

## Test-Optional - What it Means and Things to Consider

---

*The current college admissions cycle is adapting as circumstances due to COVID-19 unfold. What may be true today, may not be the case tomorrow and may change considerably in 6 months from now. **It is important that you regularly check the websites of colleges to which you are considering applying so you can stay on top of their requirements in real-time.***

---

In response to COVID-19, a growing number of colleges that had previously required SAT or ACT scores are moving to a temporary test-optional testing policy for Fall 2020 (Class of 2021). Note that, as of now, there are campuses that are still requiring standardized tests for admission, like University of Utah and Harvard University.

### **What does test-optional mean?**

When a college or university is “test-optional,” it means that they don’t require SAT or ACT scores from applicants in order to be considered for admission. Each school’s test-optional policy is different, so it’s important to do your research to make sure you understand the specifics.

### **When a test score might be required even if a college is test-optional:**

- Some campuses are test-optional only if you have attained a certain minimum GPA. Otherwise you may be required to submit scores.
- Colleges may require test scores for particular majors or to be considered for special programs, such as honors programs.
- At some universities, test scores are required if you wish to be considered for merit aid.
- Test scores may be required for Division 1 or Division 2 students.
- Test scores may be required if you are an out-of-state applicant.

### **Admissions Factors**

In the absence of tests scores, colleges and universities will place heavy focus on other areas of your application, including:

- GPA and GPA trajectory (upward trend or downward trend)
- Class rigor
  - It is important to maintain a challenging course load in your senior year. Multiple open and TA periods will not be viewed favorably.
- Essay and supplemental questions
- Extracurricular activities/ community involvement/ leadership
- Letters of recommendation
- Interview
- Awards and recognitions
- Other test scores (i.e., AP exams, subject tests, etc.).

### **How Do I Decide Whether or Not to Send Scores?**

- Read through the list of situations where you may be required to submit a test score even if a college is considered test-optional. Determine if any of these circumstances affect whether or not you will submit.
- Know that if you don't submit test scores, more focus will be put on other areas of your application. Will you be able to stand out without test scores?
  - If other areas of your high school resume are lacking, a strong test score can improve your application.
  - If your high school resume is stellar but you struggle on standardized tests, you may be better off not sending scores.
- Investigate how your test score compares with a particular school's profile. Look at the school's middle 50 percent range.
  - If your scores fall in the bottom of the range or below, don't send your scores.
  - If your score falls in the top half of the range or above, send your scores.

### **Should I bother taking the SAT or ACT?**

- We recommend taking the test if you are able to in the summer/ fall, provided test administration dates are not cancelled. Once you have results you can determine how the score may help or hurt your application.
- As indicated above, the test-optional policies can look very different from one school to the next. Do your research and ask questions to find out the specifics of the testing policy at each college to determine if you need to submit test scores.