

DIPLOMA & ABITUR

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Abstract

Choosing between the Abitur or High School Diploma program can be a big decision. The counselors and coordinators at JFKS want you to have access to all necessary information about these two programs and what they have to offer. This handbook will give you a better understanding of each program by answering your questions and addressing common misconceptions about their differences. If you are still unsure what program is best for you after reading through this handbook, do not hesitate to set up a meeting with your counselor or coordinator in order to discuss your individual situation.

JFKS gives you the opportunity to not only earn the German Abitur offered in Germany but also the American High School diploma. Both programs are extremely rigorous and lead to the earning of world-wide-recognized certificates. Both diplomas can be earned in 12 years.

The Diploma Program

The High School Diploma is awarded after completion of the required number of credits and specific courses from grades 9-12. The Diploma from JFKS is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and is recognized in the admissions process by universities and colleges in the United States and Canada as well as US universities overseas. The combination of the High School Diploma and specific AP exam scores will allow students to enter German and other global universities.

Advanced Placement (AP) Program

This program offers 11th and 12th graders the opportunity to receive college or university credit in specific subject areas during their time at JFKS. The AP exams are administered in May of each year and registration happens through Haus Reil in the fall. According to exam performance, students may receive college or university credit, advanced placement, or exemption from certain prerequisites at many colleges and universities. The combination of the High School Diploma and AP exams in specific subject areas allows students to enter German and other European universities as well. See the “College Planning” document on the school website for more information.

AP Courses vs AP Exams

Globally recognized, college-level courses/exams, certified/managed by CollegeBoard

- ❖ **AP courses** on your transcript show rigor and ability to do college level work
- ❖ **AP exams** which are separate from the course itself, can give you college credit (USA) and are used in the university admissions process (Netherlands, UK, many schools in EU/globally). AP exam scores are not on the transcript.

You do **NOT** need to take the AP exam just because you are enrolled in an AP course. You choose which exams you want to take and pay for. There is no requirement to take the exams. Your decision to take/not take the exams should be based on your future plans and what you intend to use the exam scores for (gaining college credits in the USA, and/or admission to universities in other countries). You will need to do research to know which AP exam(s) you may need for admission to various universities and programs.

[To see a full list of APs offered at JFKS, click here for the AP Brochure.](#)

[For more information about each AP course, go to this webpage and click on the course.](#)

Graduation Requirements

In order to earn the High School Diploma you must receive the following credits:

High School Diploma Requirements

Total credits required: **26**

English: 4 credits

Mathematics: 3 credits (U.S. Colleges prefer 4 credits in Algebra I and higher)

Social Studies: 4 credits (which must include U.S. History)

Science: 4 credits

PE/Sport: 2 credits

German: 1 credit for each year enrolled at JFKS

+Electives to total 26

Transcript Requests

Every student from grade 9 to grade 12 has a “transcript”, a document on which all grades are printed using the American grading system and assigned both credits as well as quality points. When these credits and quality points are calculated, each student earns a Grade Point Average (GPA). The GPA is cumulative so that the final GPA at the end of 12th grade reflects the student’s entire high school career (grades 9-12). The accumulation of credits for graduation begins in 9th grade. If you have any questions about your credit count, see the Registrar (Ms. Mack) in Haus Reil for a transcript. Your GPA can be found on your transcript.

Transcripts are sent to colleges & universities from JFKS and reflect your grades from 9-12, as required by colleges. Colleges can rescind offers if grades drop senior year. You must review your transcript with Ms. Mack BEFORE you submit your applications to ensure correctness.

The Abitur Program

The German Abitur is awarded after successful completion of the Abitur program which begins in grade 11 and continues through grade 12, ending with written and oral exams in 5 chosen subjects. The Abitur is recognized for admission to German and European universities and is also recognized by American colleges and universities. (Note: if an Abi student applies to American schools or other countries outside of Germany, their transcript, which also includes 9th and 10th grade, will be submitted.)

If you choose the Abitur, you can also earn the US High School Diploma as well

The Abitur requires the focus of **two** honors subjects called “Leistungskurse”, which the student may choose, and students must also take **five** final 12th grade exams in total. For more detailed information on the Abitur, visit the school website for links.

If you choose the Abitur program, you may earn BOTH the Abitur and High School Diploma, should you fulfill all requirements. It is possible to earn the diploma in addition to the Abitur, but not the other way around.

Most students who graduate from JFKS will leave with both the German Abitur and the US High School Diploma. The school’s system and course scheduling allows a student to be able to earn the required credits for the diploma while working towards the Abitur. All JFKS Abitur students will additionally earn the Diploma, unless subject failures prevent the student from earning the proper 26 credits. Most students who graduate with both will only use/need one degree (the Abitur) to apply to university. In this way, it does not create any significant advantage to earning both when it comes to university applications.

