

# Frequently Asked Questions About the ATAR

# Essentials: Frequently Asked Questions About the ATAR

## Key dates

Early August	Applications open
End September	On-time applications close
Mid-December	HSC results and ATARs released
Early January	Change of preferences for January Main Round close
Mid-January	January Main Round offers made. Most offers to Year 12 students are made in this round

## Fast facts

- The ATAR is a rank that indicates a student's position overall against other students. HSC marks indicate their performance in each of their courses.
- To be eligible for an ATAR, students must satisfactorily complete 10 units of ATAR courses, including: 8 units from Category A courses, 2 units of English, 3 Board Developed Courses of 2 units or greater, and 4 subjects.
- Bonus points do not change a student's ATAR; they change the student's selection rank for a particular course or institution. A Year 12 student's selection rank = ATAR + bonus points.

## Contacting UAC



1300 ASK UAC (1300 275 822)  
from mobiles: (02) 9752 0200  
from overseas: +61 2 9752 0200



UAC  
Locked Bag 112  
Silverwater NSW 2128



[www.facebook.com/  
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Quad 2, 8 Parkview Drive  
Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127

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# Contents

<b>Introduction and common terms</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>The HSC and the ATAR</b>	<b>13</b>
Introduction	3	HSC marks and the ATAR: what's the difference?	14
Common terms	3	<b>Calculating the ATAR</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>ATAR basics</b>	<b>5</b>	Overview	18
Explaining the ATAR	6	Scaling	18
The Limited ATAR	8	Bonus points	19
<b>Courses and subjects</b>	<b>9</b>		
ATAR courses	10		
Accumulating courses	12		
Repeating courses	12		
Accelerating studies	12		

# Introduction and common terms



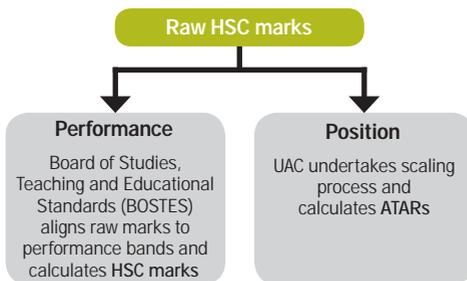
## Introduction

Tertiary institutions in Australia have found that a selection rank based on a student's overall academic achievement is the best single predictor of success for tertiary study.

The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) was therefore developed to provide a measure of a student's overall academic achievement in the Higher School Certificate (HSC) or ACT Year 12 Certificate in relation to other students.

This is in contrast to HSC or Year 12 marks that provide information about how well a student has performed in each of the courses they have completed.

ATARs and HSC marks are calculated separately using different methods.



## Common terms

### ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (ACT BSSS)

Statutory authority responsible for the certification of senior secondary school studies in government and non-government schools in the ACT.

### Additional selection criteria

Criteria used by some institutions as well as, or instead of, the ATAR to assess specific skills relevant to a particular course. They can include tests, interviews, auditions and portfolios.

### ATAR courses

Board Developed courses for which the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) conducts examinations that yield graded

assessments. English Studies, Mathematics General 1 and Life Skills courses are not ATAR courses. VET courses can contribute to a student's ATAR eligibility requirements and calculation if the student enrolls in the appropriate additional examination course and completes the examination.

### Board Developed courses

Courses for which the syllabus has been developed by BOSTES. They are used in the calculation of the ATAR provided they have examinations conducted by BOSTES and these examinations yield graded assessments.

### Board Endorsed courses

Courses that may be studied as one or two units and as preliminary and/or HSC courses. They count towards the HSC and appear on the student's Record of Achievement. However, Board Endorsed courses do not count in the calculation of the ATAR.

### Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES)

NSW Government authority that sets the core curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 12, sets guidelines for school assessment tasks, and sets, organises and marks the HSC examinations. Referred to as 'BOSTES' in this publication.

### Bonus points

Points allocated to a student by an institution. Bonus points do not change a student's ATAR, but change their selection rank for a particular course preference. Examples are subject bonus points or regional bonus points. Bonus points can also be awarded to Educational Access Schemes (EAS) applicants.

### Category A courses

ATAR courses that have the academic rigour and depth of knowledge to provide an adequate background for tertiary studies.

### Category B courses

Courses that do not provide an adequate background for tertiary studies, but can contribute to the ATAR when combined with Category A courses. No more than two units of Category B courses can be included in the ATAR calculation.

## Cohort

A student's peer group. For example, the ATAR cohort refers to those students who receive an ATAR in the same academic year. A Year 7 cohort comprises those students who began Year 7 together, regardless of when they left the school system.

## Extension courses

Courses that enable students to undertake more in-depth study in areas of special interest. These courses build on the content of the 2-unit course.

## HSC course

A branch of study within a NSW HSC subject. A subject may have several different courses. For example, within the subject of English, courses include English (Standard), English (Advanced), HSC English Extension 1, HSC English Extension 2, and English as a Second Language.

## HSC mark

A 50:50 combination of a student's examination mark and school-based assessment mark for each course. It is recorded on the student's HSC Record of Achievement, which is issued to them by BOSTES.

