



[Home \(/\)](#) / [Apply to College \(/plan-for-college/apply-to-college\)](#) / [What is Test Optional?](#)

What is Test Optional?

Most colleges have introduced more flexibility and choice into the admissions process by adopting a “test-optional” policy regarding college entrance exams, either temporarily or permanently.

Test optional is a policy that many colleges have introduced to provide more flexibility and choice in the admissions process.

Recent research shows that on average, close to 50% of applications include test scores.

Many colleges with test-optional policies still encourage students to submit their scores, but they don't require all students to do so for admission. Students can and should make the decision that will best help their admission chances. For many students who take the SAT, sending scores will strengthen their application.

Understanding test-optional policies can help you make informed decisions about whether to take the SAT, the ACT®, or both and when to submit test scores.

What Does Test Optional Mean?

If a college or university has a test-optional admissions policy, that means that most applicants can choose whether to submit their SAT or ACT scores with their application. It doesn't mean that schools aren't interested in seeing all applicants' test scores—but if you choose not to submit your scores, it won't be counted against you in the application review.

The most important point is that policies vary widely. Be sure to read each college's policy carefully so you understand what you need to do to qualify for admission, scholarships, financial aid, etc.

Also keep in mind that colleges that were test optional last year may be going back to requiring tests.

Review a [complete list of colleges](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/plan-for-college/find-your-fit/what-colleges-require-SAT) (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/plan-for-college/find-your-fit/what-colleges-require-SAT>) that require SAT or ACT scores for admissions.

Variations in Test Policies

Here are some possible variations in test score policies:

Example 1: Test-optional admissions policy for all

A “test-optional” policy means the college allows all applicants to decide for themselves whether to submit test scores. Applicants are told, in essence, “If you think your scores are an accurate representation of your ability, feel free to submit them. If you feel they're not, don't.”

Example 2: Test-optional admissions policy for some

At some colleges, if your GPA or class rank meets the minimum requirements, you can decide not to submit SAT or ACT scores. Some colleges require certain applicants, like homeschooled or international students, to submit scores, regardless of GPA. And some colleges require test scores for students

applying for specific programs or majors such as Nursing (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers/majors/health-medicine/nursing>), Engineering (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers/majors/science-technology-engineering-math/engineering-general>), and other STEM-intensive majors (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers/majors/science-technology-engineering-math>), or programs that combine a bachelor's and master's degree.

Example 3: Test flexible

A “test flexible” policy means you may be able to take a test other than the SAT or ACT, such as AP Exams, to meet the school’s requirements for admission.

Example 4: Test blind

A “test blind” policy means the college won’t look at test scores for admission even if they are submitted.

Example 5: Test optional/Test blind for admissions, but required for enrollment

A growing number of colleges that are test optional or test blind for admissions require or consider SAT or ACT scores for other uses, such as scholarships, course placement, and academic counseling. Many colleges with test-optional policies for admission require or request test scores upon enrollment, to use for advising or research purposes.

Remember: When in doubt, check with the school.

Frequently Asked Questions about Test Optional

Which colleges don’t require the SAT or ACT?

Most colleges are now test optional, but some have gone back to requiring scores. It is critical to always check directly with the college to confirm their current policy, either by going to its website or calling its admissions office. Some colleges may change their policies over the summer, so it’s a good idea to check back in the fall before you apply.

Should I still take the SAT if all the colleges on my list are test optional?

In short, yes. Most college admissions officers, including those at colleges with test-optional policies, value the SAT as part of the admissions process. Even if you think standardized tests aren’t your biggest strength, there are some good reasons to take them:

- **You’ll keep your options open.** Colleges with test-optional policies still accept test scores, and some encourage them. Remember: Your college list isn’t set in stone. You can change it at any time.
- **You’ll stand out among the applicants.** If you get the score you hope for, and especially if it’s above average for the college, submitting your SAT score can help you in the admissions process. And keep in mind that colleges consider test scores in the context of everything else in your application.
- **You could get more than just admission.** At some colleges, SAT/ACT scores are still considered or required for certain scholarships. If you don’t take either of these tests, you take yourself out of the running for hundreds of thousands of dollars that could make college more affordable.
- **A high SAT score can provide information beyond GPA.** If you don’t take the SAT, colleges will have less information about your academic performance. If you have a low GPA but do well on the SAT, you’re letting colleges know you have the potential to succeed in college-level classes.

How do I decide whether to send my score?

If a college has a test-optional policy, the decision is entirely up to you. To help with that, we recommend first using the College Search tool (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>) on BigFuture to look at the average score range of the college where you’re applying. If your score is comparable or higher, you should send it. If it’s lower, think about whether sending your score could highlight

achievements that the rest of your application may not show. Colleges with test-optional policies use your scores in the context of everything else in your application, and they won't hold it against you if you don't submit scores.

Our research over the past two years shows (<https://allaccess.collegeboard.org/how-did-pandemic-disruptions-impact-applications-enrollment-and-outcomes-selective-institutions>) that most students are following this advice, with the biggest deciding factor for whether to send their score being the score itself, relative to the average scores at the college they're applying to.

If you're still unsure what to do, we recommend talking to your high school counselor.

What if I'm not confident about taking the SAT?

We understand that not everyone feels great about taking tests, but there isn't any downside to taking the SAT. If you don't do as well as you want, the decision to send your scores is still completely up to you. Colleges will only see your scores if you send them.

Remember, everyone's situation is different, but we encourage you not to limit your choices. Give yourself every opportunity to succeed.

With a score in hand, you'll be able to make the decision that's best for you. If the score isn't where you need it to be, if you don't think it reflects your ability, or if it doesn't strengthen your application—you don't have to send it. It'll still be ready and waiting if you need to submit it for course placement or scholarships.



Complete List of Colleges That Require SAT or ACT Scores for Admissions

[Review Colleges](#)

Related Topics

How to Prepare for the SAT > (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/plan-for-college/apply-to-college/how-to-prepare-for-the-sat>)

The Benefits of SAT: Creating Your Path for the Future > (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/plan-for-college/apply-to-college/benefits-of-sat>)

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