



Understanding the ATAR

If you're not entirely sure how the ATAR system works, why you might need one and how they're calculated, you're definitely not alone.

Here are some of the most common questions answered and misconceptions about the ATAR busted.

What is an ATAR?

The Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) is a number between zero and 99.95. It's designed to illustrate your overall academic achievements at high school high, when compared alongside the rest of your cohort.

It **isn't** a percentage score or a mark, it doesn't reflect your individual achievements (remember that when you receive your results).

An ATAR of 100 is impossible

Because the ATAR is a rank (not a percentage or mark) and it's measured in increments of 0.05 the highest ATAR you could get is 99.95.

That means you did better than 99.95 percent of all the Year 12 ATAR eligible students in your state. An ATAR of 80.00 indicates that you sit in the top 20% of your cohort and so on.

In order to get a rank of 100 you'd have to have beaten 100 per cent of your cohort..... including yourself. Meaning it's impossible to get an ATAR of 100.

Who needs an ATAR and why?

If you're in Year 12 and hoping to head to university straight out of high school (or within 2 years of leaving if you plan on taking a gap year, working, or would like to complete another course first), the ATAR process is the most straight forward way of helping you get an offer from a university.

That doesn't mean if you're not ATAR eligible, or you receive a low ATAR rank that you can't go straight to university. But you might have to take a different pathway and it could take a little longer.

The ATAR system was designed to make it easier for university admissions to allocate course spaces.

Your ATAR score allows your performance to be measured alongside all other Year 12's in your state and Australia, creating a national standard.

Due to ever increasing number of applications received each year as well as the huge variety of combinations of subjects taken in high schools, the ATAR system was needed to help speed up process of assessing applications .

Many courses receive more applications each year than there are places available, the ATAR rank also helps universities allocate who receives those places in the fairest way possible (even though it wouldn't feel fair if you missed out).

ATARs can also be used as a predictor or guide of your potential first-year performance at university, but it's not always a true reflection of how successful you're likely to be. For example, a student with an ATAR of 70.00 who is very capable, motivated and has a great work ethic is more likely to do well on a course than a student who received an ATAR of 90.00 but doesn't apply themselves to their studies or chooses a course that doesn't suit their abilities.

Who calculates and releases ATARs?

ATARs are calculated by tertiary admissions centres (TISC).

How's the ATAR calculated?

Calculations vary a little between states but the process is similar. Scores from your high school certificate studies and exams are sent to the admissions centres.

A number of your top scores from any subject selections and the scores from a few of your best essential subjects (e.g. English or Maths) are added together to create an aggregate score.

Then using your aggregate, subject scaling is applied and you're allocated a position on the rank table which becomes your ATAR.

Your ATAR reflects where your result sits when compared with the results of *all* the Year 12's who completed their high school certificate in your state. So an ATAR of 70 does not mean you scored 70%. It means your results put you in the 30th percentile (the top 30% of results) of all the year 12 students in your state.

What is scaling?

Scaling or adjustment is about levelling the playing field. Accounting for differences between subjects studied, as well as individual students abilities and the opportunities or hardships they faced.

For example trying to compare results from a student who did dance and languages to a student who took predominantly STEM courses is challenging.

The scaling system's been developed to iron out differences so universities can assess applicants from a single source – their ATAR.

Your ATAR NEVER changes

Even if you're awarded bonus points by some institutions for certain courses, your Selection Rank (SR) changes, but your ATAR will always be the same.

How do bonus points work if they don't increase your ATAR?

Bonus points or adjustment factors can be awarded by universities for:

- Achievement
- Living or attending school in a regional, or low socio-economic areas
- Educational Access Schemes, and more.

They're designed to ensure that every student is given a fair go during the applications process.

Each institution has their own bonus point scheme, and different courses at the same uni may apply different bonus or adjustment schemes. So potentially your selection rank could be different for each course that you've listed in your preferences.

Receiving bonus points could mean that you get offered a place on a course even if your ATAR was below the course cut-off, because your SR has got you over the line.

How do institutions use the ATAR?

While you might think that an ATAR reflects how easy (lower ATAR) or hard (higher ATAR) a course is, it's not always the case. Often the entry ATAR is based on how many applicants listed a course amongst their preferences.

Since each course has a limit to the number of students it can take, if it's a popular course that had lots of applications in previous years, and lots of applicants in your cohort list the course on their preferences, the required ATAR or cut-off to get into that course might go up.

Most institutions consider more than just the ATAR when selecting students.

You might have to have an interview, do an audition or provide a portfolio for example.

It's important to note that an ATAR is not always essential for getting into university or other tertiary education providers, they'll often offer alternative entry paths into their courses.

What's the lowest ATAR that you can get?

30.00 is the lowest ATAR reported, if you score lower than that your results will just say "30.00 or less".

Note: If you score 30.00 or below, but you'd still like to pursue a tertiary qualification (including a degree), then there may well be a way you can do this.

Speak to universities about the alternative pathways available. You could also consider taking a VET or other short course and then re-applying for uni down the track.

Remember, your ATAR is just a number.

*[https://studyworkgrow.com.au/2021/12/15/
understanding-the-atar/](https://studyworkgrow.com.au/2021/12/15/understanding-the-atar/)*