## HSC subject

A general area of study or key learning area in the NSW HSC or ACT Year 12. For example, within the subject of English, courses include English (Standard), English (Advanced), HSC English Extension 1, HSC English Extension 2, and English as a Second Language.

## International Baccalaureate (IB)

A Diploma qualification offered by some schools and recognised internationally. IB students don't receive an ATAR; they receive a UAC rank based on their total score if they've been awarded the IB Diploma or Bilingual Diploma.

## Moderation

The process of adjusting school assessment marks to a common scale so that direct comparisons can be made between assessment marks awarded by different schools. The rank order of students within a school group, and the relative gaps between them, are maintained.

## Percentile

An indicator of a student's position in a course relative to other students. For example, if a student's percentile in a course is 73, they are placed in the top 27 per cent of the students in that course.

## Performance band

A band representing a level of achievement in a course. There are six performance bands for 2-unit courses and four for extension courses. For 2-unit courses, Band 6 is the highest and Band 1 is the lowest.

## Raw HSC mark

The average of a student's raw examination mark and their raw moderated school assessment mark, before it is aligned to performance bands by BOSTES or scaled by UAC. This mark is not reported to the student.

## Scaled mark

The mark used in the ATAR calculation. It is used because unscaled marks in different courses are not directly comparable, and an adjustment must be made before an overall measure of achievement can be determined. Scaling allows the comparison of students who have studied different courses by determining what the marks would have been if all students attempted all courses.

## Scaled mean

An indicator of the average academic achievement of the course candidature. It is used in the ATAR calculation.

## Universities Admissions Centre (UAC)

The central office that receives and processes applications for admission to most undergraduate courses at its participating institutions as well as applications for Educational Access Schemes, Equity Scholarships and Schools Recommendation Schemes. UAC notifies NSW HSC students of their ATAR (ACT students are notified by their school) and makes offers of admission on behalf of participating institutions. It also processes applications for many postgraduate courses.

- ATAR basics



## Explaining the ATAR

The first thing to understand is that the ATAR is a rank, not a mark. It's a number between 0.00 and 99.95 with increments of 0.05. The ATAR provides a measure of a student's overall academic achievement in relation to that of other students and helps universities rank applicants for selection into their courses.

The ATAR indicates a student's position relative to all the students who started high school with them in Year 7. So, an ATAR of 80.00 means that a student is 20 per cent from the top of their Year 7 group, even though not everyone who started with them in Year 7 went on to achieve an ATAR.

The average ATAR is usually around 70.00. Some people are surprised by this, thinking that the average should be 50.00. It would be 50.00 if everyone from Year 7 went on to achieve an ATAR. But because the students who leave early are typically less academically able than the ones that stay on, the students receiving ATARs are a smaller, more academically able group, and the average ATAR they receive is higher.



### *Who is eligible for an ATAR?*

To be eligible for an ATAR, students must satisfactorily complete at least 10 units of ATAR courses, including:

- eight units of Category A courses
- two units of English
- three Board Developed courses of two units or greater
- four subjects.

The fourth point can easily be overlooked or misunderstood. A subject is a general area of study (eg mathematics). Within that subject there may be a number of courses (eg Mathematics General 2, Mathematics, HSC Mathematics Extension 1, HSC Mathematics Extension 2). If a student studies, for example, HSC Mathematics Extension 1, HSC Mathematics Extension 2, English (Advanced), HSC English Extension 1, HSC English Extension 2 and Biology they will not meet the four subjects requirement because they have only studied three subjects: mathematics, English and biology.



### *Are International Baccalaureate Diploma students eligible for an ATAR?*

No. International Baccalaureate (IB)

Diploma candidates are not eligible to receive an ATAR. IB students who've been awarded the IB Diploma or Bilingual Diploma are allocated a UAC rank based on their total IB score.

In addition, students undertaking tertiary preparation programs such as the Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC) and Open Foundation don't receive an ATAR.



The ATAR release date can be found at [www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/key-dates.shtml](http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/key-dates.shtml)



### *Who receives an ATAR?*

ATARs are calculated for all ATAR-eligible students and can be accessed via UAC's website or My UAC (UAC's mobile app). NSW Higher School Certificate students who indicate on their HSC entry forms that they wish to be notified of their ATAR will also receive an ATAR Advice Notice from UAC. This will arrive in the mail shortly after ATARs are released.



### *When is the ATAR released?*

UAC releases ATARs in December. The actual release date for the ATAR each year can be found on the inside front cover of the UAC Guide and on UAC's website at [www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/key-dates.shtml](http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/key-dates.shtml).



### *How is the ATAR used?*

The ATAR is used by tertiary institutions (either on its own or in conjunction with other selection criteria) to rank applicants for selection into courses.



### *What is an ATAR Advice Notice?*

This is a written notice of the ATAR that is posted to students by UAC after ATARs are released on UAC's website. An ATAR Advice Notice is only sent to NSW Higher School Certificate students who indicate on their HSC entry forms that they wish to be notified of their ATAR. It will arrive in the mail shortly after ATARs are released.

