

ATAR

essentials



UAC



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Definitions

ATAR

Australian Tertiary Admission Rank.

ATAR courses

ATAR courses are Board Developed courses for which there are formal examinations conducted by NESA that yield a graded assessment. These are the only courses that can be included in the ATAR calculations. ATAR courses are classified as either Category A courses or Category B courses.

Category A courses

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

Category B courses

These courses do not have the academic rigour and depth of knowledge to provide an adequate background for tertiary studies in themselves, but they can contribute to the ATAR if the other courses included in the ATAR calculation are more academically demanding.

Board Developed courses

A Board Developed course has a syllabus developed by NESA.

Limited ATAR

Some institutions allow some 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 5 units of courses completed, rather than the 10 used for the standard ATAR.

To be eligible for a Limited ATAR, students must be over 20 years of age on 1 March in the year they complete their HSC studies and be taking between 5 and 9 units of ATAR courses, including at least 1 unit of English.

NESA

The NSW Education Standards Authority. Prior to 2017, NESA was known as the Board of Studies, Teaching and Education Standards (BOSTES).

Percentile

A percentile indicates your position in a course against other students. The top percentile is 100 and the bottom percentile is 0. If your percentile in a course is 73, it means 27% of students are above you in that course.

Satisfactory completion of a course

You'll be considered to have satisfactorily completed a course if, in your principal's view, there is sufficient evidence that you have:

- followed the course developed or endorsed by NESA
- applied yourself with diligence and sustained effort to the set tasks and experiences provided in the course by the school
- achieved some or all of the course outcomes
- made a genuine attempt at assessment tasks that total more than 50% of the available school assessment marks for that course.

You also need to make a serious attempt at the examination for the course. For more information about HSC eligibility requirements, visit the NESA website at educationstandards.nsw.edu.au.

Failure to satisfactorily complete a course will result in that course not contributing to the eligibility requirements. If the course is a 2-unit course with an associated extension course, failure to satisfactorily complete the 2-unit course will result in neither the 2-unit nor the extension course contributing towards your ATAR.

Receiving a mark for a course on your Record of Achievement issued by NESA is an indication that you have satisfactorily completed that course.



The ATAR: what is it?

The ATAR is a rank, not a mark.

It is a number between 0 and 99.95 with increments of 0.05. It allows us to compare the overall achievement of students who have completed thousands of different combinations of HSC courses. An ATAR of 80.00 places you in the top 20% of your age cohort.

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

Your ATAR is only accessible by you or your authorised agent. ATARs are also released to institutions for the purpose of making offers to courses. UAC doesn't provide ATARs to parents, schools or careers advisers.

Tip!



Why do we need the ATAR?

The ATAR enables universities to rank applicants for selection in an objective and equitable way. It is designed to be used as an indicator of readiness for university study: there is no notion of pass or fail.

The Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) calculates the ATAR for NSW HSC students on behalf of the universities.

Depending on the course, universities also use other selection tools, such as interviews, portfolios, auditions, personal statements and questionnaires.

While the ATAR is an effective tool for allocating university places to Year 12 applicants, it's not designed to be used for any other purpose. For example, it does not reflect a student's full range of capabilities and skills, or the many attributes they will draw on as they navigate life after school.

Who gets an ATAR?

To be eligible for an ATAR you must have satisfactorily completed at least 10 units of ATAR courses, including:

- 8 units from Category A courses
- 2 units of English
- three Board Developed courses of 2 units each
- four subjects.

The fourth point can easily be overlooked or misunderstood. A subject is an area of study (eg mathematics). Within that subject there may be a number of courses (eg Mathematics Standard 1, Mathematics Standard 2, Mathematics Advanced, Mathematics Extension 1, Mathematics Extension 2).

If you're an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma student, you don't get an ATAR. Instead, when you apply through UAC, you'll be allocated a UAC rank based on your IB score.

Tip!



The same applies if you are undertaking tertiary preparation programs such as the Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC) and Open Foundation.

Each year, around 55,000 NSW students will receive an ATAR. They complete close to 27,000 different combinations of HSC courses.



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

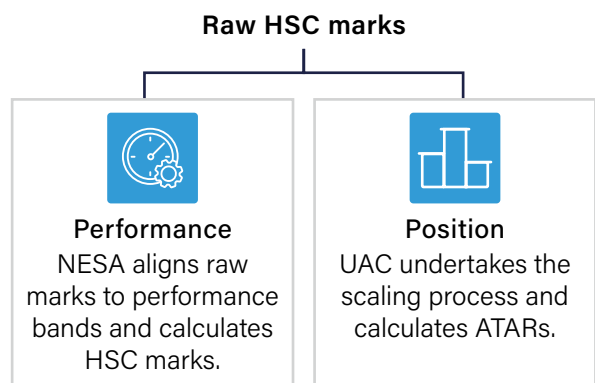
When Year 12 students receive their results, they often ask, 'Why is my ATAR low compared to my Year 12 marks?'

