



*what's the*

**ATAR?**

Australian  
Tertiary  
Admission  
Rank



**B S S S**

**BOARD OF  
SENIOR  
SECONDARY  
STUDIES**

*Australian Capital  
Territory*

# *what's the* **ATAR?**

## **Introduction**

This brochure provides an explanation of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) and of the processes used in its calculation by the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies.

## **What is the ATAR?**

The ATAR is a **percentile ranking** used by universities to assist in the selection of school leavers for entry into undergraduate courses. It is used as an indication of a student's suitability for study at university level, and to allow universities to select appropriate numbers of students for each course. The ATAR is a ranking of a student relative to the full age cohort i.e. relative to the set of students who would be in the group if all students stayed on and completed Year 12. It is reported with a range from 99.95 for the highest ranked students down to 30.00. For example, a student with an ATAR of 85.00 indicates a performance better than 85% of the population eligible to be in Year 12 or in the top 15% in relation to all the students who started school at the same time.

## **How is the ATAR reported?**

The ATAR is reported on the Tertiary Entrance Statement. A Tertiary Entrance Statement is produced for each student who meets the requirements set down by the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies for eligibility to apply for entry to university.

## How is the ATAR calculated?

The ATAR is calculated from a student's performance in their best courses. The main steps in the process are:

### *step 1: Course scores*

Colleges calculate a course score for each student in each T or H course from relevant unit scores. A course score indicates how well a student performed in a particular course compared to all other students in that course's scaling group at the college. It is a way of comparing students' performances. A scaling group is the group of students completing T or H courses in a particular area. The students may all have completed the same course, or they may have completed different courses. For example, a college may group students from their Accounting and Business Studies courses in a single scaling group. This will allow course scores for those courses to be directly compared. Course scores are not percentages and typically lie between 30 and 105.

### *step 2: Scaling*

Course scores are only useful in the calculation of the Aggregate Score if they are reported on the same scale. The scale is determined when the course scores are scaled by the OCS scaling procedure. Scaling is an adjustment of the course scores to bring them to a mean and standard deviation related to the students' performance on the AST and their best 4 course scores. A brief explanation of the OCS procedure may be found near the end of this pamphlet in Appendix A.

The scaling procedure changes the score used to represent each student's rank in a particular moderation scaling group, but it does not alter the ranking of students or the shape of the distribution. For example, if Student A is above Student B in Economics, Student A will still be above Student B after scaling.

### *step 3: Using scaled scores to produce an Aggregate Score*

Once course scores are scaled, they can be added. The Aggregate Score is the number produced by adding the best three scaled scores from major courses, and 0.6 of the next best course score (either major or minor). This may be illustrated through these three examples:

- 1 A student with 4 major courses and 1 minor course

Course Length	Scaled Scores	Weighting	Weighted Scaled Scores
Major	118.10	0.0	0.00
Major	143.22	1.0	143.22
Major	171.87	1.0	171.87
Major	125.85	1.0	125.85
Minor	176.60	0.6	105.96

$$\text{Aggregate Score} = 143.22 + 171.87 + 125.85 + 105.96 = 547$$

- 2 A student with 3 major courses and 1 double major course

Course Length	Scaled Scores
Major	118.10
Major	143.22
Major	176.60
Double Major	171.87

For score calculation purposes, this package is equivalent to 5 majors as follows:

Course Length	Scaled Scores	Weighting	Weighted Scaled Scores
Major	118.10	0.0	0.00
Major	143.22	0.6	85.93
Major	176.60	1.0	176.60
Major	171.87	1.0	171.87
Major	171.87	1.0	171.87

$$\text{Aggregate Score} = 85.93 + 176.60 + 171.87 + 171.87 = 606$$

3 A student with 3 major courses and 1 major minor course

Course Length	Scaled Score
Major	118.10
Major	143.22
Major	176.60
Major Minor	171.87

For score calculation purposes this package is equivalent to 4 majors and 1 minor as follows:

Course Length	Scaled Scores	Weighting	Weighted Scaled Scores
Major	118.10	0.0	0.00
Major	143.22	1.0	143.22
Major	176.60	1.0	176.60
Major	171.87	1.0	171.87
Minor	171.87	0.6	103.12