The ATAR Advice Notice includes:

- the ATAR
- a list of ATAR courses studied and their category
- the number of units of each ATAR course that contributed to the calculation of the ATAR.

If a student receives an ATAR between 0.00 and 30.00 the notice will read '30 or less'. If a student hasn't met the requirements of the ATAR the notice will read 'not eligible'.



***If a student loses the ATAR Advice Notice, can they get another one?***

Yes. If a student loses the ATAR Advice Notice posted to them in December, they can request a reprint of it up to the end of the following February. After that, UAC can issue a replacement ATAR Advice Notice on payment of the relevant fee. To request a replacement, students need to print out the form on UAC's website at [www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/faq](http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/faq), fill it in and post it to UAC, Locked Bag 112, Silverwater NSW 2128.



***Who else gets notified of ATARs?***

ATARs are only accessible on UAC's website or mobile app by individual students or their authorised agents and the ATAR Advice Notice is sent to the student at their registered address. ATARs are also released to institutions for the purpose of making offers to courses. UAC doesn't give ATARs to parents, schools or careers advisers. It is the student's choice if they wish to tell others about their ATAR.



***How do ACT students find out about the ATAR?***

Information about the calculation of the ACT ATAR is available from the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies. Visit [www.bsss.act.edu.au](http://www.bsss.act.edu.au) or call (02) 6205 7181.



***Does UAC have an ATAR calculator?***

No. UAC only advises students of their official ATARs on ATAR release day in December each year. UAC does not endorse the use of ATAR calculators. ATAR calculators do not use current data so can only be a general indication of a student's possible ATAR.



***Does the school attended matter?***

No. The school attended does not feature in the ATAR calculation. The ATAR calculation is based only on marks provided by BOSTES; no other information is used.



***Does the student's postcode matter?***

No. This information is not used in the ATAR calculation. However, some institutions apply regional bonus points if the student's permanent residence is in, or the student attended school in, the catchment area of the institution. Bonus points do not increase the ATAR but are used in addition to the ATAR for entry into some courses at some institutions.



***Can ATARs be recalculated?***

Generally speaking no, but there are some instances in which ATARs will be recalculated:

- if BOSTES provides amended HSC results
- if additional courses are completed in subsequent years
- if courses already completed are repeated in subsequent years.



***Are students notified if ATARs are recalculated?***

Yes. ATARs will be recalculated if HSC results change, additional courses are completed or courses are repeated, and the student will receive a new ATAR Advice Notice.



To watch a video that explains how ATARs are calculated, visit [www.uac.edu.au/atar](http://www.uac.edu.au/atar).

## The Limited ATAR

Some institutions allow a small number of applicants completing Year 12 to use a Limited ATAR, along with other selection criteria, to gain entry to tertiary study. A Limited ATAR is calculated from the best four units of courses completed, rather than the eight used for the standard ATAR.



### *Who is eligible for a Limited ATAR?*

To be eligible for a Limited ATAR, students must meet the following conditions:

- be at least 20 years of age on 1 March in the year they complete their HSC studies
- have taken between five and nine units of ATAR courses including at least one unit of English.



### *How is the Limited ATAR calculated?*

The Limited ATAR is calculated using scaled marks from ATAR courses comprising:

- at least one unit of English
- the best four other units of Category A courses.

Students eligible for a Limited ATAR will be sent a separate Advice Notice by UAC at the same time as HSC results and ATAR Advice Notices are posted.

Some institutions use the Limited ATAR in conjunction with other criteria for selection purposes.



### *Can a student receive an ATAR and a Limited ATAR?*

Yes. If a student meets the criteria to receive a Limited ATAR, and also meets the criteria to receive an ATAR, both will be calculated and sent.

For example, if a student aged over 20 years studied eight ATAR units (including two units of English) in the 2015 HSC, he or she would have received a Limited ATAR in 2015. If the same student decided to study two additional ATAR units in the 2016 HSC, they would be eligible for an ATAR in 2016.

Each institution decides whether to use the ATAR or Limited ATAR for selection purposes. Some will use the Limited ATAR in conjunction with other criteria.



### *Can courses be accumulated for a Limited ATAR?*

No. Students cannot accumulate courses for a Limited ATAR. Courses must be completed in the same academic year.



For a list of institutions that use the Limited ATAR, visit [www.uac.edu.au/atar/limited-atar.shtml](http://www.uac.edu.au/atar/limited-atar.shtml).

# Courses • and subjects



## ATAR courses

To be eligible for an ATAR, students must complete at least 10 units of ATAR courses. These ATAR courses must include:

- eight units of Category A courses
- two units of English
- three Board Developed courses of two units or greater
- four subjects.

Some tertiary courses also require students to have studied certain HSC subjects, or equivalent, to have achieved a specific standard, or to have assumed knowledge.

Students need to consider these things when choosing their courses and subjects.

### *What are Category A courses?*

These courses have the academic rigour and depth of knowledge to provide background for tertiary studies. Examples include Mathematics and Geography. For a complete list of Category A courses, refer to the UAC Guide or visit [www.uac.edu.au/atar/courses.shtml](http://www.uac.edu.au/atar/courses.shtml).

