The French *Baccalauréat* (commonly called the *Bac*) is the national examination that most French students take at the end of secondary school. Typically, French students in their *Première* and *Terminale* years (corresponding to the U.S. 11th and 12th grades) will attend at least 30 hours of class per week and often more in order to prepare for the Bac. All will study at least eight or nine academic subjects for examination.

There are three versions of the Bac: the *general*, the *technologique*, and the *professionnel*. The Bac *general* is the one which provides admission to university education. There are three different kinds or *series* of the Bac *general* enabling students to specialize. They are:

- **Bac L** Language and literature, with concentration on French language/literature, philosophy, and languages
- **Bas S** Science and mathematics
- **Bac ES** Economics and mathematics

Regardless of the *série* they have chosen, all students are examined in French, philosophy, history/geography, mathematics, a foreign language, and physical education. Two more subjects are added depending on the version of the Bac being undertaken: literature and a second foreign language for Bac L; additional mathematics and sciences for Bac S; and economics (including mathematics) and a second foreign language for Bac ES.

The specialization of the *série* is also reflected in two additional ways:

- **Study** – The curriculum, general level, and number of class hours per subject vary according to the *série* chosen.
- **Examination** – Results on the different subjects are weighted depending on the *série*; the mark (out of twenty) will be multiplied by the coefficient assigned to that subject for that *série*. It is possible to do optional extra subjects, which earn bonus points for results over 11/20, in order to increase final marks, and many students do so.

In 1981, the French government proposed that specially designed “international options” be created. For the American Option, the Advanced Placement Program of the College Entrance Examination Board, New York, was chosen as the American educational reference. Students studying the international option (often referred to as the OIB or BOI) replace the two parts of the Bac most closely related to language and culture. Briefly, OIB American Option candidates studying language and literature in English follow a curriculum set by the inspectors in collaboration with the teacher-examiners, approved by the French Inspection Générale. Candidates must write two two-hour essays in the written examination, and in the oral exam,

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make a ten-minute presentation on an excerpt from a set text, and answer both general and
detailed questions on works studied in the two-year program. Both the oral and written
examinations are entirely in English.

There are written and oral examinations. Each subject is marked on a scale of 0 to 20, and the
result is then multiplied by the appropriate coefficient for the subject in the given série. Because
marking standards are strict and rigorous, it is very difficult for candidates to achieve marks
above 16. Marks below 10 are common, even for “good” students and, because a student takes
only one written examination in each subject, the marks on an individual subject examination are
not always a reliable indicator of a student’s ability in that subject.

The only pass results possible are:

- passable: 10/20
- mention assez bien: 12/20 (honors)
- mention bien: 14/20 (high honors)
- mention très bien: 16/20 (highest honors)