The answer is that they are very different measures of achievement: HSC marks tell you about your performance in the HSC, whereas your ATAR tells you about your position, or ranking, in the HSC.

It's fair to say that, depending on what you study, marks around 70 in the HSC could lead to an ATAR in the 50s, while marks closer to 80 could lead to an ATAR around 80.00. This is because most students usually achieve marks between 70 and 80 (Band 4) and, when they are ranked, that group really spreads out.

The example of Fred and Laura on page 8 shows how these small differences in marks can lead to large differences in ATARs.

HSC marks and ATARs are calculated separately using different methods:



The following table outlines the main differences between these two measures of achievement.

Your HSC marks	Your ATAR
Are presented as marks out of 100 (for each 2-unit course).	Is a rank, not a mark or percentage.
Tell you how well you've performed in each of your courses, according to standards set by NESA.	Tells you where you're positioned overall in relation to other students.
Can only be compared to the marks of students who completed the same HSC courses.	Tells you how you compare with other students who have done different combinations of HSC courses.
Are provided by NESA.	Is provided by UAC.

Your HSC marks

Your HSC mark for each course is the average of your examination mark and your school assessment mark. So if your examination mark is 75 and your assessment mark is 73, your HSC mark is 74. This mark determines your performance band for the course.

Performance bands

NESA describes the standards for a course using a performance scale; for 2-unit courses there are six performance bands and for extension courses there are four performance bands. The bands represent the range of achievement expected of students completing the course.

Examination marks

Each year and for each course, NESA determines the range of raw examination marks that correspond to each performance band, so that every raw examination mark is aligned to a performance band. It is this aligned mark that you receive from NESA.

School assessment marks

To enable school assessments from different schools to be compared, assessment marks submitted by schools are moderated using the raw examination marks. These moderated school assessment marks are also aligned to performance bands. It is this aligned mark that you receive from NESA.

Most HSC courses usually have a median (middle) mark above 75, but the median ATAR is usually around 70.00.

Your HSC results

Your HSC results present a profile of your HSC achievement.

For example, here are Elizabeth's HSC results:



	Units	Examination mark	Assessment mark	HSC mark	Performance band
Business Studies	2	83/100	77/100	80	5
English Advanced	2	77/100	73/100	75	4
Mathematics Advanced	2	75/100	83/100	79	4
Modern History	2	88/100	86/100	87	5
Visual Arts	2	85/100	83/100	84	5
French Continuers	2	88/100	86/100	87	5

Calculating your ATAR

Your ATAR is based on the sum of your scaled marks in 10 units of ATAR courses. These 10 units will be made up of:

- your best 2 units of English
- your best 8 units from the remaining units.

No more than 2 units of Category B courses can be included.

To show you how it's done, let's calculate the ATAR for Elizabeth based on the HSC marks shown in the previous table.

Step 1: Calculate raw HSC marks

The first step is to calculate the average of the raw examination mark and the moderated school assessment mark for each of Elizabeth's courses. These averages are called raw HSC marks. They are not reported to the student.

Step 2: Calculate percentile in each course

Next, we need to find out how Elizabeth's performance compared to other students. To do this, we look at the percentiles. The percentiles indicate a student's position in their courses compared with other students in those courses.

Elizabeth's percentiles are set out in the following table.

	Units	HSC mark/100	HSC median/100	Percentile
Business Studies	2	80	74	67
English Advanced	2	75	82	18
Mathematics Advanced	2	79	80	47
Modern History	2	87	76	85
Visual Arts	2	84	83	59
French Continuers	2	87	84	62

What is scaling?

Scaling allows a proper and fair comparison of students who have studied different courses. It determines what your marks would have been if all students attempted all courses and all courses were marked in a way that produced the same distribution of marks. It does this by modifying the mean, the standard deviation and the maximum mark for each course.

The scaled mean for a course is based on the average academic achievement of the course candidature, which is determined by the marks the students in that course have achieved in all their courses. The average scaled mean is 50 for 2-unit courses.

