

program spotlight: what you'll study in your first year at aelo swiss academy

Ask a prospective student what they know about the degree they have just enrolled in, and they can usually describe the destination with confidence: the internship, the specialization, the career that follows. Ask them what happens in the first twelve months and the picture goes quiet. That gap is understandable. Brochures sell outcomes. Yet the first year is where the degree actually begins, and it deserves a closer look than it usually gets.

This spotlight walks through the first year at AELO Swiss Academy: what you will study, how you will be assessed, and what the year is designed to do for you before the specializations arrive. I have sat on both sides of this conversation, advising students before they arrive and watching them settle in afterwards, and the students who thrive are almost always the ones who understood the shape of the year before it started.

A year built on foundations

The first year at AELO Swiss Academy is deliberately a common year. Whatever direction your studies take later, the opening two semesters are built around a shared body of knowledge: the vocabulary, the analytical habits, and the working culture that every later module assumes you already have. This is a deliberate design choice, and an old one. Swiss education has long favored thorough foundations over early specialization, on the reasoning that a narrow base makes for a shaky structure.

In practice this means your first year is broad rather than deep. You will touch management, economics, mathematics, communication, and language, and none of it will reach the level of a final-year module. That breadth sometimes frustrates impatient students in the first weeks. By the end of the year most of them see the point. The second year moves quickly, and it can only move quickly because the first year leveled the ground.

The core curriculum at a glance

Strip away the module codes and the timetable details, and the first year rests on five pillars:



- Principles of management and organizational behavior
- Quantitative methods and business mathematics

- Economics for business
- Business communication and academic writing
- Languages and intercultural competence

Each pillar carries real weight across the two semesters, though the exact balance shifts from term to term. What follows is a closer look at each of them, roughly in the order students come to appreciate them.



Learning to think in numbers

Let me be honest about this one, because it is the module people fear before they arrive. Quantitative methods is not pure mathematics. Nobody is asking you to prove theorems. What the first year asks is that you become comfortable with the arithmetic of business: percentages and percentage change, index numbers, interest and discounting, basic descriptive statistics, and enough spreadsheet work that the software does the heavy lifting for you.

The teaching assumes mixed backgrounds, because cohorts always are. Some students arrive with strong school mathematics; others have not opened a math book in two years. The early weeks therefore move slowly and deliberately, revising what school taught and then applying it to business situations. A student who once told me she had chosen her program partly to avoid mathematics finished the year building her own demand forecasts for a group project. That is the intended arc. The goal is not elegance. The goal is that a number in a report never again feels like a foreign language, and that you can spot when one looks wrong.

Writing, speaking, and being understood

If quantitative methods is the module people fear, communication is the module people underestimate. Almost everyone can write a paragraph and deliver a presentation. Very few people arriving straight from school can construct an argument that a critical reader would call sound. The first year works on that gap.

You will write short essays with proper structure: a claim, evidence, a counter-argument considered and answered. You will learn citation not as bureaucratic decoration but as basic honesty about where ideas come from. You will present in front of your seminar group more than once, because fluency under mild pressure is a skill built through repetition rather than theory. And you will do a fair amount of this in groups, because in the professional world arguments are built by teams, not by solitary geniuses.

The classes are typically international, with English as the working language and a range of first languages around the table. That mix is itself part of the curriculum. Learning to write plainly enough that a second-language reader follows you is a professional skill, not a concession, and the seminar room is where it gets practiced.

How markets and organizations behave

The economics
https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/ stream in the first year is about vocabulary and intuition. Supply and demand, elasticity, market structures, and then the macroeconomic weather every business operates in: inflation, interest rates, exchange rates. Studying these in Switzerland adds texture most textbooks cannot. You are sitting in a small, open economy with its own currency, its own central bank, and a labor market that works differently from its neighbors'. Abstract concepts acquire a local address.

The management half of the pillar covers the classic material: planning, organizing, leading, controlling, motivation theory, and the study of how organizations actually behave, which is often different from what their org charts suggest. Teaching leans on cases rather than pure lecture. You will read about a company facing a decision, argue about it in a seminar, and discover that two reasonable people can reach opposite conclusions from the same facts. First-year study does not resolve that tension. It teaches you to hold it, which is the more useful achievement.

The language question, and the intercultural one

Switzerland has four national languages and functions, in practice, on several more. A first year at AELO Swiss Academy treats language as professional infrastructure rather than an elective ornament. Depending on your starting level and pathway, you will strengthen your academic English and, in most programs, continue with French or German. The aim is not fluency by June. The aim is momentum: enough progress that a later internship or work placement in a French or German speaking environment becomes a realistic option rather than an intimidating one.

Alongside the language work sits intercultural competence, which sounds soft until you have watched a group project falter because three members held three different assumptions about deadlines, disagreement, and what a meeting is for. The module addresses those assumptions directly: how cultures differ in communication style, hierarchy, and attitudes toward time, and how to work across the differences instead of being surprised by them. Students from highly international backgrounds often assume they need none of this. They are usually the ones who get the most from it.

How the year is assessed

Assessment in the first year is deliberately mixed. Written examinations sit at the end of each semester and carry real weight, but they share the year with coursework essays, group projects, presentations, and in some modules a continuous assessment component. The exact weighting varies from module to module, so read each module outline carefully rather than assuming a single pattern holds everywhere.

Two practical notes from experience. First, the students who struggle are rarely the ones who lack ability. They are the ones who banked everything on a final exam and treated coursework as an interruption. The distribution of marks makes that strategy expensive. Second, group projects are assessed on the output, but the experience is assessed by you. The groups that agree on roles and deadlines in the first fifteen minutes almost always

outperform the groups that start by being polite to each other. Learn that lesson in the first year, while the stakes are low.

The rhythm of a normal week

A reasonable question that few people ask on open days: what does a Tuesday actually look like? In the first year, expect a timetable with a solid spine of lectures and seminars, but with more empty space than a school timetable. That space is not free time. It is reading time, problem-set time, and group-work time, and the students who treat it as such finish their evenings early while the students who treat it as holiday finish their semesters badly.

A fair working assumption is that every hour in class wants roughly an hour of your own study beside it. Some weeks demand more, particularly near assessment periods. The Swiss academic tradition places a high value on self-responsibility: nobody will chase you for a missed reading. The freedom is genuine, and so is the consequence.

Habits that decide the year

Having watched first-year cohorts pass through, I would nominate a handful of habits as more decisive than raw talent. Reviewing notes weekly rather than monthly. Asking a question the same week it appears instead of the week before the exam. Joining or forming a study group of two or three serious people, which is large enough to be useful and small enough to stay focused. Sleeping properly during assessment periods, which sounds like advice for children and is in fact the advice final-year students give to first-years with real feeling.

None of these habits are taught as a module, and all of them are learned as if they were. The first year grades your subjects, but it also trains you, quietly, in how to be a student of a demanding program. That training transfers further than any single module ever could.

Preparing before day one

If you are reading this before the year begins, a short list of preparations is worth more than any amount of worrying:

- Refresh your school mathematics, especially percentages, basic algebra, and reading graphs,