



Guidelines on the Uses of College Board Test Scores and Related Data

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Purpose

These guidelines are designed to assist users and others interested in College Board tests and related data, with the most helpful, fair, and proper use of the tests and data. The guidelines were originally developed by the membership of the College Board and are periodically reviewed and revised to ensure they remain accurate and relevant.

These guidelines are created to:

- Describe how the College Board interprets its own responsibilities in relation to the public and test users, as well as what it considers the responsibilities of the users to be;
- State the conditions the College Board regards as appropriate for use of its tests; and
- Provide guidance on how College Board test scores and related data can be used to improve educational decisions.

About These Guidelines

The College Board has long shared the public's interest in the appropriate use of tests and has been a leader in the movement to raise educational quality and maintain high academic standards. The educationally sound use of college entrance test scores, examination grades, placement results, and related information is an important component in the College Board's mission to extend educational equity and excellence to an ever-growing number of students. With that mission in mind, the College Board has developed this document to offer guidelines on the appropriate uses of test results. All College Board assessments and related services are covered by these guidelines. Among the major programs addressed are:

- ACCUPLACER®
- Advanced Placement Program® (AP®)
- College-Level Examination Program® (CLEP®)
- Prueba de Aptitud Académica (PAA™)
- SAT Suite of Assessments
 - ◆ PSAT™ 8/9
 - ◆ PSAT™ 10
 - ◆ PSAT/NMSQT® (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test)
 - ◆ SAT®
 - ◆ SAT Subject Tests™
- Student Search Service®

These guidelines highlight the beneficial uses of test scores and related data and advise users about the tests' limitations. Users are encouraged to consider scores in conjunction with other factors such as students' grades, courses taken, cocurricular activities, writing samples, personal statements, interviews, portfolios, and recommendations when making admission decisions.

Because the decisions and judgments influenced by test scores may have significant personal and social consequences, users should avoid practices that might limit educational opportunities for certain groups of students. The College Board strongly encourages users to conduct validation studies in order to determine and review the best combinations of factors in making educational decisions. Integrating the guidelines into the decision-making process will help ensure that test scores and related data are used appropriately from both an ethical and educational standpoint.

Test scores have long proved very useful in helping admission and placement staff and other educators to better understand and interpret students' qualifications and preparation. Students in secondary schools throughout the United States experience vastly different educational models and grading systems. In many situations, test results provide the only consistent and objective measure of students' abilities and achievement in specific areas.

All College Board examinations are constructed to measure specific content or skills, and appropriate use of test scores is closely related to their purpose and overall content. The College Board reminds users to determine whether a test it plans to use actually covers the material students should know and skills they want students to demonstrate. Throughout these guidelines, users are cautioned not to “overuse” test results, by interpreting scores either too broadly or too precisely, and are encouraged to remember that test results are rarely absolute measurements.

The College Board has found that most test uses can be counted on to provoke at least some debate about their merits or limitations. The disagreements sometimes are based on differences in the specific circumstances of a particular use. Judgments about using test scores to screen applicants, for example, may be influenced by such considerations as how valid the tests are as predictors, how feasible it is to use other information instead of, or in addition to, the scores, and how many students are involved. The technical issues raised, however, are often of less significance than are questions of public policy and institutional prerogatives.

To guarantee and maintain quality and utility, College Board examinations and other services are regularly and rigorously reviewed and updated. The College Board remains committed to promoting the best use of tests and data by providing comprehensive information about each product and how it is intended to be used. More information on many of the topics covered in the guidelines is available at the College Board’s online Research section and in specific program publications and technical data provided at research.collegeboard.org.

While it is strongly recommended that College Board tests and related data be used in a manner consistent with these guidelines, this publication does not represent a scientific blueprint for action applicable to every situation. Therefore, comments, inquiries, and suggestions on how to better use or improve the use of College Board test results are welcome.