To be eligible for the Abitur program students must:

- be *at least* at German level D2
- have taken honors math in grades 9 and 10
- have taken a third language in grades 9 and 10

Switching Programs

At the end of 10th grade, students can either continue in the Abitur program, continue in the Diploma program, or switch programs. It is possible, before 11th grade, to switch from the Abitur to the Diploma program, and this is quite common at JFKS. Once 11th grade starts, however, you cannot change or switch between programs: 11th and 12th are a package deal. The decision of which program to pursue is based on many different factors: language preference of classes and tests, where and what you plan to study, possible career choices, where you want to live, your financial situation, etc. Advantages and disadvantages can arise based on which path you choose to take. Both the Abitur and the Diploma are recognized in Germany, the United States, and other countries, as long as certain qualifications are met.

Common Misconceptions

1. *The Abitur is harder than the Diploma.*

Incorrect. Both programs are extremely rigorous and provide you with a graduating credential. There are key differences that distinguish the Abitur from the Diploma; the difficulty depends on what courses the student picks within either track.

Amount of High-Level Courses and Exams

- In the Abitur you only take 2 honors/high-level Leistungskurse (LK) and the remainder of your courses are standard Grundkurse (GK). At the end you will take 2 LK exams and choose 3 GK exams.
- In the diploma program you can choose the number of high-level AP courses and AP exams you wish to take. AP courses are college-level courses while still in high school, so depending on how many APs you take, this could result in a very high work-load and extremely rigorous academic year.

In conclusion: one program is not “better” than the other, and both are strong credentials for entering university. At the end of the day, your final product is going to be evaluated against itself, nothing else.

2. *I’m already tracked to do the Abi, so I should just keep going with that.*

Before starting 11th grade, consider which program is the better fit for you.

Students should consider the following:

- What language of instruction do you want the majority of your classes to be in and what language would you prefer to test in?
 - Think about which language you are stronger in *academically*. Which language will enable you to receive better grades at the end of school? Remember, most classes in the Diploma program will be in English, with a few exceptions like German, third language courses, and Grundkurse you might be interested in, and the Abitur will mostly be in German, again, with the exception of English and third language courses.

- If you want to take all of your final examinations in English, we recommend the Diploma program.
- You need to be *at least* at German level D2 in order to start the Abi program in 11th grade. However, achieving a D2 language level does not necessarily mean you are going to be comfortable studying high-level subjects completely in that language. Think about how you learn best. In the end, your final grades and test scores matter, so if you believe you will achieve better scores in one language over another, take that into consideration.
- Where do you want to study?
 - You should consider where you want to study when you make this decision. Talk with your counselor about your individual situation; they can help you with further considerations regarding your future.

3. The Abitur lowers my chances of getting into universities outside of Germany.

No. The Abitur, just like the Diploma, is a graduating credential. *You don't need to worry about either one being less-than or more-than: that is not how universities look at students.* International applicants are viewed differently depending on where you apply, and there are many individual factors to consider. There is no magic formula. Talk to your counselor/tutor to determine what is best for your personal goals. In general, it is best to take high-level courses (LK/AP) related to the subject(s) you hope to study in university. There is an option to take a wider variety of high-level courses in the diploma program (APs) but that does not mean that the Abi lowers your chances of acceptance.

4. Since I don't know what I want to do or where I want to go in the future, I can't make this decision right now.

You can still make a good decision by reviewing the information provided and discussing your situation with family and counselors. Even if you are not sure about what you want to do or study later, you can make wise choices to keep your options open. *Both* programs enable you to study around the globe, but talk to your counselor about all of the places you are considering in order to build a schedule that allows you to keep your options open.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Does where I plan to study determine which program I should choose?

A: Yes, but it is important to know that *both* the Abitur and Diploma can be acknowledged and utilized in different places. The Abitur is recognized by the U.S. as a foreign credential. The U.S. looks not only at your 11th and 12th grade “combination grade” given to Abitur students, but also your GPA, which accumulates from the 9th grade through 12th grade. (Canada and Australia also look at your credentials with the GPA system.) The Diploma is recognized by Germany as long as certain qualifications are met – see the “College Planning” document on the website for further information and specific guidelines.

Q: If my German is good but not brilliant, could it still make sense for me to go for the Abitur?

A: It depends on how important it is for you to have the Abitur. There are just as many options available with the High School Diploma, so ask yourself what the advantage would be of having the Abitur. In general, it is advised to choose the program which will allow you to achieve the highest marks. If your German level is good but you think it will prove difficult to study high-level academic material only in German, then you should take that into consideration. If you are certain you want to stay in Germany after graduation then perhaps Abi is still the best choice, but there are multiple factors to consider. If you do decide to pursue the Abitur, you must be in at least D2 by 11th grade.