### *What are Category B courses?*

Category B courses are courses that don't provide an adequate background for tertiary studies but can contribute to the ATAR when combined with Category A courses. **No more than two units of Category B courses can be included in the ATAR calculation.** Examples of Category B courses are Human Services and Hospitality. For a complete list of Category B courses, see the UAC Guide or visit [www.uac.edu.au/atar/courses.shtml](http://www.uac.edu.au/atar/courses.shtml).

For a Category B course to be included in the ATAR calculation, students must be enrolled with BOSTES for the course and the exam.

### *Can English Studies count towards the ATAR?*

No. This course has no external HSC examination and cannot be included in the ATAR calculation.

For information on choosing courses, visit Schoolink on UAC's website at [www.uac.edu.au/schoolink](http://www.uac.edu.au/schoolink).

### *Are TAFE-delivered courses Category B courses?*

Some TAFE-delivered HSC VET courses are Category B courses and can contribute to the ATAR if the student is enrolled with BOSTES and sits an exam. Other TAFE-delivered courses are endorsed by BOSTES and contribute to the HSC but they do not have an HSC examination and do not contribute towards the calculation of the ATAR.

ATAR courses (either Category A or Category B) must be Board Developed courses for which BOSTES conducts examinations that yield graded assessments.

### *Which courses count towards the ATAR?*

Only ATAR (Board Developed) courses can be used in the calculation of the ATAR. The ATAR is calculated from an aggregate of scaled marks of ATAR courses, including two units of English and the best eight units from the remaining courses (according to the ATAR rules).

The ATAR Advice Notice lists the courses included in the calculation of the ATAR. Just looking at HSC marks is not enough to determine which courses will be included in the ATAR. Sometimes the course with the lowest HSC mark will not count, but this is not always the case. Remember that scaled marks, not HSC marks, are used to calculate the ATAR.

### *Which courses get a good ATAR?*

Just about any combination of courses can lead to a good ATAR; it all depends on how well a student has done in all their courses in comparison to other students.

Students shouldn't choose courses based on what they believe are the likely effects of scaling. Choices should be based on interests, demonstrated abilities and the value of courses for future career plans.

### *Are certain courses always 'scaled up' or 'scaled down'?*

No. How a course scales is determined by the ability of the candidature, which is indicated by the scaled mean. If the quality of the candidature changes, the scaled mean will also change. The scaled mean of all courses, except HSC Mathematics Extension 2, is lower than the HSC mean.



***Can choosing certain courses (eg Physics) increase a student's ATAR?***

No. The ATAR indicates a student's overall position; therefore, a student can only maximise their ATAR by choosing courses they enjoy and do well in. It is a myth that choosing certain courses increases the ATAR.



***What patterns of study are taken by students who achieve an ATAR of 99.95?***

While most students who achieve an ATAR of 99.95 take at least one extension subject, there are many different patterns of study observed every year. Students present anywhere from 10 to 15 units, some accumulating over two years and some over three years.

In recent years some candidates have achieved an ATAR of 99.95 studying English as a Second Language. Further, some students in the 99.95 group did not study mathematics at all; instead, their study patterns typically consisted of HSC English Extension 1 and languages or HSC English Extension 1, Modern and/or Ancient History and subjects like Business Studies or Studies of Religion II. Remember, students should select subjects in which they are interested and which prepare them for their future careers.



***What happens if a course isn't satisfactorily completed?***

If a student doesn't satisfactorily complete a course, that course will not count towards meeting their ATAR requirements. If the course is a 2-unit course with an associated extension course in which the student is enrolled, the extension course will not count either.

Receiving a mark for a course on the student's Record of Achievement issued by BOSTES is an indication that the student has satisfactorily completed that course.



***Can an extension course contribute to the ATAR if the corresponding 2-unit course has not been satisfactorily completed?***

The general answer is 'no'. For example, you must complete English (Advanced) to count HSC English Extension 1 (and you must complete HSC English Extension 1 to count HSC English Extension 2).

The exception is Mathematics, where you can complete Extension 1 and Extension 2 without completing 2-unit Mathematics (but you must complete HSC Mathematics Extension 1 to count HSC Mathematics Extension 2).



***Does an extension course have to be completed at the same time as the corresponding 2-unit course?***

No. The 2-unit course can be completed one year and the extension course completed in a later year. If a student withdraws from an extension course, the marks from the 2-unit course are still available for inclusion in the calculation of the ATAR.



***If a course has a high percentage of students in Band 6, does this affect the scaled marks for that course?***

No. Performance bands and scaled marks relate to two distinct processes. BOSTES uses raw HSC marks to align performance bands and calculate HSC marks, while UAC uses the same raw HSC marks to undertake the scaling process and calculate the ATAR. Therefore, performance bands and scaled marks cannot affect each other.



***Can students get a better ATAR by studying more units?***

No. Students cannot assume that simply by studying more units their ATAR will be increased. While students who study more units tend to gain higher ATARs, there are a number of reasons why, such as each student's interest, motivation, effort and time management.



***How many units of maths can be included in the calculation of the ATAR?***

Only four units of calculus-based maths can be included in the ATAR calculation. HSC Mathematics Extension 1 has a different weighting (in terms of units) depending on whether it's paired with Mathematics or HSC Mathematics Extension 2.