If a course has a high scaled mean, it tells us that, on average, the ability of the students in that course is high – in general, they did well in their other courses. Courses such as Mathematics Extension 2 and Physics usually have high scaled means because they're studied by high-achieving students.

If a course has a low scaled mean, it tells us that the ability of the students in that course ranges from high to low. (It doesn't mean that you can't get a high ATAR if you study that course.)

Each year, UAC publishes a detailed report on the scaling of the NSW HSC. You can access the reports on the UAC website.

Scaled marks are calculated in the year that you complete the course. If you accumulate courses towards your HSC, your marks are not re-scaled in the year you become eligible for an ATAR.



Although Elizabeth's HSC marks in English Advanced and Business Studies differ by only 5, the percentiles are very different. In English Advanced she has performed better than 18% of other students in that course, whereas in Business Studies she has performed better than 67%.

This example shows that your marks in different courses are not comparable. They cannot be added together to derive your ATAR. Some form of adjustment must be carried out before an overall measure of achievement can be determined. This is called scaling.

Step 3: Scale raw marks

The next step is to scale Elizabeth's raw HSC marks. As you can see from the following table, Elizabeth's scaled marks are different from the HSC marks she received from NESA.

	Units	HSC mark/100	Scaled mark/100
Business Studies	2	80	59.2
English Advanced	2	75	49.4
Mathematics Advanced	2	79	62.2
Modern History	2	87	74.0
Visual Arts	2	84	46.8
French Continuers	2	87	75.4

Like Elizabeth, your scaled marks are likely to be different from, and lower than, your corresponding HSC marks. This is not surprising: your HSC marks and scaled marks are meant to be different. HSC marks are aligned to standards, whereas scaled marks are the marks you would have received if all course candidatures were the same.

Step 4: Calculate aggregate

Now we need to calculate Elizabeth's aggregate of scaled marks. According to the ATAR rules, 2 units of English must be included, then the best 8 units from her remaining courses.

Ignoring English, Visual Arts has the lowest scaled mark. Therefore, both units of Visual Arts are omitted.

Elizabeth's aggregate is 320.2.

Step 5: Determine overall percentile

Elizabeth's aggregate is used to determine her position compared with other students. This position will be expressed as a percentile in an interim phase of the ATAR calculation.

Step 6: Truncate percentile

The last step is to truncate the percentile to the nearest 0.05.

Elizabeth's ATAR is 80.85.

This means that Elizabeth did well enough overall to perform better than 80.85% of her age cohort.

Don't choose a course that you are not very good at, or interested in, simply because it may be scaled up. Scaling allows for fair comparison of your achievements across all of your courses. Choose courses you like or are good at, without worrying about your ATAR.





Case studies: HSC marks v ATARs

The following hypothetical case studies illustrate how HSC marks and ATARs are different measures of achievement.

Fred and Laura

Fred and Laura 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 ATAR: 58.00		 Laura ATAR: 78.00	
Course	Units	HSC mark/100	Percentile	HSC mark/100	Percentile
Biology	2	70	40	80	72
Business Studies	2	70	40	80	67
English Advanced	2	70	6	80	42
Mathematics Advanced	2	70	21	80	50
Modern History	2	70	36	80	65
Visual Arts	2	70	12	80	39

Their HSC marks in each course differ by only 10, yet their ATARs differ by 20.00. Laura's ATAR is similar to her HSC marks while Fred's ATAR is much lower than his HSC marks.

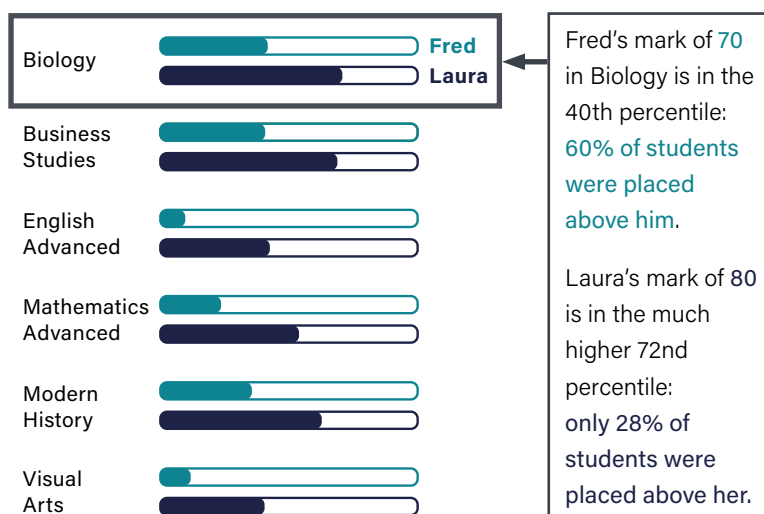
The reason for the large difference in the ATARs can be found in the differences in the percentiles. The percentiles are much higher for Laura than for Fred.

