To ensure that study is neither too narrowly focused nor too diffuse, the College endorses the principle of distribution of studies just as strongly as it endorses the principle of concentration. The College requires that study be characterized by a reasonable diversity of subject matters and approaches, particularly in the earlier years, and by concentration in one of the major programs or departments in the later years. In addition, the College requires that all students take courses in certain foundational skills—writing, quantitative reasoning, and foreign language—that hold the key to opportunities in later study and later life. People who fail to develop these skills at an early stage unknowingly limit their futures.

In each skill, students are required to travel some further distance from where they were in high school for the reason that these competences mature and deepen. The best high school writer is still not the writer he or she could be; students who do not use their mathematics or foreign language skills in college commonly lose abilities they once had and can graduate knowing less than when they arrived.

The distributional requirements, described in this section, are intended to assure that all graduates of Yale College have an acquaintance with a broad variety of fields of inquiry and approaches to knowledge. These requirements are the only specific rules limiting the selection of courses outside a student’s major program. By themselves, the distributional requirements constitute a minimal education, not a complete one, and represent the least that an educated person should seek to know. They are intended to be starting points, not goals.