Aggregate Score =  $143.22 + 176.60 + 171.87 + 103.12 = 595$

#### *step 4: Calculating the ATAR*

The Aggregate Scores for all students who have met the requirements are listed in order from highest to lowest. The students are then given a rank called the rank by candidature. This rank is then converted to an age rank (ATAR) using a table supplied by the NSW Technical Committee on Scaling. This gives a rank for ACT students as if they were part of the NSW age cohort. The ACT, because of its size and demographic nature, can be more readily considered to be within the NSW age cohort for comparison to the states. By using this method the relativities that have been in place for ACT students for a number of years are maintained.

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The ATAR calculated in the ACT is directly comparable to the ATAR calculated in NSW and other states and the same cut-offs at NSW and ACT universities apply to both ACT and NSW students. If you are applying to interstate universities, that state's admissions centre will use the ATAR for entry into its universities. All Australian universities have agreed to use the ranking based on the age cohort for each state. This means that most interstate applicants will be able to directly compare their ranks with university cut-offs irrespective of their state of origin.

## What courses should I choose?

In making an informed decision about your choice of courses, you should take into account:

- your interests and abilities
- likely prerequisites for educational opportunities you may wish to access after leaving school.

You should seek advice on these matters from teachers at your college.

## Comparing unit scores

In the ACT the unit scores represent a position in a rank order of the group of students completing that unit in that college. They do not represent a score out of 100. Care must be taken when comparing unit scores from one unit to another or between colleges as these are only a best estimation of scores and can be very different after the scaling process.

To best understand your unit score you need to know the mean and standard deviation of the unit scores of the group studying that unit. The mean of a group is the average, the standard deviation of the group is a measure of how spread out the group is. This information can be used to determine where you are situated in the group.

## Appendix A: The Other Course Score (OCS) scaling method

Briefly, the stages in the process are:

- 1 For each student, a measure of General Achievement (GA) is calculated using her/his AST score and four best course scores. The course scores from the best 3 T majors and the next best T course score – either major or minor – are used.
- 2 The average and the spread of the GA scores in each moderation scaling group are calculated, and the course scores are then adjusted so that they have the same average and spread as the GA scores.
- 3 The AST and the adjusted course scores are used to calculate revised GA values.
- 4 The course scores are adjusted again (as in step 2) using these revised GA values. The process continues working through steps 3 and 4 until the adjustments made to the course scores from one step to the next are no longer significant. In practice this usually takes less than twenty cycles.

Note:

- Although an individual student's AST result or GA is not used directly in adjusting his/her own course scores; it affects the parameters of each scaling group the student is a part of.
- The AST scores are not altered during any part of the process.
- The final stage in the process produces course scores which are on the same scale across all courses and across all colleges. This means they can then be directly compared to each other. The course scores can be added together to produce Aggregate Scores, which are then used in the calculation of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank.

## More Information

There are staff members in your college who can explain and give advice on this brochure or any other in this series.

Other pamphlets in this series that are available from your school are:

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
What's the AST?	Explains the ACT Scaling Test and its role in your assessment program.
What certificates could you obtain?	Explains all the different certificates you could be awarded at the end of Year 12, and what's on them.
Your rights to appeal	Explains the processes available for having results for Year 11 and/or 12 assessment tasks, units or courses reviewed.
What's Moderation?	Explains the consensus based peer reviewed process used to moderate student work across the ACT
What's Plagiarism? How you can avoid it	A guide to what constitutes plagiarism and how you can avoid it. Citation and referencing examples are included.
What's Plagiarism? How you can avoid it Advice for Teachers	A guide to what constitutes plagiarism. Procedures and strategies for dealing with plagiarism and where to find resources and further information.
Equitable Assessment and Special consideration in Assessment in Years 11 and 12	A guide to reasonable accommodation in assessment for students with special circumstances. (Student and Teacher versions)
What additional programs are available?	A guide to additional programs available for senior secondary students in the ACT.

Further information may be obtained at: <http://www.bsss.act.edu.au>

Enquires may also be directed to the:  
ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies  
GPO Box 158  
CANBERRA ACT 2601  
Phone: (02) 6205 7181

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