From the table you can also see that in each course a large percentage of the course candidature has marks in the range 70 to 80. For example, in English Advanced, 36% of the candidature has marks in this range (42nd percentile for 80 minus the 6th percentile for 70).



Given the differences in their course percentiles, it is not surprising that Fred's and Laura's ATARs are very different.

The differences in their positions are demonstrated further in the illustration on the right: it shows where their respective marks placed them in each course.



James and Amy

There is no general rule for the relationship between ATARs and HSC marks, because the pattern of HSC marks varies across courses and each course has a different scaled mean.

It can be said that, in general, if you are in the middle group of students enrolled in your courses (with marks typically in the 70s), you are likely to get an ATAR around 70.00.

But sometimes marks in the 70s can result in a lower ATAR depending on your courses and your position in your courses.

James and Amy both received HSC marks in the 70s but James' ATAR is 65.60 while Amy's ATAR is 75.60.

James ATAR: 65.60		Amy ATAR: 75.60	
Course	HSC mark	Course	HSC mark
English Standard	79	Biology	79
Information Processes & Tech	79	Chemistry	76
Mathematics Standard 2	71	English Advanced	76
PDH&PE	75	Mathematics Advanced	77
Society & Culture	78	German Continuers	74

Both case studies are based on 2020 HSC data.

Your ATAR notification

To access your ATAR, you need to log in to the UAC website. For security reasons, UAC will not notify you of your ATAR by email or text message.

When you log in to view your ATAR, you'll be able to see a list of the ATAR courses you studied and their category, and the number of units of each ATAR course that contributed to the calculation of your ATAR.

While you're there, download your ATAR Advice Notice. It's available for free for a short period after ATARs are released. If you want to access it at a later date, you can buy it through the UAC Shop on the UAC website.

Here's an example of an ATAR Advice Notice:

The screenshot shows an ATAR Advice Notice for JANE CITIZEN. The ATAR is 75.80. The notice lists the courses included in the calculation and the units included for each course.

Course name	Category	Year completed	Unit value	Units included in calculation of ATAR
English Standard	A	2021	2	2
Geography	A	2021	2	2
Legal Studies	A	2021	2	1
Mathematics Advanced	A	2021	2	2
Studies of Religion I	A	2021	1	1
Hospitality Examination	B	2021	2	2

This example shows that:

- all courses were completed in 2021
- all courses are Category A courses except Hospitality Examination
- both units of English were included, as is required
- all units of Geography, Mathematics Advanced, Studies of Religion 1 and Hospitality Examination were included
- 1 unit of Legal Studies was included.

The scaled mark in Legal Studies was lower than the scaled marks in the other courses so only 1 unit was included to make up the required 10 units.

If your ATAR is recorded as:

- '30 or less', your ATAR is between 0.00 and 30.00
- 'not eligible', you haven't met the requirements of the ATAR.

Tip!





Tertiary selection and the ATAR

Each year more than 45,000 current school leavers apply through UAC for admission to courses offered by NSW and ACT universities. For the majority of courses, there are more applicants than places. Applicants must be ranked to allow selection to take place.

The first step in the selection process is to check whether applicants have satisfied the prerequisites specified for the courses for which they have applied. Say, for example, that a Bachelor of Advanced Computing course specifies Mathematics (Advanced) (Band 4) as a prerequisite. If you do not achieve at least a Band 4 in Mathematics (Advanced) you will not be considered for the Bachelor of Advanced Computing, regardless of your ATAR.

The second step is to rank all applicants who satisfy the prerequisites for that course. For most courses, applicants who are current school leavers are ranked using the ATAR. If a university takes other factors into consideration – such as performance in a Year 12 subject or eligibility for the Educational Access Scheme – then the applicant’s selection rank for the relevant course will increase (but their ATAR will remain the same).

Some courses have additional selection criteria, such as a portfolio, interview, audition, questionnaire or test. Any additional selection criteria is specified in the course description on the UAC website.

Tip!



Frequently asked questions

Which courses count towards my ATAR?

Your ATAR is calculated from your aggregate of scaled marks, including 2 units of English and your best 8 units from the remaining courses, according to the ATAR rules.

