for every question’s right answer! Go back to the book or use an online resource such as Kahn Academy to reinforce shaky subjects. Keep a week-by-week log—in a notebook or on a laptop—of what you’ve studied, what questions you’ve missed, and what concepts you need to make sure to review. If you find you need help with free response questions, search student samples of FRQ question responses or ask your teacher for help.
  7. ***Practice, practice, practice*.**Remember when we said to count backwards from April 29th? That’s because in the two weeks prior to the exam, you should focus on *taking as many practice exams as possible*. Two full, timed practice tests should be the absolute minimum, but to truly feel confident, we recommend more.

There you have it: a straightforward study routine for the exams. By now it should be clear why beginning early is so important! One of the worst things you can do is wait until the last minute to prepare, and then try to cram for everything you think you are missing. The point of making a plan is to make sure you’re spending enough time on each important topic, rather than skimming everything superficially, getting so caught up in one topic that you never get to others, or just rushing through a few practice tests without taking the time to assess your mistakes.

Of course, no plan is entirely foolproof, and complications may arise. Here are some complaints we hear a lot:

* + ***“I don’t have enough time to study.”***Well, make time! If AP exams are important to you, you may want to prioritize them over other activities for the time being. In extreme cases, you may consider “punting” the exam—if you’re way, way behind on studying, **don’t take the test.** Trust us, it’s better to defer on an exam than get a 1.
  + ***“I need essay help.”***FRQs are ½ of your score! Practicing FRQs should be a big part of your study plan. But getting notes on your writing is trickier than scoring a practice exam. Try asking your biology teacher. Alternately, you can google “AP Biology FRQ student responses” and that should lead you to some examples of full-point responses, no-point responses and everything in between.
  + ***“We haven’t covered \_\_\_\_\_\_ in class.”***If you encounter something unfamiliar, first try to use the test prep book to teach yourself. If you can’t, ask a teacher, parent, classmate, friend, or tutor, or use a reputable online resource such as Kahn Academy.
  + ***“I don’t know what score I need.”***Mid- and upper-tier colleges generally see a 3 as neutral or somewhat positive; 4 as beneficial; and 5 as exceptional. For the most selective schools, you should be shooting for a 4 or 5 (of course, 5 is preferred). How that translates into course credits depends entirely on the school. Basically: aim as high as you can.

AP exams are never a walk in the park, nor should they be: like we said at the beginning of this email, these tests are designed to be the gold standard of academic mastery, with a difficulty to match. But with the right amount of planning—and strategic help when it’s required—you can earn that 4 or 5!

*This resource was taken and adapted from www.signeteducation.com*