

FAQs about the ATAR



Will I be notified if my ATAR is recalculated?

Yes. Your ATAR will be recalculated if your HSC results change, you complete additional courses or repeat courses you have completed, and you will receive a new ATAR Advice Notice.

Does the school I attend matter?

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

Does my postcode matter?

No, this information is not used in the ATAR calculation.

In some courses more students are in performance band 6 than in other courses. Does this affect the scaled mark for the course?

No. It is the raw HSC marks that are scaled, not the HSC marks that you receive. The percentage of students placed in performance band 6 differs across courses, but this has no effect on the calculation of the ATAR.

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

No. Raw HSC marks are scaled and used in the ATAR calculation.

Do I get a better ATAR if I study more units?

This is a common question. While the data show that students who study more units tend to gain higher ATARs, that is not necessarily the reason why. The relationship between the number of units studied and your ATAR might result from personal attributes including interest, motivation, effort and time management. You cannot assume that simply by studying more units your ATAR will be increased.

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

The general answer is no. The exception is Mathematics where you can complete Extension 1 and Extension 2 without completing 2-unit Mathematics. You cannot complete Extension 2 without completing Extension 1.

English is different. To complete Extension 2 you must complete English (Advanced) as well as Extension 1.

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

No. If you wish, you can complete the 2-unit course one year and the extension course in a later year. If you are adding an extension course and withdraw, the marks from the 2-unit course that you have already done will be available for inclusion in the calculation of your ATAR.

What happens if I already have an ATAR and add a new ATAR course the following year?

Your aggregate will be recalculated using your new course and your previous courses. Your aggregate may increase or stay the same but it will not decrease. However, since you are being compared with a different cohort your ATAR may increase, remain the same or even decrease.

Which ATAR is used for selection purposes?

Your latest ATAR will be used for selection purposes. This could be better or worse than a previous 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.

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. More information can be found in the *Report on the Scaling of the NSW HSC* that can be downloaded from the publications section of UAC's website at www.uac.edu.au/publications/undergraduate/index.shtml

If I'm eligible to get bonus points, does my ATAR change?

No. If universities allocate bonus points they are not added to your ATAR. Bonus points are not ATAR points, they are just that – bonus points. Bonus points don't change your ATAR; bonus points change your selection rank for a particular course or university.

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

Universities allocate bonus points for different circumstances. Examples include your performance in your HSC subjects, whether you live or attend school in an area defined by the university and whether you have applied for consideration through Educational Access Schemes.

For most Year 12 applicants, your selection rank for university entrance is your ATAR. However, if universities allocate bonus points to you for a particular course, then your selection rank for that course = ATAR + bonus points. As the bonus points schemes for each university, and often for each course at the same university, are different, your selection rank can be different for each course you list in your 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. 99 (ATAR of 99)
2. 98 (ATAR of 97 plus 1 bonus point)
3. 97 (ATAR of 95 plus 2 bonus points)

4. 96 (ATAR of 96)
5. 95 (ATAR of 93 plus 2 bonus points)
6. 94 (ATAR of 94).

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 97.

How can I find out more?

There's a lot more information about the ATAR on UAC's website at www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/atar/

Copies of the Scaling Report are also available to download.



How can I contact UAC?

write to: Universities Admissions Centre
Locked Bag 112
SILVERWATER NSW 2128

visit: Quad 2, 8 Parkview Drive
Sydney Olympic Park NSW
office hours:
8.30am–4.30pm Monday to Friday (Sydney time)

telephone: +61 2 9752 0200

email: use our online enquiry form at www.uac.edu.au

website: www.uac.edu.au

What is the ATAR?

The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 with increments of 0.05. It is a rank that provides a measure of your overall academic achievement in the NSW HSC in relation to that of other students, and it helps universities rank applicants for selection. It is calculated by the universities and released by UAC. **The ATAR is a rank, not a mark.**

Your ATAR indicates your position relative to the students who entered Year 7 with you. An ATAR of 80.00 indicates that you have performed well enough in the HSC to place you 20 per cent from the top of your Year 7 group, assuming that all students in this group completed Year 12 and were eligible for the ATAR.

It is important to note that your ranking depends solely on your performance in the HSC.

What is the ATAR used for?

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

The ATAR should not be used for any other purpose because its sole function is to help universities select students for admission.

Who receives an ATAR?

ATARs are calculated for all ATAR-eligible students but not all students are notified. Only NSW HSC students who indicate on their HSC entry forms that they wish to be notified of their ATAR will receive an ATAR Advice Notice from UAC. This will arrive in the mail at about the same time that HSC results are received from the Board of Studies.

Am I eligible for an ATAR?

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

- eight units from Category A courses
- two units of English
- three ATAR courses of two units or greater
- four subjects.

How is my ATAR calculated?

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

- your best two units of English and
- your best eight units from the remaining units. No more than two units of Category B courses can be included.

The actual calculation of your ATAR is a complex process that begins with scaling your raw HSC marks and ends with ranking you among your entire Year 7 cohort.

When is my ATAR calculated?

