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# Computing a GPA--Yikes!

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Dear Friends,

October reminds us that we are heading down the homestretch of 2009. It's a time to rejoice in the glorious shades of reds, browns, and golds that are visible in pumpkins, chrysanthemums, and corn stalks; the smell of fall air and apple cider; and the fun of jumping into those piles of leaves. Speaking of October, here is a riddle for you. Excluding leap years, October always starts on the same day of the week as what other month? Read to the end of the newsletter to find the answer! :)

Along with these sights and smells of fall, this time of year also brings thoughts of college visits to plan, college application deadlines for seniors, transcripts....

And that brings us to this month's topic of calculating grade point averages (GPA). We regularly receive questions from parents asking: What is a GPA? How is it computed? We want to address these questions as well as give you additional information that you may not have even considered yet, but may need to know.

## Definition

The Wiktionary definition of grade point average is "a method of computing a numerical value for letter grades received in school by assigning each a numeric value and averaging the numbers." You will notice from some of the transcript templates listed on our [high school website](#), that there are often two sets of GPAs shown--yearly and cumulative. Each of these is calculated a bit differently so we'll take a look at how to compute both types.

## Yearly GPA

The first step to computing the yearly GPA is to convert each letter grade to points. For example, an A equals 4 points, a B equals 3 points, a C equals 2 points, and so forth. The grade points are then multiplied by the number of credits a course earned resulting in what is known as quality points. An example will clarify this operation. Let's say that a student received a letter grade of an "A" in Algebra I. The first step is to convert the letter grade of an A to 4 points and multiply by 1 credit for a total of 4 quality points. In addition, if a student takes a one semester health course earning one-half credit and receives a "B," then calculate the quality points as follows: multiply .5 credits by 3 grade points for a total of 1.5 quality points. Continue this operation for each course your teen takes in a given school year. The next step of the computation will be to total the quality points for all courses and divide by the total number of credits earned in a given year, rounding the answer to two decimal places. This results in the yearly GPA. You may find it helpful to [review these steps](#) on the GPA computation example we have listed in our transcript section of the website.

When calculating the yearly GPA, there are some factors to take into consideration. (Isn't it always the case that as soon as you think something is cut and dry, someone throws you a curve?!) Well, here is one of those situations. If you give pass/fail grades for any of your courses, the credits for these courses will be included in the sum of credits shown on the high school transcript, but they will not be used in computing the GPA. When calculating the GPA, you will need to subtract the pass/fail credits out of the total number of credits for that year before dividing by the total number of quality points. An illustration may help.

Total credits for one year: 6.5 (including .5 credit for a course graded pass/fail)

Total quality points: 21.5

Compute GPA: 21.5 divided by 6 (6.5 minus .5) equals 3.58

Another curve--if you plan to attach +'s and -'s to your letter grades, then your grade points will need to reflect that. For instance, an A+ will compute to 4.3 points rather than the usual 4 points. An A-, however, will be 3.7 points; a B+ (3.3 points); B- (2.7 points); and so on.

With this information in hand, you are now ready to calculate the GPA for each individual year of high school.

Next let's turn our attention to computing the cumulative GPA over the course of all four years.

## Cumulative GPA

Since you want to show an overall average of your child's high school work and not an average of the averages, you should not simply add up all the yearly GPAs and divide by 4 (the number of years). Instead, to calculate a cumulative GPA, it will be necessary to add all the quality points from 9th through 12th grades and divide by the sum of all four years of credits (first subtracting out any pass/fail credits).

If you wish to include a running cumulative GPA for each year of high school, then you will need to do the above operation in steps. Obviously, the yearly and cumulative GPAs for the 9th grade will be the same. For 10th grade, you will add the quality points from both 9th and 10th and divide that sum by the total number of credits (minus any pass/fail credits) for both those years. Then in the 11th grade, you will again go back to 9th grade and add all the quality points through the 11th grade and divide by the sum of the credits for those three years. The 12th grade computations will be completed in the same fashion and the resulting GPA will be both the cumulative GPA for 12th grade as well as the grand cumulative GPA for all four years of high school.

## General Tips and Suggestions

In addition to the GPA, some transcript formats include a grading scale or table. Showing such a scale is optional. If you taught all the courses included on the child's transcript, then a grading scale can be informative to the reader. On the other hand, if your child took some courses from other instructors, they may have used a different scale from yours. In this case, it would be wise not to include the scale on your transcript.

A question you may encounter when submitting your teen's GPA is whether it is weighted or un-weighted. The GPA will be considered weighted if the student took Advanced Placement and/or honors courses. These types of courses change the grade points attached to the letter grades. An Advanced Placement course grade will receive one point higher than a traditional grade. For example, an A will be worth 5 points rather than 4 points. An honors course grade will generate a half point increase--an A will receive 4.5 points rather than 4. If your student did not take such courses, then the GPA will be un-weighted.

Advanced Placement courses and honors courses designate that the work involved in the course is more substantial than the standard high school course. Beginning in 2008, in order to label a course "Advanced Placement" or "AP" on a high school transcript, the syllabus for a particular course must be reviewed and audited by the AP Central Department of the College Board. You may [click here](#) to read more about this auditing procedure.

Designating a course "Honors" on a transcript is subjective and falls to your discretion as a parent. An honors designation implies that not only a greater quantity of work was required, but also a higher quality of work than what is normally expected in a high school course. You should document for your personal records the curriculum and other materials used in an honors course and note specific information as to why a particular course was deemed honors such as making note of the number and length of papers assigned, supplemental books added to the reading list, extra experiments completed (over and above those indicated in the curriculum), etc. If any questions regarding the course content are ever raised by anyone reviewing the transcript (such as a college admission officer), then the requested information will be readily available.

In our personal opinion (other authors and newsletter readers may disagree with us), homeschooled students will receive greater recognition for taking a community college course or an AP course than an honors course, simply because the AP or community college course has an aspect of "objectivity" associated with it.

GPA calculations are not difficult once you become familiar with terms such as yearly and cumulative GPAs as well as weighted and un-weighted GPAs. We hope this explanation will remove one more fear of homeschooling high school. One last word of advice--it's a good idea for you to have someone verify the GPA because it is easy to make a mistake when

calculating. We're sure your teen may even volunteer for this job! If you are a member of HSLDA, please know that you may call us any time with questions regarding GPA calculations and we'll be happy to walk you through the process.

Our November newsletter will provide ideas for improving and honing your teens' study skills. Until then, we are...

Calculating how fast time is flying,

Becky Cooke & Diane Kummer  
HSLDA High School Coordinators



**This resource is an article from the  
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