

of Scaling 2019

The information in this guide pertains to students completing the VCE in 2019

Some background

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) administers the two Victorian senior secondary certificates that mark the successful completion of secondary education. The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) provides pathways into tertiary education, training and work. The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is a practical work-related certificate and provides pathways into training, apprenticeships and work.

The Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) administers the application and offer process for tertiary institutions in Victoria:

universities, technical and further education (TAFE) institutes and independent tertiary colleges.

To assist tertiary institutions in selecting students, VTAC provides an overall measure of each VCE student's performance across their Year 12 studies. This overall measure is called the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

The following explanation will help you understand how the ATAR is calculated, why results are scaled and how scaling works.

Tertiary selection for 'recent Year 12' applicants

The selection process is competitive and involves:

- » VTAC checking an applicant meets eligibility requirements for a course, and
- » the institution assessing the applicant's capacity for success in a course, and ranking the applicant against others who have applied to the course.

Eligibility requirements

Minimum tertiary entrance requirements

An applicant must meet minimum tertiary entrance requirements. For higher education courses this is satisfactory completion of the VCE. Minimum tertiary entrance requirements for VET courses vary between courses, however if you meet minimum tertiary entrance requirements for higher education courses, you will have met them for VET, too. For more information see (vtac.edu.au/who).

VCE prerequisite studies

Students who don't complete the VCE prerequisite studies for a course are generally not considered for that course.

What is the ATAR?

The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is an overall percentile rank reflecting a student's Year 12 achievement compared to the age group in a given year. It is not a score and there is no pass or fail ATAR. Everyone who receives an ATAR has passed the VCE.

The ATAR allows tertiary institutions to competitively rank students who have completed different combinations of VCE studies. It is calculated by VTAC **solely** for use by institutions for admission into some tertiary courses.

The ATAR is reported as a number between 0.00 and 99.95 with increments of 0.05. A student with an ATAR of 75.00 has achieved VCE results above 75 per cent of the Year 12 age group.

Selection

When selecting students, many institutions use information about applicants' VCE performance. The information used, and how it is used, varies between institutions and courses. However, the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a mechanism designed for this purpose and is commonly used.

Many courses use other selection mechanisms, additional to or instead of the ATAR. These may include interviews, auditions, folios and tests. Applications for special consideration (SEAS) are also taken into account.

All universities are committed to considering around 20 per cent of applicants on a range of criteria broader than just the ATAR. TAFE institutes and independent tertiary colleges normally use a range of criteria, including the ATAR and interviews, and generally do not select mainly on the ATAR.

The selection mechanisms used by each course are published under 'essential requirements and admission criteria' as part of the course entry in CourseSearch (vtac.edu.au/CourseSearch).

To qualify for an ATAR through VTAC, a student must:

- » qualify for the VCE, and
- » achieve study scores in at least four permissible Unit 3 and 4 VCE studies, including one from the English group.

Interstate use of the ATAR

The ATAR is recognised in all Australian states as each state uses a similar methodology, and a statistical cross-checking process when calculating ATARs.

How is the ATAR calculated?

The following process is used to calculate each student's ATAR.

1. VCAA provides VTAC with VCE study scores.

2. All VCE study scores are scaled to ensure fairness by adjusting for the fact that it is more difficult to obtain a high study score in some studies than others. This is not because some studies are inherently harder than others. This is because some studies attract a more competitive cohort of students than others. Once VCE study scores are scaled, they become scaled study scores.

3. An aggregate is calculated for each student by calculating their primary four and any permissible increments. The aggregate is a number between 0 and a value that can reach over 210.

The primary four is:

- » a student's best scaled study score in any one of English, English (EAL), Literature or English Language, plus
- » the scaled study scores of their next best three permissible studies.

If available, and subject to the rules and restrictions that follow, up to two increments may be added. These may include:

- » ten per cent of a fifth or sixth permissible scaled study score
- » a permissible unscored VCE or VFE increment
- » a permissible higher education study increment
- » Year 12 credit for studies completed interstate, and
- » an increment for legitimate one year students.

