

DIPLOMA or ABITUR?

CONTENTS

Abstract	1
The Diploma Program	2
Advanced Placement (AP) Program	2
AP Courses vs AP Exams	2
Graduation Requirements	3
Transcripts	3
The Abitur Program	4
Switching Programs	5
Common Questions	8
Summary	11

Abstract

JFKS gives students the option to earn either the German Abitur or an American High School diploma as their primary qualification. Both programs can be extremely rigorous and can lead to earning a globally-recognized credential. Both diplomas can be earned in 12 years.

Choosing between the Abitur or High School Diploma is a big decision. The Counselor (American Diploma) and Abitur Coordinators at JFKS want students and families to have access to the necessary information about these two programs so they can make an informed decision about which is a best fit as a primary qualification. This handbook will give you a better understanding of each program by answering questions and addressing common questions. If students are still unsure which program is best for them, after attending the Information Night, *Schnupperwoche*, and reading through this handbook, do not hesitate to set up a meeting with the Counselor or Abi Coordinator in order to discuss your individual situation.

The Diploma Program

The High School Diploma is awarded after completion of the required number of credits and specific courses in grades 9-12. The JFKS Diploma 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 U.S. universities overseas. The combination of the High School Diploma, minimum GPA, and specific AP exam scores qualifies students for admission to German, U.K., Dutch, and other global universities.

Advanced Placement (AP) Program

This program offers motivated 11th and 12th graders the opportunity to take rigorous college-level classes with optional exams, which may qualify them for university credit (in the United States) and/or university entrance (elsewhere in the world). The AP exams are administered in May of each year and registration happens through Haus Reil in the fall. According to individual university policies, students may earn college credit, advanced placement, or exemption from certain prerequisites. The combination of the American High School Diploma, AP exams in specific subject areas, and in some cases a minimum GPA, qualifies students for entry to German and other European universities.

AP Courses vs AP Exams

- ❖ **AP courses** on a transcript show rigor and the ability to do college-level work and receive a weighted grade in calculating Grade Point Average (GPA)
- ❖ **AP exams**, which are distinct from the course itself, can give students college credit (USA) and are used in university admissions (Germany, Netherlands, UK and many other international universities). AP exam scores do not appear on the high school transcript.

JFKS does not require students to take AP exams when they are enrolled in AP courses. Students choose which exams they want to pay for and take in October of each year. The decision whether or not to take AP exams should be based on a student's future plans and the intended use of the exam scores (gaining college credits in the USA, and/or admission to universities in other countries). Students will need to research which AP exam(s) may be needed for admission to various universities and programs.

See the "Transitions" page of the JFKS website for more information about AP and elective options in the Diploma program.

Graduation Requirements

In order to receive a JFKS High School Diploma students must earn the following credits. A credit is equal to one full year of a standard class (meeting four or more times per week). Classes that meet three or fewer times per week receive partial credits, accordingly.

High School Diploma Requirements	
Total credits required: 26	
English:	4 credits
Mathematics:	3 credits (U.S. Colleges prefer 4 credits)
Social Studies:	4 credits (must include U.S. History)
Science:	4 credits
PE/Sport:	2 credits (must be taken every semester)
German:	1 credit for each year enrolled at JFKS
+ Electives to total 26	

Transcripts

Every JFKS student will have an American transcript, which is a document that includes all grades earned in 9th through 12th grades using the American grading system and corresponding credits and quality points (weighting for LK and AP classes). When these credits and quality points are calculated, a Grade Point Average (GPA) is determined on a 4.0 scale. The GPA is cumulative, which means the final GPA reflects the student's entire high school career (grades 9-12). The accumulation of credits for graduation also begins in 9th grade. If students have questions about credits or GPA, they can see the Registrar in Haus Reil who can supply a transcript, which includes their current GPA.

Upon student request, transcripts are sent to colleges and universities from JFKS and reflect grades from years 9-12, as required by American colleges. Colleges who have offered admission can rescind offers if grades drop during senior year. Students should review their transcript with the Registrar *before* submitting applications in order 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 universities, their transcript, which includes 9th and 10th grade, will be submitted.)

