



Measuring the Power of Learning.™

Why and How ETS Questions Test Scores

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Preface

The procedures and options described in this booklet apply to score validity cases only and do not apply to testing irregularities* involving administrative or procedural irregularities, discrepancies in test taker identification or test taker misconduct.

As a matter of fairness—to test takers and the colleges, universities, and others that use test scores in making important decisions about test takers—ETS reviews test scores that may be invalid. This booklet explains why and how ETS questions test scores when concerns arise about their validity.

Almost all test scores are reported by ETS without any question regarding their validity. When we are concerned that a test score may be invalid, we invite the test taker to submit information that addresses our concerns, as described on page 11. We also make available three options, which are described more fully beginning on page 13, for resolving the matter.

*Testing irregularities refers to problems with the administration of an exam. When they occur, they may affect an individual or groups of test takers. Such problems include, but are not limited to, administrative errors (e.g., improper timing, improper seating, improper proctoring, defective materials, defective equipment or the failure of testing staff to comply with test administration policies or procedures) and disruptions of exam administrations.

The test taker may:


1. take a specially arranged retest without charge to confirm the questioned score*; **or**
2. authorize ETS to cancel the questioned score and receive a refund of the registration fee (not including a late fee); **or**
3. submit the matter to arbitration.

Test takers may have the right to initiate legal action. However, the filing of a lawsuit will not necessarily delay the cancellation of scores that ETS determines are invalid.

First, Why We Question Test Scores

ETS prepares and administers the SAT test for the College Board, a nonprofit membership organization composed of more than 6,000 colleges, universities, and schools. College Board tests are widely viewed as accurate assessments of the abilities they are designed to measure. As a result, the millions of

*The questioned score can be confirmed even if the retest score is lower. See page 13.



people who take College Board tests each year and the thousands of institutions that receive test score reports count on the validity of the test scores College Board reports. Test scores are questioned when there is a concern that they may be invalid.

Acceptance of ETS Policies

ETS strives to administer tests under secure, standard conditions that afford test takers equivalent opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Before test takers take an ETS-administered test, they agree to accept ETS procedures. They also acknowledge that ETS has the right to review scores of questionable validity and to cancel scores when there is substantial evidence that they are invalid.

Fairness and Privacy Safeguards

ETS recognizes the importance of treating test takers fairly—and we have designed our procedures with fairness in mind. Our communications in cases of questioned scores—including this booklet—are designed to help test takers understand our procedures for reviewing scores so that questions about score validity can be resolved as quickly, economically, and equitably as possible.

ETS strives to protect the privacy of test takers whose scores are questioned. This means we avoid discussing with anyone facts that would identify a test taker, and we share personal information only with the test taker and persons designated by the test taker. However, if the test taker has made public filings or statements concerning his or her questioned scores, ETS may make a public response.

The Score Review Process

Over the years, ETS has developed procedures to review the validity of test scores. Unless ETS finds substantial evidence that a test score is invalid, the score is reported. If ETS has concerns about the validity of a test score, we give the test taker an opportunity to respond and select an option for resolving the matter. If the matter cannot be resolved, ETS will cancel the questioned score.

If before, during or after a review of questionable scores, ETS finds that misconduct has occurred in connection with a test, ETS may treat the matter under its Misconduct procedures; in that event, the options available in connection with Score Invalidity reviews will not be available even if those options were previously offered.

How Questions Arise

Questions about the validity of test scores arise in various ways. For example, we routinely compare each test taker's current scores with his or her previous test scores, frequently using a "large score difference" measure to identify scores that warrant further review. (However, ETS never cancels test scores based on large score differences alone.) Questions about score validity may also arise from:

- inquiries from colleges, universities, and other score users about the validity of particular scores (such inquiries often arise from inconsistencies among different measures of the test taker's ability);
- communications from test center supervisors, proctors, and other test takers;
- other internal and external sources of information.

Although ETS considers information received from these sources, we do not cancel scores unless we determine for ourselves that there is substantial evidence of invalidity.