When you receive your ATAR you will also see which of your courses were actually included in the calculation of your ATAR. It is not possible to tell which courses will be included in your ATAR just by looking at your HSC marks, because your ATAR uses your scaled marks. Sometimes the course with the lowest HSC mark will not count, but this is not always the case.

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

A higher HSC mark does not always mean a higher scaled mark, and the calculation of your ATAR is based on your scaled marks.

As an example, let's look at Elizabeth's marks from Step 3 on page 7.

Elizabeth's lowest HSC mark is in English Advanced but, since 2 units of English must be included, the scaled mark for English Advanced will contribute to her ATAR. Of her remaining courses you might expect Mathematics Advanced to have the lowest scaled mark as it has the next lowest HSC mark and lowest percentile. Visual Arts, however, has the lowest scaled mark because it has a lower scaled mean.

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. Looking at the table on page 9, we can see that James and Amy had all of their HSC marks in the 70s. But those marks were in different courses and their ATARs were very different.

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 NESA; no other information is used.

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

No. Scaling is carried out afresh each year. If the quality of the candidature changes, then the scaled mean will also change. Your position in your courses is just as important as the scaled means of your courses in determining your ATAR.

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. Also remember that your position in the course is important for the 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 to your 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 Studies, English Standard and English Advanced are scaled as a single group as the raw marks are put on a common scale by NESAs.

Why can't I use my HSC marks to check the calculation of my ATAR?

There are two reasons. The first is that scaled marks, not HSC marks, are used in the calculation of the ATAR and the second is that the ATAR is not an average mark; it is a rank that indicates your position.

Can I find out what my scaled marks are?

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

Can I have my ATAR recalculated?

No. If, however, NESAs provides amended HSC results, your ATAR is recalculated and you are notified immediately.

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

No. You must satisfactorily complete the corresponding 2-unit course before the extension course can be considered.

The exception is mathematics, where you can complete Extension 1 and Extension 2 without completing the 2-unit Mathematics Advanced (but you must complete Mathematics Extension 1 to count Mathematics Extension 2). If you have completed both Extension 1 and Extension 2 then your Extension 1 and Extension 2 results are considered separately in determining the aggregate used to calculate your ATAR; one, both or neither might be included in the calculation.

If I'm eligible for selection rank adjustments, does my ATAR change?

No. Your ATAR stays the same. If, however, NESAs provides amended HSC results, your ATAR is recalculated and you are notified immediately.

If selection rank adjustments don't increase my ATAR, then how do they work?

Universities take several factors into consideration when adjusting selection ranks. Examples include students performing strongly in specified HSC courses, students living or attending school in an area defined by the university, and students

applying for consideration through the Educational Access Scheme. Selection rank adjustments are applied differently from institution to institution and from course to course within the same institution. Therefore, your selection rank can be different for each course you list in your course preferences.

Some institutions require you to achieve a minimum ATAR before you are eligible for selection rank adjustments – check the information from each institution carefully to see if they have a minimum ATAR requirement.

Where a university publishes a lowest selection rank for a course, does this include adjustment factors?

Yes. The lowest selection rank for a course includes adjustment factors; the lowest ATAR does not. It is important to understand this difference between the lowest selection rank and the lowest ATAR.

The difference is illustrated in the following 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 adjustment of 1 point)
3. 87.00 (ATAR of 83.00 plus adjustment of 4 points)

4. 86.00 (ATAR of 86.00)
5. 85.00 (ATAR of 83.00 plus adjustment of 2 points)
6. 84.00 (ATAR of 84.00).

Offers will be made to applicants 1, 2 and 3. Applicant 4 won't receive an offer, even with an ATAR higher than applicant 3, and applicant 3 will receive an offer even though their ATAR is below the lowest selection rank. The lowest selection rank required to receive an offer to Course A will be 87.00.

This example shows why it is important not to assume that the published lowest ATAR for a course is the ATAR required to be made an offer to that course. The lowest ATAR for this course is 83.00 (applicant 3). Even though applicants 4, 5 and 6 have ATARs of 83.00 and above, their selection ranks are below the lowest selection rank of 87.00 and therefore they will not receive an offer.



More information

Visit the UAC website at uac.edu.au/atar for more information about:

- ATAR eligibility
- ATAR calculation and scaling
- key dates.

Each year, UAC operates the ATAR Enquiry Centre for a few days after ATARs are released. The phone number is published on the UAC website.

For questions about HSC results, search for 'HSC results' on the NESA website at educationstandards.nsw.edu.au. NESA also operates the HSC Results Inquiry Centre after results are released each year.

ATAR essentials

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Good Thanks Media

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