Guidelines

1. For the College Board

The College Board should:

- 1.1 Adhere to the highest standards in the development and administration of its tests and related services, giving careful attention to such generally accepted standards as those embodied in *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (2014),¹ promulgated by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education.
- 1.2 Provide the users of its assessments—counselors, admission officers, middle and secondary school teachers, community college and university faculty members and administrators, and test takers themselves—with full information about the purposes and nature of these assessments and related services.
- 1.3 Through periodic professional development activities, as well as publications, the internet, and other media, advise educational institutions, agencies, and the public of the purposes, appropriate uses, and limitations of its tests and related services, and explain the responsibilities users should exercise.
- 1.4 Provide test takers with a complete description of the content and types of questions included on the tests they will be taking and, where appropriate, provide practice materials, such as practice questions or a complete sample practice test.
- 1.5 Encourage appropriate use of its tests and related services by publishing information essential to the proper use and understanding of the assessments; provide research services to evaluate the validity of admission and placement procedures; regularly communicate and consult with institutions and agencies that use the services; and provide timely advice and assistance to users of College Board data.
- 1.6 Maintain tests that are current and relevant to the domains they measure and engage faculty members from diverse backgrounds, as well as from both secondary and postsecondary levels, as appropriate, in the construction and review of the tests.
- 1.7 Ensure fairness and sensitivity to all students regardless of age, race, creed, color, sex, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or socioeconomic status through special reviews of test questions.
- 1.8 Seek to inform those who set national, state, and local policy about appropriate uses of test scores and related data.
- 1.9 Maintain procedures for each of its testing programs for collecting advice and feedback from students, as well as from institutions and professional organizations, about the quality and adequacy of the services provided.

1. American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education. *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 2014.

- 1.10 Develop and implement standard procedures for security and test administration to ensure that all students have the same opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and so that users can feel confident that scores were earned under similar conditions.
- 1.11 Maintain effective procedures for protecting the privacy of individual test takers, never releasing information that serves to identify them without their consent.
- 1.12 Respect the interests of educational institutions and other organizations, releasing identifiable aggregated data about them only to individuals or agencies authorized to receive such information.
- 1.13 Maintain effective procedures for verifying the scores of test takers who question the accuracy of their scores and for responding with care to students' queries or concerns about particular test questions or test administration procedures.
- 1.14 Establish policies for each program about the length of time that scores are valid, and when releasing older scores, include a cautionary statement indicating that such scores may not be a reliable indication of current abilities.

2. For Institutions, Agencies, and Organizations

Middle and secondary schools, community colleges, four-year colleges, universities, scholarship agencies, and other educational organizations should:

- 2.1 Assign responsibilities involving test use to people knowledgeable about educational measurement, including purpose, content, reliability, validity, scaling, equating, norming, concorded scores, statistical characteristics, capabilities, and limitations of any test in use or under consideration.²
- 2.2 Support training and other professional development opportunities for test users to assure they remain up to date about test content, score interpretation, and related issues.
- 2.3 Inform test takers about why tests are required or recommended, when they are offered, and how the scores will be used, as applicable.
- 2.4 Protect the privacy of test takers by treating the scores and other information derived from the tests they take confidentially, bearing in mind the additional considerations involved with electronic transmission and the potential for retransmission.
- 2.5 Use College Board test scores and related data with discretion and for purposes that are appropriate and in ways that have been validated and in ways that are consistent with the applicable guidelines in the remaining sections.³

2. See also *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, "Responsibility for test use should be assumed by or delegated only to those individuals who have the training, professional credentials, and/or experience necessary to handle this responsibility. All special qualifications for test administration or interpretation specified in the test manual should be met." Standard 9.1.

3. See also *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, "When a test is to be used for a purpose for which little or no validity evidence is available, the user is responsible for documenting the rationale for the selection of the test and obtaining evidence of the reliability/precision of the test scores and the validity of the interpretations supporting the use of the scores for this purpose." Standard 9.4.

- 2.6 Adopt procedures to ensure that, when test scores are used as a screening mechanism to identify potential candidates, other relevant information, including the secondary school record, is considered in the final selection of recipients.
- 2.7 Guard against the release or forwarding to third parties of College Board scores or student transcripts that include this information.