4. The aggregates are placed in numerical order on a percentile scale and become ATARs.

The ATAR represents the percentage of the population in the relevant age group that the student outperformed. This takes into account the students who successfully completed VCE that year, as well as those in Victoria who did not complete VCE.

The ATAR is a number between 0 and 99.95 in intervals of 0.05. The highest ATAR is 99.95, the next highest 99.90, and so on. The lowest automatically reported ATAR is 30.00. ATARs below 30.00 are reported as 'less than 30'.

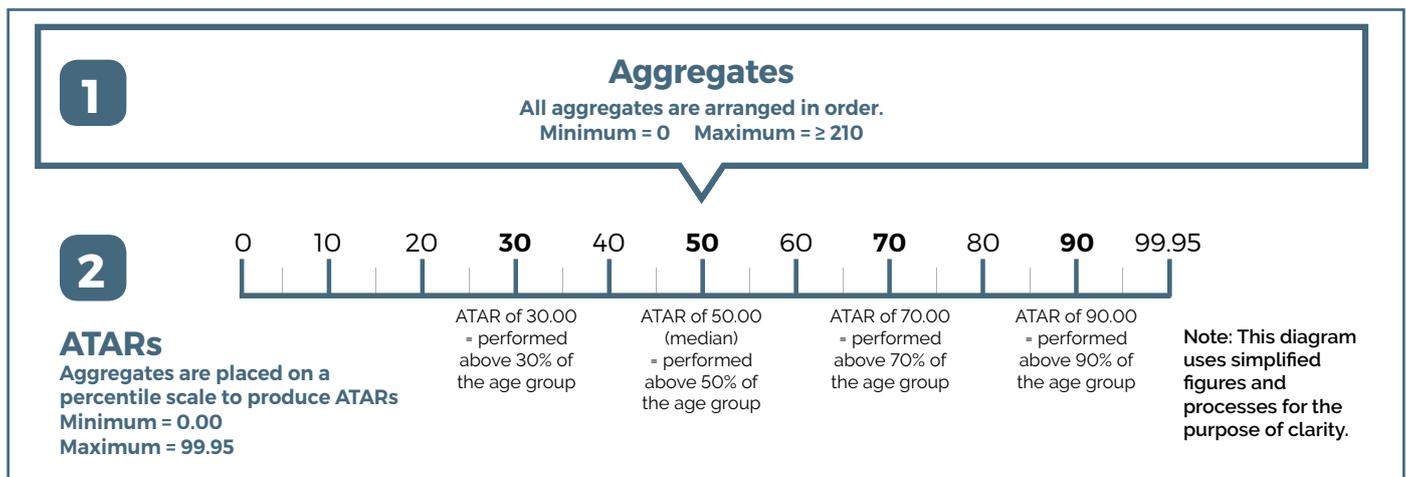
The complete list of studies and VTAC scaled study scores used in the calculation of each student's ATAR is included on their ATAR statement.

Interrupted study status

Applicants granted official interrupted study status by the VCAA should seek advice from VTAC about the applicability of rules and provisions in this publication. In general, the rules that require completion of Units 3 and 4 in the one year may be waived for applicants granted interrupted study status in the studies concerned.

Further VCE study

Students who have previously obtained an ATAR but have undertaken further study resulting in an additional study score or increment are eligible to have their ATAR recalculated. The higher of the two will be recorded and reported as their ATAR. Ranking for courses will be based on the highest ATAR achieved. VTAC does, however, inform course selection authorities of all of an applicant's VCE results—including those not contributing to their ATAR.



Which studies contribute to the ATAR?

VTAC will use up to six results in calculating an ATAR. They may include:

- » VCE Unit 3 and 4 sequences
- » Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs with Unit 3 and 4 sequences
- » VFE studies, and
- » one approved higher education study.

However, only some of these types of study can be included in the primary four, others can only be used as increments. This is explained in the rules and restrictions that follow.

While studies used in the calculation of the ATAR may be taken over any number of years, the length of time taken to complete VCE studies may be taken into account by institutions.

The primary four

If a student has a 'primary four' they will get an ATAR.