Some Types of Information That ETS Considers When Reviewing Scores

Information, including but not limited to, that:

- a test taker may not have worked independently
- test scores are inconsistent with previous test scores or other measures of the test taker's abilities
- questions or answers may have been available to the test taker before the test administration

Comparisons of:

- one test taker's answers with those of other test takers
- a test taker's scores with previous scores or scores on different sections of the test
- the handwriting on the answer sheet with handwriting on other documents
- the essay with that of another test taker(s), and/or published or unpublished source(s)
- identification documents
- the information on an answer sheet with other records

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- changed answers on the answer sheet with the answers of another test taker
 - scratch work in the test book and the corresponding responses

No Action Taken During Review


When questions are raised before a test score has been reported, ETS does not report the score to score users unless and until ETS's concerns about its validity have been resolved. On the other hand, if a *previously reported* score is in question, ETS does not notify score users unless and until it has decided to cancel the score after the review and resolution process has been completed, or after the test taker has failed to comply with deadlines for submitting information or exercising an option.

Two-Stage Review Process

ETS will not cancel a test score without substantial evidence that it is invalid. To ensure fairness, the review process involves two stages with different sets of personnel responsible for each.

The Initial Review

The ETS Office of Testing Integrity is responsible for the initial review of scores. Testing Integrity staff consider whether,



based on information available to ETS, there appears to be substantial evidence of invalidity. In some instances, ETS staff call on test center staff or other sources to obtain more information. In each case the Office of Testing Integrity prepares a file, called a Score Review Summary, which contains information and documentation relating to its concerns.

If the Office of Testing Integrity determines that there is not substantial evidence of invalidity, it terminates the review and sends any scores not already reported to the test taker and designated score users. Any score users that have raised questions about the scores are then advised that ETS found no irregularities that would cause us to cancel the scores.

If Testing Integrity staff find substantial evidence that a score may be invalid, they notify the test taker and give him or her an opportunity to submit additional information that addresses ETS's concerns. Upon receipt of such information, Testing Integrity staff refer the Score Review Summary to the ETS Board of Review for consideration and decision.

If the test taker elects not to respond by the expiration of the time period indicated in ETS's letter, the test taker's scores will be canceled. In this case, there will be no review by the ETS Board.

Test takers are also offered two options for resolving the matter at this stage; those options—retesting and score cancellation—are described beginning on page 13 of this booklet.

Submitting Additional Information

Before questioned scores are submitted to the Board of Review, the Office of Testing Integrity provides test takers with one opportunity to submit information addressing ETS's concerns. Test takers may submit any information about their test experience that is relevant. For example:

- Other standardized test results may indicate that the questioned score is consistent with other measures of the test taker's abilities.
- Authenticated original documents written prior to the questioned test administration may address questions about handwriting differences.
- In the case of a physical impairment or other disability (which may account for substantial score differences or apparent handwriting discrepancies), the test taker may submit a doctor's certificate or other relevant information.

ETS's Board of Review considers all such information, and in some cases it resolves ETS's concerns.

On the other hand, the Board of Review gives little weight to information that does not specifically address ETS's questions about score validity. For example, character references or testimonial letters do not explain handwriting differences or unusual agreement between the answers of two test takers.

The Second Stage of Review

The Board of Review is an impartial group of ETS professional staff. Board of Review members do not review scores from testing programs for which they have managerial or administrative responsibility. The Board meets in rotating panels to review cases. If even one panel member concludes there is not substantial evidence of invalidity, the review is terminated and the score is reported.

The Board of Review considers the contents of the Score Review Summary (which, in discrepant handwriting cases, includes a report from an external document examiner retained by ETS) and any information submitted by the test taker. If the Board of Review finds that there is substantial evidence of invalidity, the Office of Testing Integrity

notifies the test taker. ETS offers three options before canceling the test taker's scores at this stage, as outlined below and on the following pages. As discussed beginning on page 9 of this booklet, the first two options are also available before the case is submitted to the Board of Review.

Options Leading to Resolution

Option 1 — Retake the Test

In general, the test taker may take the test again without paying a registration or test fee at a specially arranged administration to confirm that the original score accurately reflects his or her ability*. To confirm a score, the new score from a retest may not have to be exactly the same as the original test score. The retest confirmation range varies from test to test. For example, for the SAT, the retest score must be within 6 points for the reading score, within 6 points for the writing and language score, and within 5 points for the mathematics score to confirm.