3. K–12 Instructional Planning and Counseling

Educators should:

- 3.1 Advise students on what tests they may need to take in pursuing their educational objectives; when and where they might conveniently take the tests in view of institutional requirements, testing schedules, and their own personal schedules; and how to interpret their scores in the context of their own situations.
- 3.2 Explain the limitations, as well as the intended purposes of College Board examinations: that the results are estimates that contain a small amount of measurement error and should be treated as such; that scores should be interpreted as ranges rather than points; and that admission test scores are useful as one means of predicting academic performance in college when considered with other relevant information.
- 3.3 Inform students that placement test scores are intended to be used by colleges and universities to help evaluate eligibility for either proper course placement, advanced placement, or college-level course credit.
- 3.4 Inform students that admission test scores are intended to be used by colleges and universities as supplementary to secondary school records and other relevant information, with the scores providing a useful uniform measure for all students, in contrast to school records, which vary widely because of different grading practices.⁴
- 3.5 Inform students with disabilities who have been receiving accommodations in school of accommodations available for testing and where they should apply for them.
- 3.6 Understand how to use data from College Board tests to provide information to students about course selection, college majors, and careers.
- 3.7 Release the scores and other information derived from a test a student takes only with the student’s explicit consent, if the student could be identified from the released information.
- 3.8 Encourage all potential college-bound students to take appropriate admission or placement tests, without regard to the possibility of raising or lowering the school or district average.

4. The College Board’s accommodations request process, including criteria, is explained on the College Board Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) website at collegeboard.org/ssd.

4. Recruiting and Marketing

When College Board tests and related data are used for recruiting or marketing purposes, including but not limited to via Student Search Service, the responsible officials should:

- 4.1 Adhere to generally accepted ethical standards in the recruitment of students for the institution.
- 4.2 Identify the College Board program (e.g., Student Search Service, SAT, AP, etc.) providing the contact information in the initial communication with the student.
- 4.3 Use the provided information solely for their own purposes, and in compliance with applicable program terms and conditions.
- 4.4 Provide prospective applicants with relevant and helpful information about the characteristics of all admitted and enrolled students, including those in specific academic programs.
- 4.5 Provide complete information to prospective applicants regarding admission requirements, procedures, and deadlines. Inform students who submit multiple scores for the same assessment (both SAT and SAT Subject Tests or AP Exams) how these scores will be used in the admission process (e.g., highest, latest, average).

5. Admission (Individual Institutions or University Systems) or Scholarship/Recognition Program Eligibility

When College Board tests and related data are used for admission, retention, or scholarship/recognition program purposes, either by individual institutions or systems or groups of colleges, the responsible officials and selection committee members should:

- 5.1 Know enough about tests and test data to ensure that their proper uses and limitations are understood and applied.
- 5.2 Use SAT and other scores in conjunction with other indicators, such as the secondary school record (grades and courses), interviews, personal statements, writing samples, portfolios, recommendations, etc., in evaluating the applicant's admissibility at a particular institution.
- 5.3 View admission test scores as approximate indicators reflecting a point in time rather than as fixed and exact measures of a student's preparation for college-level work.
- 5.4 Evaluate test results and other information about applicants in the context of their particular background and experience, as well as in the context of the programs they intend to pursue.
- 5.5 Ensure that small differences in test scores are not the basis for rejecting an otherwise qualified applicant.

- 5.6 Guard against using minimum test scores unless used in conjunction with other information such as secondary school performance and unless properly validated. An exception to this guideline is that institutions may establish, based on empirical data, specific score levels that reflect desired skill competencies, such as English language proficiency.
- 5.7 Validate data used in the selection process, both for the individual institution and appropriate system or group studies, regularly to ensure their continuing relevance.⁵
- 5.8 Maintain adequate procedures for protecting the confidentiality of test scores and other admission data.
- 5.9 When introducing or revising admission or program eligibility policies, allow sufficient lead time and provide adequate notice to schools and students, so that they can take the new policies into account when planning school programs and curricular offerings, and preparing for admission tests and other requirements.
- 5.10 Before determining the admission or eligibility policies to be adopted for the group or system of colleges or scholarship or recognition programs, allow sufficient time and opportunity for representatives of the individual institutions to consider and discuss possible policies and to suggest alternative policies, especially as these relate to their institutions.
- 5.11 For information on the measurement and statistical characteristics, please refer to program-specific technical manuals as applicable.