If students study Mathematics (2 units), then HSC Mathematics Extension 1 accounts for 1 unit.

If students study HSC Mathematics Extension 2 (2 units), then HSC Mathematics Extension 1 accounts for 2 units. This is calculated by doubling the mark received for the 1-unit course.

If a student completes Mathematics then goes on to satisfactorily complete HSC Mathematics Extension 1 and HSC Mathematics Extension 2, their results in Mathematics cannot be included in the ATAR calculation, even if they have excelled in it.

**?** *What happens if a student already has an ATAR and adds a new ATAR course the following year?*

The student's aggregate will be recalculated using the new course and their previous courses. The aggregate may increase or stay the same but it will not decrease. However, since the student is being compared with a different age cohort, their ATAR may increase, stay the same or even decrease.

## Accumulating courses

**?** *Can courses be accumulated?*  
Yes. Courses can be accumulated for the ATAR over a period of up to five years.

Scaled marks are calculated in the year the course is completed.

However, students cannot accumulate courses for a Limited ATAR. Courses must be completed in the same academic year.

## Repeating courses

**?** *What happens if a course is repeated?*  
Courses can be repeated over a period of up to five years. A student is considered to be repeating an HSC course if they:

- repeat the same course
- study a different course in the same subject area, apart from an extension course.

If a student repeats a course, only the marks for the latest satisfactory attempt will be available for inclusion in the calculation of their ATAR, even if they are lower than the earlier attempt.

## Accelerating studies

**?** *Can students accelerate their studies?*  
Yes. Some students may elect to accelerate their studies by attempting HSC courses while in Year 11. This can offer advantages such as:

- enabling students to take fewer courses in Year 12, meaning they can focus on those units
- allowing students to study a broader range of subjects
- having more units available for inclusion in the calculation of the ATAR.

**?** *If students complete courses in Year 11, who are they ranked with?*

Courses are scaled in the year they are completed and the scaled mark is available for inclusion in the ATAR calculation when the student becomes ATAR eligible. The student is ranked with others in the same ATAR cohort.

**?** *If a student completes Mathematics in Year 11 then goes on to study HSC Mathematics Extension 1 and HSC Mathematics Extension 2 in Year 12, can all their maths results be included in the calculation of the ATAR?*

No. Only four units of calculus-based maths can be included in the ATAR calculation. Students studying HSC Mathematics Extension 1 should be aware that it has a different weighting (in terms of units) depending on whether they take Mathematics or HSC Mathematics Extension 2.

If students study Mathematics (2 units), then HSC Mathematics Extension 1 accounts for 1 unit.

If students study HSC Mathematics Extension 2 (2 units), then HSC Mathematics Extension 1 accounts for 2 units. This is calculated by doubling the mark received for the 1-unit course.

If a student completes Mathematics then goes on to satisfactorily complete HSC Mathematics Extension 1 and Mathematics Extension 2, their results in Mathematics cannot be included in their ATAR calculation, even if they have excelled in it.

# The HSC and the ATAR



## HSC marks and the ATAR: what's the difference?

A student's HSC marks, as reported in their Record of Achievement, are an indication of the standards the student has reached in each of the courses they have completed. They are a 50:50 combination of a student's examination mark and school-based assessment mark for each course.

The ATAR, on the other hand, is a number that measures a student's overall academic achievement in the HSC in relation to other students. It is a rank, rather than a mark or score. The ATAR is calculated by UAC using scaled raw HSC marks.

The following table summarises the differences between HSC marks and the ATAR.

HSC marks	The ATAR
HSC marks provide information about how well students have performed in each of the courses they have completed.	The ATAR provides information about how well students are positioned overall against other students.
HSC marks indicate a student's performance in the different courses they have studied.	The ATAR allows a student to be compared with other students who have completed different combinations of courses.
HSC marks are reported against standards.	The ATAR is a rank, not a mark.
HSC marks are provided by BOSTES.	The ATAR is provided by UAC.

In the ACT, students receive their ACT Year 12 Certificate results and Tertiary Entrance Statement from the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies. The Tertiary Entrance Statement reports a student's ATAR.



**Can students work out what their ATAR will be from their HSC marks?**

No. Scaled marks (not HSC marks) are used to calculate the ATAR.

Students who achieve marks typically in the mid-70s may get an ATAR of around 70.00. But sometimes marks in the 70s can mean a much lower ATAR depending on their courses and their position in those courses.



**Why is the ATAR lower than the HSC marks for some students?**

The ATAR is not a mark; it's a rank that indicates a student's position in relation to other students. HSC marks show how well a student has performed against standards in each HSC course.

Most HSC marks lie between 50 and 100, so the middle students in most courses will receive a mark between 70 and 80.

Consider the following two students who completed the same courses in 2015. Fred received an HSC mark of 70 in each course, while Laura received an HSC mark of 80 in each course.