Subject to the following rules and restrictions, the 'primary four' consists of:

- » a student's best score in any one of the English studies, plus
- » the scores of their next best three permissible studies.

Permissible scaled study scores for the primary four may be from VCE Unit 3 and 4 studies or VCE VET Unit 3 and 4 sequences with a scored assessment.

Increments

If available, a maximum of two increments are added to the primary four during the calculation of an ATAR.

Increments could be:

- » ten per cent of a fifth or sixth permissible scaled score
- » a permissible unscored VCE or VFE increment
- » a permissible higher education study increment
- » Year 12 credit for studies completed interstate
- » an increment for legitimate one year students

If a student has more than six results, the six permissible scores that give the highest ATAR are used. Any studies not used for the ATAR remain visible to selection officers.

Rules and restrictions

VCE Vocational Education and Training (VET) studies

Scored VCE VET studies

'Scored VCE VET studies' are VCE VET Unit 3 and 4 sequences with a scored assessment.

When calculating an ATAR, VCE VET Unit 3 and 4 sequences with a scored assessment are treated in the same way as other Unit 3 and 4 VCE studies.

However, if a student chooses not to take the scored assessment for a study when it is available, the study cannot be used in the calculation of their ATAR.

Unscored VCE VET studies

Unscored VCE VET studies are VCE VET Unit 3 and 4 sequences with no scored assessment available.

Since there are no scores available for unscored sequences, VTAC may include the sequence as an increment (the fifth and/or sixth study). In 2019 this will be calculated from the fourth of the primary four scaled study scores. Up to two unscored VCE VET increments may contribute to an ATAR. An unscored increment cannot be awarded if scored assessment was available but the student chose not to take it.

VET and Further Education (VFE/VE3)

VFE/VE3 studies are VET courses that are not part of the VCE VET program but have been approved for block credit at Unit 3 and 4 level by the VCAA. VFE/VE3 studies may count towards an ATAR as an increment (the fifth and/or sixth study). In 2019, this increment will be calculated from the fourth of the primary four scaled study scores.

VCE and VCE VET results will take precedence over VFE/VE3 block credit results in the calculation of the ATAR. VFE/VE3 block credit can only be used in the calculation of an ATAR if there are fewer than six VCE or VCE VET studies available. Up to two VFE/VE3 increments can contribute to the ATAR.

VFE/VE3 studies must be at level three or above in the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Approved higher education studies

Students undertaking an approved higher education study in Year 12 can include the result as an increment in the ATAR (fifth or sixth contribution) provided that VCAA corequisite or prerequisite conditions are met and study combination restrictions are met.

If the average mark for the higher education study is:

- » at least 90 per cent, the increment will be 5.0
- » at least 80 per cent but less than 90 per cent, the increment will be 4.5
- » at least 70 per cent but less than 80 per cent, the increment will be 4.0
- » at least 60 per cent but less than 70 per cent, the increment will be 3.5
- » at least 50 per cent but less than 60 per cent, the increment will be 3.0

If the average mark for the higher education study is less than 50, then no increment is available.

Study area groupings

There are restrictions to how many studies from the same study area grouping can contribute to an ATAR. Each grouping may include VCE, VCE VET and higher education studies. For the purpose of calculating the ATAR, VET industry areas are also treated as study area groupings.

Study area groupings include:

- » English studies
- » Entertainment
- » History studies
- » Hospitality
- » Information Technology studies
- » Languages (other than English)
- » Mathematics studies
- » Music studies

For a list of study area groupings and common studies associated with each, refer to the VTAC study area groupings fact sheet: vtac.edu.au/publications.

Study area group restrictions are:

1. At most, two results from the same study area grouping can be included in the calculation of the primary four.
2. At most, three results from the same study area grouping can contribute to the ATAR, the third being an increment.
3. If a student has unscored VCE VET results, these can only be used in the calculation of their ATAR after all scored results in the same study area grouping have been used.