(Note that the scores referred to here are reported as numbers between 10 and 40.) If ETS questioned an SAT that contained a reading score of 30, a writing and language score of 29, and a math score

*When ETS finds substantial evidence that a test taker's score on an essay portion of an examination is invalid, the test taker may take a retest to replace the questioned score rather than to confirm it.

of 32, the test taker would need to obtain a retest reading score of 24 or higher to confirm the questioned reading score, a retest writing and language score of 23 or higher to confirm the questioned writing and language score, and a retest score of 27 or higher to confirm the questioned math score. Office of Testing Integrity staff are available to advise test takers of confirmation ranges for other tests. If the score on a retest is higher than the questioned score, the retest score is the one that counts.

For paper-based testing, the retest option is available only to test takers testing in the United States and U.S. territories, and Canada.

If Validity Is Not Confirmed

If a retest score does not confirm the validity of a questioned score, ETS will cancel the questioned score and notify any score users who have already received the score that the score has been canceled. Test takers may elect, after being informed of their retest score, to have their retest score reported. ETS does not refund test fees when test takers choose to have a retest score reported.

If Only One Section Is Confirmed

If a test has two or more separately reported scores, such as SAT reading, writing and language, and math scores,

test takers may confirm one or more sections of the test but not the other(s). In such instances, ETS will cancel the section score that is not confirmed. The test taker can choose to replace it with the retest score and combine this score with the confirmed score from the other section. For example, if ETS questioned scores on the SAT of reading 30, writing and language 29, and math 32, and the test taker took a retest and obtained retest scores of reading 25, writing and language 24, and math 22, ETS would, at the test taker's option, report the confirmed reading score of 30, the confirmed writing and language score of 29, and the retest math score of 22. Alternatively, the test taker can elect to have all scores canceled and receive a refund of the test fee. Office of Testing Integrity staff are available to inform test takers about their retest scores and their substitution options.

Requirements for Retaking the Test

The retest, which ETS arranges as quickly as possible, is administered under secure conditions. Test takers must present positive identification before retesting begins. In addition, ETS requires a personal photograph of the test taker and the names of three faculty members who can identify the test taker from the photograph.

Option 2 — Test Taker May Cancel the Score

A test taker may ask ETS to cancel the questioned score. ETS then removes the score from the test taker's record and refunds any test fees paid by the test taker. If the score has been previously reported, ETS notifies score users that it has been canceled. In such instances, ETS does not disclose the specific reason for canceling the score unless required by law or pursuant to a U.S. or foreign subpoena.

Option 3 — Arbitration

A test taker may ask to have a third-party arbitrator, appointed by the American Arbitration Association, determine whether ETS has substantial evidence to support cancellation of the questioned test score. **The arbitration option is only available to test takers testing in the United States and U.S. territories.**

Requirements

Test takers electing this option must sign a standard ETS Arbitration Agreement that spells out the procedures that will apply in the arbitration. Arbitration is intended only as an independent review of ETS's decision that there is substantial evidence to support cancellation. This review is based upon the documents

alone. As a result, the arbitrator will review only the information that had been submitted to the ETS Board of Review when it decided to cancel the scores. Therefore, test takers may not submit any information in the arbitration that was not submitted to the Board of Review within the time provided.

Cost

ETS pays the cost of arbitration.

Questions About Options

Test takers who have questions about any of these options are invited to call ETS's Office of Testing Integrity for further information.*

Cancellation Procedures

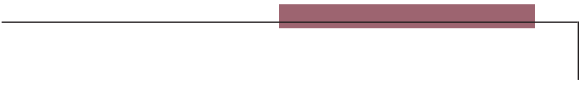
When ETS cancels a test score, it is removed from ETS's and College Board's files. Any registration fee (not including a late fee) the test taker paid is refunded unless the test taker takes a retest and chooses to have those scores reported. If a score has not already been reported to any score users, ETS takes no further action. If the score has been reported, ETS notifies the institutions that previously received the score that

*Contact information for the OTI can be found on the inside front cover of this booklet.

the score has been canceled. The specific reason for canceling the score is not disclosed.

Advice from Others

Test takers may seek advice from a trusted individual concerning ETS's test score review procedures. Minors and high school students, for example, may wish to talk to their parents, teachers, guidance counselors, or others for assistance. Office of Testing Integrity staff members are available to discuss the ETS score review process with the test taker or anyone who has been asked by the test taker to help resolve these questions. Generally, test takers must give ETS written permission to talk to anyone, including their parents, about their scores; however, if the test taker is under 18 years of age, ETS does not insist on written permission to talk with a parent.



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