Course	Fred		Laura	
	HSC mark /100	Percentile	HSC mark /100	Percentile
Biology	70	43	80	75
Business Studies	70	36	80	67
English (Advanced)	70	11	80	47
Mathematics	70	21	80	51
Modern History	70	30	80	59
Visual Arts	70	14	80	51
<b>ATAR</b>	<b>57.50</b>		<b>79.65</b>	

Their HSC marks in each course differ by only 10, yet their ATARs differ by 22.15. Their performance was similar, but their positions were quite different. Laura's ATAR is similar to her HSC marks while Fred's ATAR is much lower than his HSC marks. This is because Laura's percentiles (her positions) in her courses are much better than Fred's.

The percentile column in this table tells us about their positions in more detail. For example, in Biology, Laura's mark of 80 positioned her in the 75th percentile, which means she is placed in the top 25 per cent of students in that course. Fred's mark of 70 is in the 43rd percentile, so he is only in the top 57 per cent. Even though Fred and Laura's performance in Biology differed by 10 marks, their positions varied by 32.



**Why is one course counted towards the ATAR when another course with a higher HSC mark doesn't count?**

This is because scaled marks are the marks included in the ATAR calculation, not HSC marks, and a higher HSC mark does not always mean a higher scaled mark. The scaled mark in a course will be influenced by the student's position in the course and the scaled mean for that course.

The example below shows a set of HSC and scaled marks corresponding to results at the 90th percentile for each course.

Course	Scaled mean	HSC mark	Scaled mark
Ancient History	48.8	89.0	77.2
Biology	53.2	87.0	78.4
Business Studies	47.6	89.0	76.4
Society and Culture	47.0	91.0	75.4
Physics	61.0	89.0	84.0
English (Standard)	38.2	79.0	60.0

Even though the highest HSC mark was for Society and Culture, it will not be included in the ATAR calculation. This is because, apart from English, Society and Culture has the lowest scaled mark of all the courses. Remember, two units of English must be included, even if they are the lowest scaled marks.



**If a student gets the same HSC mark in two different courses, will the one with the higher scaled mean count towards the ATAR?**

Not necessarily. Both a student's position in the course and the scaled mean of the course are important in determining which courses count towards the ATAR. A higher position in a course with a lower scaled mean may be enough to warrant its inclusion in the ATAR calculation.

The example below shows a student's marks in two courses.

Course	Scaled mean	HSC mark	Percentile	Scaled mark
Geography	50.2	94.0	P <sub>99</sub>	91.4
German Continuers	66.0	94.0	P <sub>90</sub>	87.2

Geography and German Continuers have the same HSC mark of 94. German Continuers has a higher scaled mean than Geography but the scaled mark for Geography is higher. This is because the Geography mark represents a higher percentile (position) than the German Continuers mark.



**Two students have similar HSC marks, but they don't have similar ATARs. Why not?**

The ATARs will only be similar if the courses are the same. If the courses are different and have different scaled means, the ATARs may be very different.

Here are some examples.

Liam and Kellie are in the 50th percentile in all of their courses. Their average HSC marks are similar, 77.0 and 78.2 respectively, but their ATARs are quite different, 55.25 and 78.90 respectively.

Liam			
ATAR	Course	Scaled mean	HSC mark
55.25	Dance	45.6	78
	English (Standard)	38.2	68
	Music 1	42.6	82
	Society and Culture	47.0	78
	Visual Arts	44.6	79

Kellie			
ATAR	Course	Scaled mean	HSC mark
78.90	Economics	64.4	78
	English (Advanced)	64.0	82
	Legal Studies	51.0	76
	Mathematics	62.4	81
	Physics	61.0	74

The reason for the difference in their ATARs is the difference in the strength of the competition in the courses they have chosen. The average scaled mean for Liam's courses was 43.6 whereas for Kellie's courses it was 60.6. Kellie has done better overall as she has competed against higher-achieving students than Liam. Consequently, her ATAR is higher.

Remember that the scaled mean of a course indicates the overall average academic achievement of the students in that course.

Consider James and Amy's HSC marks, which are shown in the following tables. Their average HSC marks are similar, 78.8 and 76.6 respectively, but their ATARs are quite different, 65.00 and 75.00 respectively.

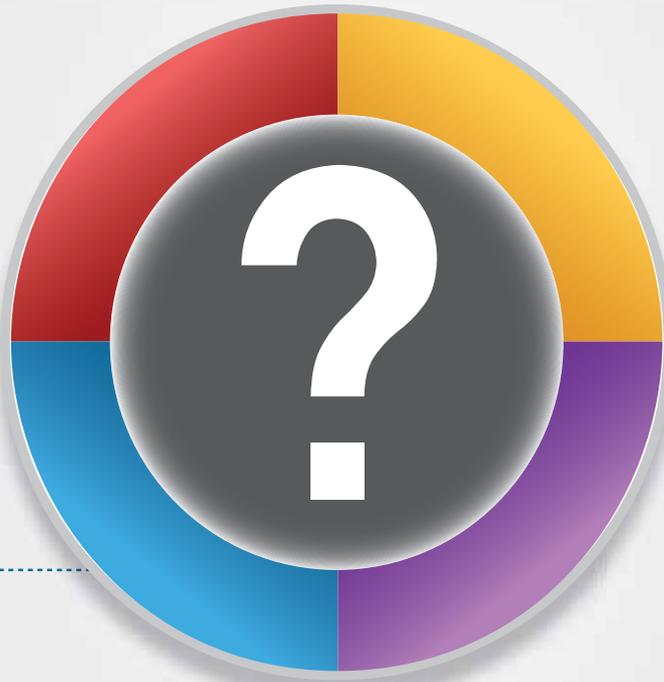
James			
ATAR	Course	Scaled mean	HSC mark
65.00	Business Studies	47.6	82
	English (Standard)	38.2	74
	Mathematics General 2	43.2	74
	Music 1	42.6	85
	Senior Science	37.6	79

