General Principles to Keep in Mind

Selecting four or five courses from among Yale's many offerings for your first term can be at once exhilarating and overwhelming. Below is a list of points and some questions you may want to keep in mind as you consider your course selection.

- Reflect on the courses that you particularly enjoyed in high school. Why did you like them? Was it the subject matter, the method of inquiry, or the nature of the assignments? Your answers might guide your course selection in your first year and beyond.
- Explore subjects that were not part of your high school curriculum. Yale offers courses in more than seventy-five different areas of study. Investigate unfamiliar disciplines, and read through a variety of course and program descriptions in the Yale College Programs of Study (YCPS). If you see an interesting course that has no prerequisites, consider visiting the class during course selection period.
- Think about your favorite extracurricular activities. What inspires you to devote time to them? Look for courses that would allow you to develop a broader perspective on these interests or to strengthen skills useful to your pursuit of them.
- Consider what major you might be interested in completing and take a course to explore that interest and, perhaps, to fulfill prerequisites for the major.
- Keep in mind the need to complete the distributional requirements, as well as other practical considerations, such as requirements for medical school.
- If you plan to major in a science or complete the requirements for medical school, consider the special advice you need to reach those goals. Opportunities for guidance about meeting premedical requirements are outlined under Preparing for Health Care Professions. For information on majoring in the sciences, consult the program descriptions of those majors in the YCPS, as well as each major’s goals as outlined in the Yale College Majors Project. Be aware that many courses in the sciences must be taken sequentially and that prospective science majors ordinarily start the sequence in their first year.
- Choose courses for which you have appropriate preparation. Advising sessions and placement examinations will assist you, and directors of undergraduate studies (DUSes) can talk to you about suitable placement (see Choosing Courses at the Proper Level and descriptions of individual departments).
- Take at least one small course that will offer you the chance to participate in discussions and get to know a faculty member. Conversely, don’t crowd your course schedule with large lecture courses.
- Consider the overall rhythm of your course assignments. Will all, or nearly all, of your assignments be papers? Exams? Will many assignments come due at the same time? Opt for a variety of course assignments and a staggered schedule of assignments through the term.
- Consider the special academic programs with courses open only to first-year students, including Directed Studies and the First-Year Seminar program. Be aware that these programs have their own application procedures and that some have application deadlines during the summer.
- Keep in mind that your first year is a time of great transition and uncertain expectations. Although there are many enticing courses from which to choose, we recommend that you enroll in no more than four or four and one-half course credits in your first term.

When you arrive on campus, many people, including your residential college dean, college adviser, and first-year counselor, will be happy to answer your questions. During the summer, you will undoubtedly begin to contemplate which courses you want to take, but we encourage you to keep an open mind. As you focus on your first term, remember that your Yale education consists of eight terms. Leave your course schedule open, therefore, to exploration and discovery as you seek and encounter intellectual interests with which to engage.