6. Placement and Credit

When College Board tests are used for placement and credit purposes, the responsible officials should:

- 6.1 Determine the appropriateness of particular tests through consultation with faculty members familiar with the content of the tests and the content of aligned courses at the institution.
- 6.2 Establish standards appropriate to the performance levels and ranges of their enrolled students.
- 6.3 Accept the transfer of credits earned by examination at a previous institution in the same manner as transfer credit for coursework from said previous institution.
- 6.4 Publicize their placement and credit policies, making clear which tests are used, how students gain access to them, what scores are required, how much credit may be awarded for each examination, whether an exam score can lead to advanced placement as opposed to credit, whether or not credits granted meet degree or major requirements, and how much total credit may be obtained.
- 6.5 Establish standards regarding the length of time that scores may be considered valid for use in placement and/or credit-granting decisions and the norms used for interpretation when setting placement and credit policies.

5. See also *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, "Validity," Section 1, 11–31.

- 6.6 Periodically validate examinations and standards used for placement and credit to ensure their continuing relevance.
- 6.7 If additional fees are charged for credits awarded by examination, establish such fees at levels that represent actual costs involved in providing this avenue to credit rather than instructional costs or other unrelated costs.

7. Using Aggregate Scores

Educators, the media, and others should:

- 7.1 Use aggregate scores in conjunction with other factors such as the number of courses taken in academic subjects, targeting areas for increased teacher development, attention, and focus in curriculum, applying tools such as instructional planning reports, vertical score scales, and benchmarks, retention/attrition rates, or graduation rates and other outcome measures for:
- Evaluation of the general direction in which education in a particular jurisdiction is headed
 - Curriculum development
 - Faculty staffing
 - Student recruitment
 - Planning for physical facilities
 - Student services such as guidance and placement

A Note on the Use of Aggregate SAT data

As measures of developed Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (ERW) and Math abilities that are important for success in college, SAT scores are useful in making decisions about individual students and assessing their academic preparation. Because of the increasing public interest in educational accountability, aggregate test data continue to be widely publicized and analyzed. Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, states are successfully using the SAT as the statewide assessment for school accountability.

Each assessment in the SAT Suite of Assessments has an associated set of metrics called the college and career readiness benchmarks. These metrics are tools developed to help administrators, teachers, parents, and students understand whether students have mastered the knowledge, skills, and understandings needed to be successful in college. The SAT benchmarks offer a measure of whether a student is prepared to succeed in college, while the PSAT-related assessments benchmarks measure whether students are on target to meet the SAT benchmark and, thus, on track to being prepared for college. The SAT College and Career Readiness Benchmarks represent the minimum scores on the ERW and Math sections that are associated with having a high likelihood of earning at least a C in relevant credit-bearing, introductory college-level courses. Students who meet both the ERW and Math benchmarks on the SAT are ready to succeed in college-level coursework. The benchmarks for the SAT Suite of Assessments are intended to help monitor the academic progress of a student or groups of students as they prepare for college and careers. When necessary, interventions can be introduced to help students get on track to graduate high school prepared for college-level work.

Many states choose to give the SAT to all of their students as part of the school day, which research shows increases college-going rates. However, it is important to note that many College Board tests are taken only by particular groups of self-selected students. Therefore, aggregate results of their performance on these tests usually do not reflect the educational attainment of all students in a school, district, or state.

Useful comparisons of students' performance are possible only if all students take the same test. Average SAT scores are not appropriate for state comparisons because the percentage of SAT takers varies widely among states. In some states, a very small percentage of college-bound seniors take the SAT. Typically, these students have strong academic backgrounds and are applicants to the nation's most selective colleges and scholarship programs. Therefore, it is expected that the SAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and Math scale score averages reported for these states will be higher than the overall average. In states where a greater proportion of students, with a wide range of academic backgrounds, take the SAT, and where most colleges in the state require the test for admission, the scores are closer to the overall average.

In looking at average SAT scores, the user must understand the context in which the particular test scores were earned. Other factors shown to be related to performance on the SAT include academic courses studied in high school, family background, and education of parents.