Amy			
ATAR	Course	Scaled mean	HSC mark
75.00	Biology	53.2	76
	Chemistry	63.0	70
	English (Advanced)	64.0	84
	Mathematics	62.4	73
	French Continuers	69.6	80

Amy has an ATAR that is almost the same as her average HSC course score (76.6) whereas James's ATAR is much lower than his average HSC course score (78.8). In fact, his average HSC score is higher than Amy's. However, the average of the scaled means of the courses taken by James is 41.8, whereas the average scaled mean for the courses taken by Amy is 62.4. This means that Amy has been competing against higher-achieving students than James.

*\* With the exception of the Fred and Laura example, which is based on 2015 HSC data, the examples in this section are taken from the Report on the Scaling of the 2014 NSW Higher School Certificate, which can be downloaded from UAC's website at [www.uac.edu.au/publications/atar.shtml](http://www.uac.edu.au/publications/atar.shtml).*

- Calculating the ATAR



## Overview

The ATAR is based on an aggregate of scaled marks in 10 units of ATAR courses comprising:

- the best two units of English
- the best eight units from the remaining units.

No more than two units of Category B courses can be included.

The calculation of the ATAR is a complex process that begins with scaling the raw HSC marks and ends with ranking students among their Year 7 cohort.

### *Are all courses included in the ATAR calculation?*

No. Only ATAR courses with formal examinations that are conducted by BOSTES and yield a graded assessment can be used to calculate the ATAR.

### *When is a student's ATAR calculated?*

A student will receive an ATAR the first year they satisfy the eligibility requirements. If a student completes additional courses or repeats courses they have completed, their ATAR will be recalculated. A student's most recent ATAR is the one used by tertiary institutions for selection purposes.

### *If a student's HSC paper has been re-marked, will a new ATAR be calculated?*

Yes. If BOSTES provides UAC with amended HSC results, the student's ATAR is automatically recalculated and the student notified by email by UAC. A new ATAR Advice Notice will also be sent to the student.

### *In some courses more students get high HSC marks than in other courses. Does this affect the ATAR calculation?*

No, because it is a student's position in their courses that is important when calculating the ATAR. Remember that the HSC marks reported to students are not used in the ATAR calculation. Raw HSC marks are scaled and used in the ATAR calculation.

### *Is an ATAR calculated for International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma students?*

No. IB Diploma candidates are not eligible to receive an ATAR. UAC only calculates ATARs for eligible students sitting the NSW HSC and the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies calculates ATARs for eligible students sitting the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate.

IB students awarded the IB Diploma or Bilingual Diploma are allocated a UAC rank based on their total IB score.

### *How does UAC calculate the UAC rank from IB results?*

A national table has been developed to show a common rank for each IB aggregate score. This table is updated yearly and can be found on the UAC website.

 **For more information about how the ATAR is calculated, download the UAC publication *All About Your ATAR* at [www.uac.edu.au/publications/atar.shtml](http://www.uac.edu.au/publications/atar.shtml).**

## Scaling

Because scaled marks (not HSC marks) are used in the ATAR calculation, scaling is the first step in calculating the ATAR. It is necessary because HSC students take all kinds of different courses, and scaling allows courses to be compared fairly. The same marks in different courses are not necessarily equal, just as the same amounts of money in different countries are not equal. In the same way that an exchange rate can be used to compare currencies, scaling can be used to compare marks in different courses.

### *Can students find out what their scaled marks are?*

No. Scaled marks are not reported to students. They are determined during an interim phase in the calculation of the ATAR.

**How are extension courses scaled?**

For most extension courses the scaled means and standard deviations are determined by the performance of the extension students on the corresponding 2-unit course.



To watch a video about the ATAR and how it's calculated, visit [www.uac.edu.au/media-hub/videos.shtml](http://www.uac.edu.au/media-hub/videos.shtml).

**How is English scaled?**

English (Standard) and English (Advanced) are scaled as a single group. However, the same HSC mark gives different scaled marks in English (Standard) and English (Advanced) because scaled marks are based on raw HSC marks, not the HSC marks provided to students.



For detailed information on the calculation of the ATAR, see the latest Report on the Scaling of the NSW Higher School Certificate at [www.uac.edu.au/publications/atar.shtml](http://www.uac.edu.au/publications/atar.shtml).

**Are certain courses always 'scaled up' or 'scaled down'?**

No. Scaling is determined by how well a course's candidature does, and this can change each year. If the quality of the candidature changes, the scaled mean will also change, and this change will, in turn, determine how the marks are scaled.