Equivalent studies

Studies with significant overlap between them are considered equivalent. Students should consult with their school when choosing their VCE program to ensure they are not studying equivalent units. For further information refer to the VCAA's VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook. However, if circumstances result in a student studying equivalent units, only one of these units can be included in the calculation of their ATAR. This will be the unit with the highest permissible contribution to their ATAR. Example equivalent combinations are:

- » English and English as an Additional Language.
- » The same language in any combination of: first language; second language; second language advanced; language, culture and society; or VET study.
- » Studies that have been replaced by a revised subject, such as National Politics replaced by Australian Politics, International Politics replaced by Global Politics, Information Technology replaced by Computing, and Food and Technology replaced by Food Studies.

Example of ATAR calculation with restricted studies

Chris has completed six studies:

- » Music Performance
- » Music Investigation
- » Music Style and Composition
- » Music (Higher Education Study)
- » English Language and
- » Italian

When calculating the ATAR only two music studies (not including the Higher Education Study) may be included in the primary four, and one other music study will be counted as an increment. Therefore, the fourth music study (the one with the lowest score) will not contribute to the calculation of the ATAR, but will be sent to institutions for their information.

As a result, the studies used in the calculation of Chris's ATAR will include a maximum of three music studies as well as English Language and Italian.

What is scaling?

For the purpose of tertiary admissions, VTAC's role is to provide a way of ranking students that ensures all studies are treated equally and that provides students with a common rank for tertiary selection across Australia.

Every year, there are different levels of competition in different studies. To compare students fairly, the level of achievement required to obtain a certain result in one study needs to be the same level of achievement required to obtain that same result in all other studies.

Scaling addresses this by adjusting the study scores for each study to account for how strong the students were in the study and how difficult it was to achieve the average ranking.

Scaling ensures that it is possible for students to attain a high ATAR regardless of the combination of studies they undertake.

VCE study scores

When VTAC receives each VCE study score from the VCAA, it is calculated from the total marks the student received for each graded assessment in that study.

VCE study scores for all studies are reported on a scale of 0 to 50 with an average score of 30. However, it is not a score out of 50. It is a ranking, or relative position, which shows a student's performance compared with all other students who **took that study in that year**.

A student with a VCE study score of 30 is near the middle of the cohort, or has performed better than about half of all students who took that study in that year. A student with a VCE study score of 40 has performed better than about 91 per cent of all students who took that study in that year.

What this means is that the middle student in any study will have a VCE study score of about 30.

However, VCE study scores don't consider how academically strong the other students were in the study and therefore how difficult it was to achieve the middle ranking in each study.

How is scaling done?

In each study, study scores are adjusted so that the overall level of scores in that study matches the scores obtained by the same group of students in all of their other studies. This is achieved in the following way:

1. The VCAA collects students' assessment results and uses them to calculate **VCE study scores** for each student, for each study they complete.
2. When VTAC receives VCE study scores from the VCAA, each study has been standardised. The average score for each study is 30.
3. VTAC looks at the assessment data across all studies to make sure obtaining the average score in one study required the same level of achievement as every other study.
4. When the data demonstrates the overall level of scores across studies doesn't match, adjustments need to be made. This is the scaling process.
5. If competition in a particular study was higher than the average level of competition across all studies—as indicated by the group of students performing higher in their other studies—study scores need to be adjusted upwards, otherwise students doing that study would be unfairly disadvantaged.
6. Likewise, if competition in a particular study was lower than the average level of competition across all studies—as indicated by

Scaled study scores

For tertiary selection, students need to be ranked in a way that is fair to students across all the different studies they have taken. This involves taking into consideration how academically strong the other students were in each study and how difficult it was to achieve the middle ranking in each study.

Where the academic competition in a study is higher than other studies, study scores have to be adjusted upwards, otherwise students doing that study would be unfairly disadvantaged.

Similarly, in a study where the academic competition is lower than other studies, the study scores have to be adjusted downwards, otherwise students doing that study would be unfairly advantaged.

In some studies the scaling process produces scaled study scores greater than 50. They can go as high as 55. However, the minimum scaled study score remains zero.

Scaling myths

The scaling process is not always well understood and many students believe that to achieve their best possible ATAR they need to choose studies that are scaled up. This is not true and may even work against them.