Appendix A

Examples of uses of College Board test scores and related data that should be encouraged:

1. Utilizing College Board test scores to provide additional context to better understand other information (such as grades and courses taken) in a student's transcript.
2. Awarding advanced placement and/or college credit for established minimum scores on examinations such as AP and CLEP.
3. Reviewing student performance on College Board tests with individual students, parents, and teachers in order to help everybody understand the student's strengths and challenge areas.
4. Using test results to identify, in advance, students at risk, to assist with retention and persistence support.
5. Helping students understand how their scores on standardized assessments, such as the SAT, relate to all other test takers on the same assessment and to the applicant pools at institutions the student is considering.
6. Using standardized assessment scores (for example, from the SAT, Advanced Placement Program, ACCUPLACER, or CLEP) to conduct unique, institutionally based research to identify which of those characteristics used in decision making predict success in course placement or in freshman or long-term performance best.
7. Using placement test results, such as those provided by ACCUPLACER, AP, or CLEP, to ensure that students enroll in appropriate courses and that developmental support is provided to students who need it.
8. Incorporating information about student performance on the SAT and AP Exams into high school profiles to provide the local community, as well as colleges, a context in which to understand students' scores and transcript information in addition to data about student socioeconomic status.
9. Providing information about institutional test scores in print, online, and through other communications, so students and families understand the full range of characteristics of applicants and admitted and enrolled students.
10. Sharing score reports, especially aggregate reports that assess specific academic performances, with teachers to assist instructional needs and planning.
11. Using test scores and accompanying proficiency information from the PSAT 8/9, PSAT 10, PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, and ACCUPLACER as an early identification system for college-bound students or as an early intervention tool for students in need of additional academic preparation.
12. Using test scores, such as those from the PSAT/NMSQT, as a predictor of readiness for AP Exams.
13. Viewing AP scores, SAT scores (from both the SAT and Subject Tests), and other standardized testing results as a way to identify a student's strengths when evaluating admission applications.

14. Utilizing multiple criteria when advising students about AP opportunities (e.g., prior grades and courses, PSAT/NMSQT scores, teacher recommendations, and student motivation).
15. Utilizing information from the SAT and PSAT/NMSQT (particularly the Question Analysis and Instructional Planning reports) to improve instruction by relating information about the skills measured on these tests and state or local standards.
16. Utilizing the SAT as the statewide assessment for federal accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Appendix B

Examples of uses of College Board test scores and related data that should be avoided:

1. Encouraging the belief that College Board tests measure a person's worth as a human being.
2. Using test scores as the sole basis for important decisions affecting the lives of individuals, when other information of equal or greater relevance and the resources for using such information are available.
3. Using minimum cut scores on tests without proper validation.
4. Making decisions about otherwise qualified students based only on small differences in test scores.
5. Using scores without appropriate consideration to their validity.
6. Providing inadequate or misleading information about the importance of test scores in making judgments or decisions.
7. Requiring or recommending that certain tests be taken when the scores are not used or are used to a negligible extent.
8. Failing to recognize differences in admission standards and requirements that may exist among different schools or departments within many institutions when providing information to prospective applicants.
9. Discouraging certain students from taking tests in an effort to increase a school's or district's average score.
10. Rejecting a student's application for transfer on the basis of SAT scores received 2 or 3 years prior when the student has since maintained a strong academic record.
11. Using College Board tests as a sole indicator of the overall performance of students, teachers, educational institutions, districts, states, and other groups, except for those states in which all students are tested.
12. Ranking states, districts, schools, and other institutions solely by aggregate AP Exam or SAT scores, except for those states in which all students are tested.

About the College Board

The College Board is a mission-driven not-for-profit organization that connects students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board was created to expand access to higher education. Today, the membership association is made up of over 6,000 of the world's leading educational institutions and is dedicated to promoting excellence and equity in education. Each year, the College Board helps more than seven million students prepare for a successful transition to college through programs and services in college readiness and college success—including the SAT® and the Advanced Placement Program®. The organization also serves the education community through research and advocacy on behalf of students, educators, and schools.

For further information, visit collegeboard.org.

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