## Bonus points

There are a number of different types of bonus points for Year 12 students seeking entry to tertiary study. Most institutions offer subject bonus points and some also offer regional bonus points. Each institution sets its own criteria for allocating these. Some institutions require students to achieve a minimum ATAR before they are eligible to receive any bonus points. Students should carefully check each institution's requirements.

Bonus points can also be awarded because of an application through Educational Access Schemes (EAS). Bonus points do not affect a student's ATAR, but they do affect a student's selection rank.

**How do students know if they're eligible for bonus points?**

Some tertiary institutions apply bonus points if a student does well in a subject related to the course they have chosen. These are subject bonus points.

Some tertiary institutions apply bonus points if a student lives in a designated region, others apply bonus points if a student attends school in a designated region, and some institutions do both. These are regional bonus points.

Many institutions also apply bonus points if a student has experienced long-term educational disadvantage beyond their control, including attending a school that the government has identified as being disadvantaged. These are Educational Access Schemes (EAS) bonus points.

For more information on bonus points, visit our website and check with the relevant institution.

**Do ATARs include bonus points?**

No. If institutions allocate bonus points, they are not added to the ATAR. Bonus points are not ATAR points, they are just that – bonus points. Bonus points don't change a student's ATAR; they change the student's selection rank for a particular course or institution.

**If bonus points don't increase the ATAR, then how do they work?**

Institutions allocate bonus points for different circumstances. Examples include performance in HSC subjects, living or attending school in an area defined by the institution and applying for consideration of long-term educational disadvantage through Educational Access Schemes (EAS).

For many Year 12 applicants, their selection rank for tertiary entrance is their ATAR. However, if institutions allocate bonus points to a student for a particular course, then their selection rank for that course = ATAR + bonus points. As the bonus points schemes for each institution, and often for each course, are different, a student's selection rank can be different for each course they list in their course preferences.



### *Do cut-offs include bonus points?*

Yes. The cut-off is the lowest rank (including any bonus points) required for entry into a particular course.

For example, Course A has six applicants and only three places available. The six applicants have the following selection ranks:

1	89.00 (ATAR of 89.00)
2	88.00 (ATAR of 87.00 plus 1 bonus point)
3	87.00 (ATAR of 83.00 plus 4 bonus points)
4	86.00 (ATAR of 86.00)
5	85.00 (ATAR of 83.00 plus 2 bonus points)
6	84.00 (ATAR of 84.00)

Offers will be made to applicants 1, 2 and 3. Applicant 4 will not receive an offer even though that applicant has an ATAR higher than applicant 3. The cut-off for Course A will be 87.00. This is the lowest selection rank required to receive an offer to Course A.



### *How can I find out more?*

There's a lot more information about the ATAR on the UAC website.

Copies of the annual Report on the Scaling of the NSW Higher School Certificate and ATAR tables are also available to download.

## Resources

### Other UAC publications

- UAC Guide
- University Entry Requirements for Year 10 Students
- UAC International
- Educational Access Schemes (EAS)
- Equity Scholarships (ES)
- Schools Recommendation Schemes (SRS)
- Report on the Scaling of the NSW Higher School Certificate
- UAC News
- Directions e-newsletter
- All About Your ATAR
- All About UAC for Year 11 and 12 Students
- All About UAC for Student Advisers
- All About UAC for Parents

### Download from UAC's website

#### ATAR

- All About Your ATAR (video)
- All About the ATAR (PowerPoint presentation)

#### Year 10

- A Walk Through the Year 10 Booklet (PowerPoint presentation)
- Choosing HSC Courses – Facts and Myths (PowerPoint presentation)

#### Year 12

- Applying to Uni: It's Easy if You Know What to Do (PowerPoint presentation)
- Applying as a Year 12 (video)
- Applying as an International with an Australian Year 12 or IB (video)

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## Frequently Asked Questions About the ATAR

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### About this publication

*Frequently Asked Questions About the ATAR* aims to answer common questions about the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). It includes definitions of common terms used in relation to the ATAR and explanations of eligibility requirements, scaling and calculation.

### Cover image

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If you are a NSW Higher School Certificate student, your Year 12 results will be held, along with Year 12 results from other states and territories in Australia, in an archive database at UAC. If you are eligible for an ATAR or a Limited ATAR, these will also be held in the database. Your results, including your ATAR if you are eligible, will be held in similar archives at tertiary admissions centres in other states in Australia. Results held in these archives will only be accessed by the relevant tertiary admission centre if you initiate an application for tertiary study through that centre, or if you submit an application for tertiary study directly with an institution participating in that centre.

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<sup>1</sup> In the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)*.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*.

<sup>3</sup> In the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW)*.

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Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) Pty Ltd

Quad 2, 8 Parkview Drive

Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127

Locked Bag 112, Silverwater NSW 2128

1300 ASK UAC (1300 275 822)

from mobiles: (02) 9752 0200

from overseas: +61 2 9752 0200

[www.uac.edu.au](http://www.uac.edu.au)

ABN 19 070 055 935 ACN 070 055 935