If a student chooses a study that they are not very good at simply because it was previously scaled up, the scaled study score they receive will be a lot lower than what they would expect in a study they are good at and that interests them. Yes, the score may be scaled up, but it is unlikely that the scaled study score would be any higher than if they had chosen a more suitable study, even one that is scaled down.

The way to ensure that a student achieves the best ATAR is to choose studies according to what interests them, what they are good at, and what studies they need for future study.

the group of students performing lower in their other studies—study scores need to be adjusted downwards, otherwise students doing that study would be unfairly advantaged.

7. Once the study scores have been scaled, they are called **scaled study scores**. It is these scaled study scores that are used to calculate the ATAR.

Example 1: Australian Politics

For Australian Politics in 2018 the average VCE study score was 30, but the students who took Australian Politics averaged 32 for all their studies (including Australian Politics). This shows that the students who did Australian Politics in 2018 were of above average strength in their other studies. Therefore, the scaling process adjusted the study scores upwards so that the average scaled study score for Australian Politics was set at 32.

Example 2: Business Management

The 2018 Business Management students averaged 27 in all their studies (including Business Management). So, the scaling process meant Business Management study scores were adjusted downwards so that the average scaled study score for Business Management was 27.

When are studies scaled?

VCE studies are always scaled in the year in which they were undertaken. This may not necessarily be in the year in which a student receives their ATAR. Scaled scores from previous years may contribute to the ATAR just as studies from the current year do.

This scaling process is carried out each year for each VCE study and VCE VET program for which there is a study score. There are no predetermined outcomes—the adjustments are based on the performance of students each year. Nevertheless, the process is very stable and there is little difference in the scaled study scores from year to year.

