

Frequently Asked Questions

Heterogeneous Grade 9 English

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English 9 is “heterogeneously grouped.” What does that mean?

In heterogeneous classes students in the same class can choose to do either honors (H) or advanced (A) level work and earn that designation on their transcript. In other words, heterogeneous grouping does not mean eliminating honors and advanced learning distinctions – it means having those distinctions exist within the same class, with different students receiving differentiated instruction and assignments.

How are students placed in honors (H) or advanced (A) level English?

After 3 weeks, students choose whether they will commit to H or A level work for the semester (September 28, 2022).

During grade 8 course requests, students received teacher recommendations and noted a request for H or A ELA as part of the course selection process. However, this did not represent a commitment. We will use this to advise students and to balance the class assignments and as a datapoint for assessment of the effectiveness of the initiative. Students will elect their level of work in the course.

How should a student decide to take honors (H) or advanced (A) level?

The choice of level is an individual decision. While the administration makes the final approval of course selections, we generally follow the principle of challenge by choice.

Students who earned high grades in grade 8 English and did not struggle to complete their work, will probably be comfortable in English 9H. Students who struggled to complete their work, had difficulty maintaining their grades, or who need extra support with their skills or executive functioning may want to choose the English 9A level. Both levels offer a rigorous college preparatory curriculum.

Students should consider their overall workload and past experience in making the decision. We find that a student mindset is a stronger indicator of success than talent. We encourage students to take on the level of challenge that is right for them.

How is the curriculum different for H and A level work?

Both levels offer a rigorous college preparatory curriculum. Students who elect H level work will be expected to demonstrate a higher level of [*sophistication, consistency, and independence*](#) in meeting the expectations for different assignments. Students will, in general, do the same work and assignments with H level work meeting these higher expectations as described in the individual assignment expectations and teacher feedback on completed assignments.

What is the impact on a student's grades of selecting H or A level work?

At the end of the year students will receive either the H or A designation on their transcript. The designation will impact students' weighted GPAs, with H final grades being weighted 0.25 GPA points above A level final grades. We encourage students to focus on learning rather than grades and grade weights and to take on the level of challenge that will best support their growth.

If a student chooses A level at the beginning of the year but wants to switch, can they? How?

After 3 weeks of Semester 1, students will choose whether they will commit to H or A level work for the semester (September 28, 2022). At the beginning of the second semester, they may also choose to change their level.

If a student chooses to change their level at the semester 2 mark (January 20, 2023), their semester 1 grade will be adjusted up or down one grade level. For clarification, here are some examples

- A student has an A average at the A level for semester 1 and changes to the H level for semester 2, their semester 1 grade will be averaged into their year long grade as an A-.
- A student has an B average at the H level for semester 1 and changes to the A level for semester 2, their semester 1 grade will be averaged into their year long grade as an B+.

Again, we encourage students to focus on learning rather than grades and grade weights and to take on the level of challenge that will best support their growth.

Where can I find out more about heterogeneous grouping?

This linked website has a wealth of information as well as a link to the pilot proposal – <https://sites.google.com/arlington.k12.ma.us/arlingtonhighschoolhgiinfopage/home>.

What preparation and training have the English teachers received for planning this program?

The AHS English Department has been working for many years on aligning course expectations to ensure that all students have equitable access to high level learning across all levels. Over the past year, in preparation for the introduction of heterogeneous grouping in English 9, the department reviewed expectations, curriculum, and instructional practices. They also reviewed literature on heterogeneous grouping as well as feedback from the community as part of the study of heterogeneous grouping leading up to this pilot.

Following the approval of the grade 9 English heterogeneous grouping pilot project, the teachers met for a number of planning retreats. These included 1 day in the spring and 5 days in the summer. Following a workshop with Kim Marshall on effective planning for differentiated learning, they spent time on a number of topics/practices:

1. Examining the ninth grade texts, essential questions, and common assessments as a means of reviewing the curriculum with an eye towards heterogeneously grouped classes
2. Determining three texts/units that students will study during the same time of year to help teachers assess student experiences and outcomes

3. Reviewing the elements of narrative and expository writing that we expect students to employ at certain points in the year
4. Ongoing discussions regarding rubrics and grading with a focus on delineating Curriculum H and Curriculum A level work.
5. Plans for the use of common planning time.
6. Reading texts that helped the group explore equity in teaching and grading.