If you choose the Abitur, you can also earn a U.S. High School Diploma.

The Abitur requires the focus of **two** honors subjects called “Leistungskurse”, which the student may choose and are examined at the end of Grade 12. Students take **three** additional exams in subjects of their choice. For more detailed information on the Abitur, visit the school website for links.

Students who choose the Abitur as their primary qualification, may earn BOTH the Abitur and a symbolic High School Diploma, if they fulfill all requirements. The graduation requirements and course scheduling allow students to earn the required credits for the diploma while working towards the Abitur. 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* German level D2 entering 11th Grade
- have followed the weighted math exam option in grades 9 and 10
- have taken a third language, at latest in grades 9 and 10

Information from JFKS Teachers about Leistungskurse and Grundkurs offered at JFKS can be found on the Abitur “Transitions” page of the JFKS website.

Switching Programs

In the second semester of 10th grade, students will decide whether they will pursue the Abitur or the Diploma as their primary qualification. Leading up to this decision, Grade 10 students will explore options in Advisory class, attend an Alumni Panel, receive information from both the Diploma Counselor and Abi Coordinator, and participate in *Schnupperwoche*, where they can sit in on both LK and AP classes.

Once 11th grade starts, students cannot change or switch between programs. The decision of which program to pursue is based on many different factors: language preference for classes and tests, where and what students plan to study after high school, possible career choices, in which country a student plans to live, financial situation, etc. Advantages and disadvantages can arise based on which path you choose to take. Both the Abitur and the Diploma + AP exams are recognized in Germany, the United States, and other countries, as long as certain qualifications are met.

Common Questions

1. *Is one program more rigorous/difficult than the other?*

No. Both programs are rigorous and provide a recognized graduation 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 Higher-Level Courses and Exams

- In the Abitur students take 2 honors/high-level Leistungskurse (LK) and the remaining courses are standard Grundkurse (GK). At the end, students will take 2 LK exams and choose 3 GK exam subjects.
- In the diploma program students choose the number of high-level AP courses and AP exams they wish to take. It is possible to earn the Diploma without taking any AP exams/courses (as is the case with Abitur students who earn the Diploma). AP courses are college-level courses while still in high school, so depending on how many APs taken, this could result in a very heavy workload and extremely rigorous academic year.

One program is not “better” than the other. Both are strong credentials for entering university. It is more important for each student to think about their individual best-fit and future plans.

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

Before starting 11th grade, evaluate 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 do you prefer to test in?
 - Think about which language is stronger *academically*. Which language will enable you to achieve better grades? Remember, most classes in the Diploma program are taught in English, with a few exceptions like German, third language courses, and Grundkurs you might choose, and the Abitur will mostly be in German, with the exception of English, third language courses, and possibly a few elective classes.
 - If you want to take all of your final examinations in English, we recommend the Diploma program.

- You must be *at least* at German level D2 in order to start the Abi program in 11th grade. However, achieving a D2 level does not necessarily mean you are going to be comfortable studying high-level subjects completely in German. 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.
- Students entering the U.S. Diploma program only, must be classified as level E1 English by the start of 11th grade.
- In which country/language do you want to study after high school?
 - You should consider where you want to study and in what language after high school. Talk with the Counselor or Abi Tutor if you need support with this decision. Some students who earn the Abitur in German do go on to study in English at university and some D2 students who earn the diploma do go on to study in German in Germany.

3. Does the Abitur lower my chances of getting into universities outside of Germany?

No. The Abitur is a graduation credential accepted globally. Applicants with a German Abitur are accepted around the world, and there are many individual factors that universities consider. Students may talk with their counselor/tutor to determine what is best for their personal goals. In general, it is best to take high-level courses (LK/AP) related to the subject(s) a student plans to study at 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 the chances of admission.

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

Students can still make a good decision by reviewing the information provided and discussing their individual situation with family, older students, and their Counselor/Abi Tutor. Even if they are not sure what/where they want to study at university, students can make choices that will keep their options open. *Both* programs allow students to study around the globe, and doing their best and being well-balanced in whichever program chosen is important.

