

What grade do you take calculus? The US math ladder, printable

Calculus is 12th grade on the accelerated track, 11th on the double-accelerated one, and college on the standard track. The grade is decided in middle school by when the child takes Algebra 1.

The ladder, by track

	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Standard (most students)	Math 7	Pre-Algebra / Math 8	Algebra 1	Geometry	Algebra 2	Pre-Calc or Statistics; CALCULUS IN COLLEGE
Accelerated by one year	Pre-Algebra	Algebra 1	Geometry	Algebra 2	Pre-Calc / AP Precalc	AP CALCULUS AB or BC
Accelerated by two years	Algebra 1	Geometry	Algebra 2	Pre-Calculus	AP CALCULUS AB or BC	Multivariable, Linear Algebra, AP Stats
Integrated Math	Math 7	Math 8 or Integrated 1	Integrated 1 (or 2)	Integrated 2 (or 3)	Integrated 3 (or Pre-Calc)	Pre-Calc or AP CALCULUS

The two routes to a year ahead, and the one that does not work

- Route 1** Algebra 1 in 8th grade: placement decided by a test in the spring of 7th, plus the 6th grade record. Ask the school for the criterion by winter of 6th.
- Route 2** Doubling up: Geometry and Algebra 2 in the same year (usually 10th), or Algebra 2 over the summer, then Pre-Calculus in 11th. Works for a strong student placed late.
- Not a route** Skipping Pre-Calculus. Calculus assumes its trigonometry, function families and limit idea; the AP year is spent relearning them.

AP Calculus AB vs BC

	AP Calculus AB	AP Calculus BC
College equivalent	One semester (Calculus I)	Two semesters (Calculus I and II)
Content	Limits, derivatives and applications, integrals, the fundamental theorem, basic differential equations	All of AB plus integration techniques, improper integrals, series (Taylor, Maclaurin), parametric, polar, vector functions
Pace	A year for one semester of content: slower, deeper	A year for two semesters: fast
Who takes it	Most calculus students	Students who found Pre-Calculus easy, or took AB the year before
Credit	A 4 or 5 usually earns Calculus I	A 4 or 5 usually earns Calculus I and II; the BC exam also reports an AB subscore

The honest rule: AB with an A and a 5 beats BC with a B and a 3, on the transcript and in the first year of college.

What colleges actually expect, by intended major

Intended major	What the transcript needs
Engineering, physics, mathematics, computer science	AP Calculus (AB or BC), ideally with a 4 or 5
Economics, finance, pre-med, chemistry	AP Calculus AB strongly preferred; Pre-Calculus acceptable at most
Business, biology, nursing, psychology, social sciences	Pre-Calculus or AP Statistics in 12th
Humanities, arts, journalism	Four years of math with Algebra 2 completed

No US college requires high-school calculus for admission. Selective colleges look for the most rigorous curriculum available at the school on the child's track.

How to get a year ahead safely

- [] Ask the school for the Algebra 1 placement criterion by the winter of 6th grade.
- [] Close the arithmetic gaps first: fractions, negative numbers, ratios, showing every step.
- [] Take Pre-Algebra properly; do not skip it.
- [] If placed late, the summer Algebra 2 route in 10th grade is the recovery; start in June.
- [] In the AP year, past free-response questions from the first month, marked to the College Board rubric.

Your child's ladder (fill in)

Current grade and course: _____

Algebra 1 was / will be in grade: _____

So calculus falls in: _____

Intended major area: _____

Course to ask the counselor about: _____

Full guide: sciencewithshobha.com/blog/what-grade-do-you-take-calculus-the-us-math-ladder-and-the-two-accelerated-routes/