



DIEGUEÑO MIDDLE SCHOOL

2150 Village Park Way

(760) 944-1892

Encinitas, CA 92024

“A California Distinguished School”

Jeff Copeland, Principal • Guen Butler, Assistant Principal • Laura Martin/Toni Zurcher, Counselor



College Prep and Honors English

We have two levels of English classes at both the seventh and eighth grade. College prep classes (informally referred to as “regular” English) provide a rigorous curriculum that meets the needs of the majority of students. Honor classes are designed for students who *excel* in English language arts and require a *faster-paced*, more *in-depth* and *challenging* course of study.

Both college prep (CP) and honors classes have the following attributes:

- Follow a rigorous curriculum
- Require students to work toward mastery of the California Common Core State Standards
- Prepare students for high school English
- Develop critical thinking skills
- Write argumentative essays, expository essays, narratives, responses to literature, and summaries.
- Select novels from the same board-approved list of titles
- Use the same textbook
- Utilize technology to help improve reading and writing skills

Honors classes differ from CP in the following ways:

- Greater depth and complexity of study
- Students work independent of teacher assistance more often
- Pacing is quicker
- Writing is more sophisticated (stronger vocabulary, more complex and varied sentence structure, greater depth of thought and analysis) and more extensively researched
- Assigned readings may be at a higher level of difficulty

General Expectations for Students Entering Honors Classes

An honors student...

- reads above grade level and is passionate about reading (if a student does not enjoy reading, honors is not the right class!)
- enjoys the writing process and understands the need for multiple revisions
- is highly motivated to do well and is a self-starter
- works independently when needed
- works collaboratively and productively in groups
- thinks critically about issues related to the assigned reading and writings (goes beyond surface meanings, makes connections and inferences)
- recognizes the figurative as well as the literal
- masters concepts quickly manages time well (able to juggle schoolwork, family obligations and extra-curricular activities)

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Specific Prerequisite Skills and Knowledge

When students enter an honors class, they are expected to be able to:

7th grade

- write insightful and well-developed paragraphs using a variety of sentence structures and above grade-level vocabulary
- write a well-organized, multi-paragraph essay independently
- understand the function of a thesis statement in expository writing
- identify the eight parts of speech
- find the simple subject and predicate in a sentence
- define the most common literary techniques and terms and identify examples of them
- go beyond surface summarization and discover deeper meaning in a piece of literature
- use correct punctuation and capitalization
- find and correct proofreading errors in their own rough drafts
- show a command of keyboarding skills sufficient to write a minimum of three pages in one sitting and to format the paper as directed by the teacher (e.g. set margins, spacing, font size and type)

8th grade

In addition to mastery of the skills and knowledge above, eighth graders entering honors English should also be able to:

- discover the theme in a piece of writing and support it with textual evidence
- identify characterization techniques in a narrative and write about them using textual evidence
- write commentary that offers fresh insight into supporting evidence in an essay
- use research and other supporting evidence in an essay

Additionally, 8th grade honors students should have received a grade of A or B in 7th grade honors English or an A in college prep English.



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Frequently Asked Questions – Incoming Seventh Grade

1. My student has always been an A student, so Honors English is the right class for her...right?

Maybe! There are many variables, and each child is an individual whose skills, desires, and ability to handle change should be considered before making a selection. Our Honors curriculum has been designed to challenge Honors students, so it moves faster and goes deeper than what many students experience in elementary school when they are in a multi-level class. Many of the students are used to being big fish in a small pond, and now they're in a big lake with a lot of other big fish, some who have more knowledge about certain concepts than they do, so it can be intimidating. In the Honors course, the majority of the assignments will require students to not just show they know information, but to take that information and apply it in a new situation, or to make a statement about a character or a theme and then support it with textual evidence. Also, they will need to truly study for quizzes and tests. After we read a story, for example, the quizzes won't just test basic reading comprehension, but will have multi-level questions where students will have to apply concepts they've learned to an aspect of the story. A question may ask how a story would be changed if it were written in a different point of view or had a different setting. Another question may ask students to read a nonfiction article that relates to a the literature the class has read and draw conclusions using both the story and the article. Some struggle is normal as students adjust to the rigor, but a student should not be overwhelmed by the coursework and expectations.

2. I want my student to be ready for Honors English in high school. Does he have to take Honors in middle school as a prerequisite?

Sometimes students who fit the Honors “profile” may not be ready to tackle Honors in seventh grade. The transition to middle school alone can be stressful, and the well-being of the child is always paramount. Sometimes it just takes an extra year or two for a student to gain some maturity and organization skills, or develop critical thinking skills to the level that will make Honors manageable. Many students take College prep English in middle school and successfully go on to the high school Honors classes. Middle school Honors is not a prerequisite for Honors in high school.

3. What if I think my child can do well in an Honors course, but my child doesn't want to take it?

A general rule of thumb is that if the parent wants it more than the child, usually the child ends up miserable, and nobody wins. To do well in an honors course, the student must be passionate about English and demonstrate a desire to push him/herself. Putting a child in this accelerated course against his or her will is not advisable. The best advice we can give is to give your child time to adjust to middle school, and bring up the topic again as the student is about to enter eighth grade.