5. Does where I plan to study determine which program I should choose?

It is one factor, but it is important to know that *both* the Abitur and Diploma + AP Exams are accepted in most countries. The Abitur is recognized by the U.S. as a foreign credential. The U.S. looks not only at the 11th and 12th grade “combination grade” given to Abitur students, but also their GPA, which accumulates from the 9th through 12th grades. (Canada and Australia also look at credentials using 9-12 GPA). The Diploma + AP exams is recognized by Germany, as long as certain qualifications are met. More information can be found on the Anabin and UniAssist websites, which set the rules for and evaluate “foreign” qualifications in Germany, including the U.S. Diploma.

6. My German is good but not excellent, could it still make sense for me to go for the Abitur?

If you see your future studies and career as likely being in Germany, it could be a good idea to challenge yourself and improve your German in order to prepare for university. 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 do decide to pursue the Abitur, you must be at least level D2 by the start of 11th grade.

7. What is the difference between declaring the Abitur or Diploma track prior to 10th grade and at the beginning of 11th?

The key differences are a third language (Spanish, French or Latin) and the way Math is assessed (heavier weight on exams) in Grade 9 and 10, which are required for the Abitur. Diploma students are not required to have an additional language and Math exams are weighted as less of the grade in Grades 9 and 10. Most JFKS students keep both options open through Grade 10. If a student has decided prior to 9th or 10th Grade that they will not pursue the Abitur, they have the option of one additional elective in place of a third language.

8. 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.?

There are not necessarily advantages in applying to U.S. universities with the Abitur or Diploma as your primary qualification. Both the Diploma and the Abitur are accepted. Each university evaluates international applicants in their own way based on a variety of factors (type of graduating credential, the country you are living in, citizenship, etc.), so students should check with potential universities 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 university.

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

No. All JFKS transcripts include grades and a cumulative GPA for grades 9 through 12. This is expected for all applicants applying to U.S. universities from around the world. If a student applies to European universities, they will be evaluated based only on their performance in the final two years of the Abitur.

10. Can a student drop their third language prior to 10th grade if they declare the Diploma track?

Yes. Families can make this decision prior to 10th grade; however, to keep options open, most students continue with a third language through grade 10. At JFKS, this can be French, Spanish or Latin.

11. How can a student use AP exam results in combination with the Diploma to study in Germany?

Students must pass a certain combination of four AP **exams**, depending on what they want to study, in order to directly enter German universities with the Diploma as their primary qualification (simply taking the AP class is not enough). **You must also fulfill certain credit counts and maintain 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. More information about studying with the U.S. Diploma in Germany can be found at uni-assist.de

12. Is passing four AP exams the only way to study with a Diploma at a German university?

Not necessarily. Students may also attend a year-long “Studienkolleg” program which prepares them for studies at a German university. **Note that an unweighted GPA of 3.0 or higher is required for admission to a Studienkolleg in Germany.**

In Summary

JFKS offers the opportunity to not only earn the German Abitur, but also an 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). Students choosing the Abitur program may earn both the Abitur and High School Diploma, should all requirements be met, but the Abitur would be their primary qualification.

After reading this information, students and families should think about which path will set them up for success in achieving their individual goals. Students may make an appointment with the high school Counselor or the Abitur Tutor for their grade level in order to discuss their individual circumstances.

Abitur	Diploma
Can be used to apply/attend colleges in Germany, USA, UK, Netherlands, and other countries.	Can be used to study in the U.S. and Canada, and with a minimum GPA & AP exams, to study in Germany, UK, Netherlands, and other countries.
Studying & Testing primarily in German	Studying & Testing primarily in English
Two Leistungskurse (higher level courses) weighted as honors-level grades in GPA	Opportunity to individually choose the number of honors-level (AP) courses, which are weighted in their GPA
LK classes and some additional subjects are 2-years long (both 11th & 12th grade) with exams covering the full two years.	All courses are 1-year long. Students choose new classes each year and can take AP exams over one year of material.
Must take 5 Abi exams (2 Leistungskurse and 3 additional); you choose your LKs & which courses will be exam subjects*	Students choose classes each year, based on graduation requirements, and decide whether to take AP exams, 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	Can be very rigorous and challenging
Complete in 12 years	Complete in 12 years

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