You will receive an ATAR the first year you satisfy the eligibility requirements. If you complete additional courses or repeat courses you have completed, your ATAR will be recalculated. Your most recent ATAR is the one used for selection purposes.

What is 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. We know that 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 currency in different countries, scaling can be used to compare marks in different courses.

Can I find out what my scaled marks are?

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

Does UAC have an ATAR calculator?

No. UAC only advises students of their official ATARs on ATAR release day each year.

Can I work out what my ATAR will be from my HSC marks?

No. Remember that your scaled marks (not your HSC marks) are used to calculate your ATAR, and your ATAR is not an average mark, it is a rank that indicates your position.

However, as a general rule, if you are in the middle group of students enrolled in your courses (with marks in the 70s) you are likely to get an ATAR in the late-60s. But sometimes marks in the 70s can mean a much lower ATAR depending on your courses and your position in your courses.

Which courses count towards my ATAR?

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

Your ATAR Advice Notice tells you which of your courses were actually included in the calculation of your ATAR. Just by looking at your HSC marks, it is not possible to tell which courses will be included in your ATAR. Sometimes the course with the lowest HSC mark will not count, **but this is not always the case.**

Why is my ATAR low in comparison to my HSC marks?

Your ATAR is not a mark but a number that indicates your position in relation to other students.

Most HSC marks lie between 50 and 100 so that the middle students in most courses will receive a mark between 70 and 80. The middle Year 12 students will be likely to receive an ATAR of approximately 70.

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

	Fred			Laura	
	Units	HSC mark/ 100	Percentile	HSC mark/ 100	Percentile
Biology	2	70	38	80	70
Business Studies	2	70	35	80	66
English (Advanced)	2	70	9	80	47
Mathematics	2	70	27	80	55
Modern History	2	70	25	80	62
Visual Arts	2	70	15	80	54
ATAR		57.05		80.15	

Their HSC marks in each course differ by only 10, yet their ATARs differ by 23.10. 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.

Why is one course counted towards my ATAR when another course where I received a higher HSC mark does not count?

This is because your scaled marks are the marks included in your ATAR calculation and a higher HSC mark does not always mean a higher scaled mark. Your scaled mark in a course will be influenced by your position in the course and the overall scaled mean for that course.

The example below shows a student's set of HSC marks. This student has achieved at the 90th percentile for every course.

Course	Scaled mean	P ₉₀	
		HSC mark	Scaled mark
Biology	53.8	88.0	78.4
Business Studies	47.2	89.0	75.0
English (Advanced)	65.0	91.0	85.0
Information Processes and Technology	43.8	89.0	72.6
Modern History	54.4	89.0	79.4
Visual Arts	46.4	90.0	76.0

In this example, even though this student gained a higher HSC mark in Information Processes and Technology (IPT) than for Biology, it is Biology that will be counted towards the ATAR as it has a higher **scaled mark**. IPT will not be included in this student's ATAR calculation.

If I get the same HSC mark in two different courses, will the one with the higher scaled mean count towards my ATAR?

Not necessarily. It's important to remember that the scaled mean indicates the average academic achievement of the students in that course. When you look at your results, you also have to consider your position in the course. A higher position in a course with a lower scaled mean may be enough to warrant its inclusion in your ATAR calculation.

Both your position in the course **and** the scaled mean are important in determining which of your courses contribute towards your ATAR.

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

Course	Scaled mean	HSC mark	Percentile	Scaled mark
General Mathematics	42.2	87	P ₉₀	70.0
Music 1	45.0	87	P ₇₅	59.4

General Mathematics and Music 1 have the same HSC mark of 87. Music 1 has a higher scaled mean than General Mathematics but the scaled mark for General Mathematics is higher. This is because the General Mathematics mark represents a higher percentile (position) than the Music 1 mark.

I have similar HSC marks to my friend, but we don't have similar ATARs. Why not?

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

Can I accumulate my courses?

Yes, you can accumulate courses over a period of up to five years. Your scaled marks are calculated in the year you complete the course.

Can I repeat my courses?

Yes, you can repeat courses over a period of up to five years. If you repeat a course, only the mark from your latest satisfactory attempt will be included in the calculation of your ATAR.

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

No. Scaling is carried out afresh each year. If the quality of the candidature changes, the scaled mean will also change.

Can I choose certain courses to increase my ATAR?

No. As noted above, scaling is carried out afresh each year, so the scaled means are different every year. It is a myth that choosing certain courses will increase your ATAR. When you choose your courses you should think only about what you are interested in (usually what you are good at too) and what you need to do to prepare you for your course or career plans. The scaling process is designed to allow you to choose according to these principles and not, as far as university selection is concerned, be disadvantaged by your choice.

Is it true that if I study certain courses I can't get a high ATAR?

No, there are students in every course who achieve high ATARs.

Can I have my ATAR recalculated?

Generally speaking no, but there are some instances where your ATAR will be recalculated:

- if the Board of Studies provides amended HSC results
- if you complete additional courses
- if you repeat courses you have already completed.