Q: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the timing of declaring Diploma track and what do the respective specific course options in the Diploma Program look like if one declared Diploma in a.) 9th grade or b.) 11th grade?

A: The key difference is the second foreign language requirement for the Abitur. In the Diploma program, students are not required to have a second foreign language but may opt to continue it to keep their options open. Picking your track accordingly is important and should be timed appropriately in consultation with your counselor.

Q: When is it better for a student to take the Abitur even if he or she knows they want to study in the U.S.?

A: There are no real advantages of applying to U.S. universities with the Abitur. Both the Diploma and the Abitur can be accepted. Each university sorts international applicants in their own way based on a variety of factors (type of graduating credential, the country you are living in, your citizenship, etc.), so students should check with their chosen universities (if known early) to determine how their application would be viewed by admissions. For example, will you be considered an international student? Is there any advantage to being an international student? This answer will vary for each school.

Abitur students can self-study and take AP exams, which depends upon the student's desire to study independently. This may be important for studying in the U.S. or even the U.K. if the U.K. university utilizes the tariff point system. With the Abitur, it is also possible to take [CLEP tests](#) (College Level Preparatory Examination Program) to save yourself up to a year of college. One can apply with an Abitur and no AP exams to U.S. universities, and it is still possible to "CLEP" out of certain classes or get credit (especially in the areas of math and language), but this is very specific to each university and should be researched thoroughly. See College Board for more information.

Q: If the Abitur Zeugnis only includes grades 11-12, does an Abitur transcript to U.S. schools also only include these two years?

A: No. All JFKS transcripts include grades and a GPA for grades 9 through 12. In addition, selection of the two LK courses is important for what you want to study ("Leistungskurse" = Abitur honors courses). For example, if you wish to study medicine, LK courses in Biology and Chemistry would be recommended.

Q: Can you drop French/Spanish beginning in 9th grade if you declare the Diploma track?

A: Yes; however, to be safe, maintaining the language through 10th grade is advised; at JFKS, this can be either French or Spanish. Uni-assist (the German office through which you apply with your High School Diploma in Germany) indicated in 2015 that German citizens should have two additional years of the same world language if the student wants to study at a German university utilizing the American Diploma for admission.

Q: How can I use my AP exam results in combination with the Diploma to study in Germany?

A: First of all, the AP classes you take depend on what you want to study. See JFKS' website for a list of AP courses offered (AP Brochure). You may also self-study for AP exams. AP exams are given annually in May (dates are the same worldwide) and results are available in early July. Please note that you must take the AP **exam** to get the score needed for German universities (simply taking the AP class is not enough). If you have these scores but do not maintain a high enough GPA overall, your diploma in combination with these exam results will not be accepted; **you must have a minimum 3.0 unweighted GPA**. In general, we recommend choosing AP courses that keep your options open and encourage you to focus on performing well in all subjects across the board in order to keep your GPA up.

Q: Do I have to take AP exams in order to study with my Diploma at a German university?

A: Not necessarily. You may also attend a year-long "Studienkolleg" program which prepares you for studies at a German university. SAT and ACT scores will no longer be accepted or reviewed in place of AP exams. For further information about studying in Germany with the Diploma, see the "College Planning" document on the school website.

In Summary

JFKS offers you the opportunity to not only earn the German Abitur offered in Germany but also the American High School Diploma. Both the Abitur and the Diploma are recognized in Germany and the United States (as long as certain qualifications are met). If you choose the Abitur program, you may earn both the Abitur and High School Diploma, should you fulfill all requirements.

After reading this information, think about what path is best for you. Set up a consultation meeting with your counselor or coordinator to discuss your decision.

| Abitur | Diploma |
|--|---|
| Can be used to apply/attend colleges in Germany, USA, UK, Netherlands, and other countries. | Can be used, with AP exams, to apply/attend colleges in Germany, USA, UK, Netherlands, and other countries. |
| Studying & Testing primarily in German | Studying & Testing primarily in English |
| 2 honors-level courses (Leistungskurse) weighted as honors-level in GPA | Opportunity to choose more weighted honors-level courses (AP courses) |
| Most courses are 2-years long (you're in it for both 11th & 12th); some are 1-year | All courses are 1-year long, so you will choose new classes each year |
| Must take 2 Leistungskurse (LKs) and 3 additional exams; you choose your LKs & which courses will be testing subjects* | You choose all of your classes each year, and decide if you want to take AP exams for your AP courses or not* |
| Must take a specific set of standardized classes, the same as other Abitur students | Must meet credit requirements, but can choose from a variety of courses |
| Very rigorous / challenging curriculum | Very rigorous / challenging curriculum |
| Complete in 12 years | Complete in 12 years |

**Refers to final examinations; normal Klausuren are still required in all JFKS courses.*