Studies with specific scaling rules

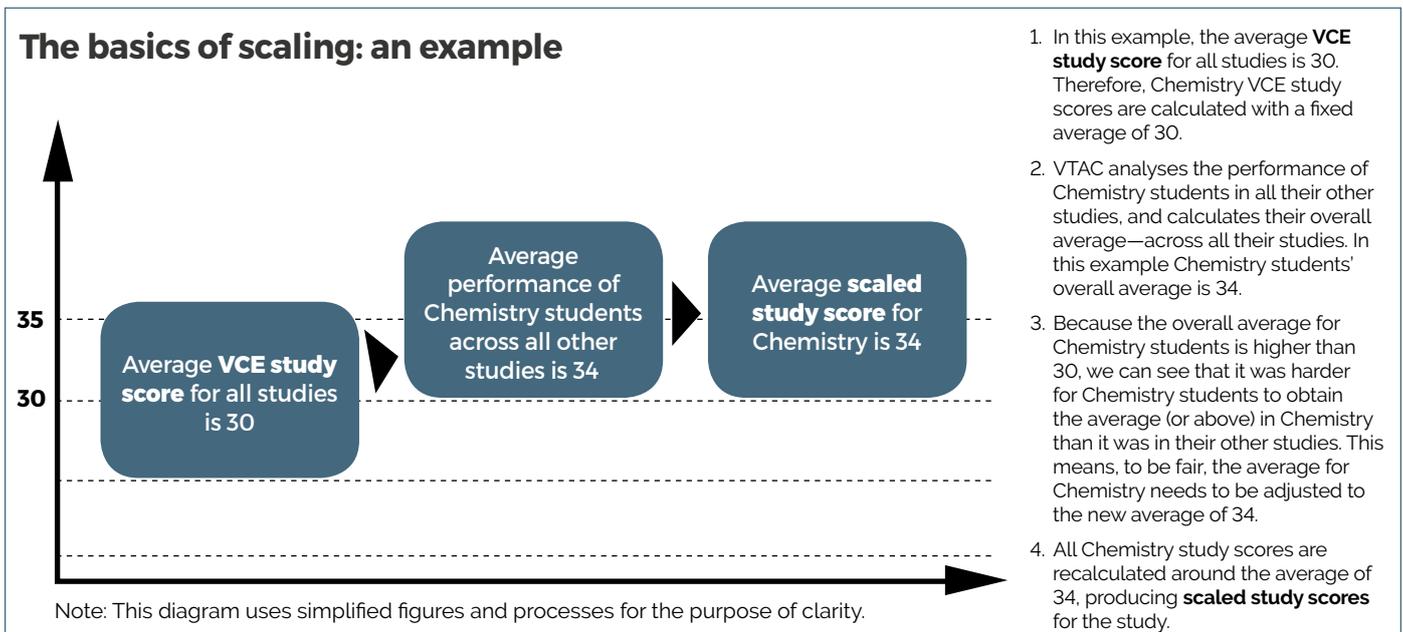
Mathematics

VCE mathematics studies are designed to cater for students of differing abilities and interests. Specialist Mathematics is the most difficult, followed by Mathematical Methods and then by Further Mathematics.

To ensure that students undertaking the more difficult mathematics studies are not disadvantaged, all three mathematics studies are scaled against each other as well as being scaled against all other studies. The higher of the two resulting scales is used.

Languages other than English

As a result of government policy to encourage the study of languages other than English (LOTE), each LOTE is adjusted by adding up to five to the initial VTAC Scaled Study Score. All students of a LOTE receive an adjustment, but it is not a uniform adjustment. For VTAC Scaled Study Scores at or close to the average, the adjustment is five, but the adjustment decreases as the score moves away from the average. It is important to remember that the additional points are added to the VTAC Scaled Study Score and therefore contribute to the aggregate—they are not added directly to the ATAR. However, because they increase the aggregate they therefore increase the ATAR accordingly.



Notional ATAR

An ATAR is calculated for all students who have successfully completed VCE in the current year (January to December).

The ATAR is calculated using only VCAA approved studies. These students will have completed at least four scored VCE studies at the Units 3 and 4 level, at least one of which must be from the English group.

A 'Notional ATAR' is calculated for any student who differs from the above. This includes such variations as:

- » students completing at least one Unit 3 and 4 study outside of a January to December timetable
- » International Baccalaurate (IB) students (an ATAR is only calculated for those IB students who complete the GAT)
- » students with interstate studies and any other variations.

A Notional ATAR is treated the same way as an ATAR, the 'Notional' label simply indicates that the ATAR was obtained in a slightly different way. For course selection and all other purposes they are treated as equivalent.

Example ATAR calculation

Year	Study	Unit 3/4 Results	GA 1	GA 2	GA 3	VCE Study Score	VTAC Scaled score	2018 Aggregate Contribution
2018	English (EAL)	SS	B	B+	C+	31	30.11	30.11
2017	Languages: Vietnamese	SS	A+	A	A	34	39.56	39.56
2018	Physics	SS	B	B+	D+	27	28.88	28.88
2018	Maths: Further Mathematics	SS	B+	B	B	31	28.37	28.37
2018	Maths: Mathematical Methods	SS	D	D+	D+	23	25.06	2.50
2018	Business Management	SS	C	D+	D	23	19.10	1.91
Aggregate								131.33
Aggregate converted to an ATAR of								73.75

The aggregate is the total of all contributions to your ATAR.

Studies from any year can be used in the calculation of the ATAR.

All permissible VCE and VCE VET studies can be used.

You must pass Units 3 and 4 for a study to be included in your ATAR.

Your Graded Assessment results are used by the VCAA to produce your study score.

The study score is calculated by the VCAA, with an average score of 30 for each subject.

All study scores are scaled by VTAC before use in the ATAR to adjust for competition.

You must have at least four permissible scored studies to receive an ATAR. If you have more than four studies available, we will use the highest eligible four studies. These are known as a "primary four".

Up to two more eligible studies can contribute as increments, which for scored VCE subjects is 10% of the scaled study score.

Your ATAR is a percentile rank determined by your aggregate. For example, an ATAR of 60 means that your aggregate was higher than 60% of the Year 12 age group.

Remember, there is no pass or fail ATAR. Every VCE student who receives an ATAR has successfully completed the VCE. An ATAR of 50 is not the pass rank, nor is it the average rank. An ATAR of 50 quite simply means a student has performed better than 50 per cent of the state population in the relevant age group.

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