

SAT / ACT Prep Online Guides and Tips

What Is a Good SAT Score? A Bad SAT Score? An Excellent SAT Score?



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[SAT/ACT SCORE TARGET](#)



What is a good SAT score? You took [the SAT](#), got your scores back, and now you want to know how you did. Or maybe you want to know what score to aim for next time.

In this guide, we'll discuss **how to figure out how your SAT scores stack up compared to all the other test-takers out there**. Then, we'll help you figure out what's a good SAT score for you based on the colleges you are interested in. We'll also provide the SAT score ranges of 38 popular schools, and discuss what to do if your score turns out to be lower than expected.

What's a Good SAT Score, Compared to the Entire Country?

The SAT score range is between 400 and 1600 for your total score, and 200-800 for each of your two subscores. One subscore is for Math, and one subscore is your combined Reading and Writing scores to make one "Evidence-Based Reading and Writing" score.

As you would expect, the higher your score, **the better you did compared to all the other test-takers**. But is there a certain SAT score cutoff that marks a "good" score?

To determine what makes for good SAT scores relative to everyone else, it's important to understand how SAT scoring works. Your total score out of 1600 (as well as your two sections subscores out of 800) corresponds to a **percentile ranking**. Your percentile tells you **what percent of students you scored better than**. So if you got a 60th-percentile score, you've scored better than 60% of all test-takers!

The 50th-percentile SAT composite score—the **average SAT score**—is **between 1050 and 1060**. (The test is deliberately designed so that the average score hovers around 1000 on the 1600-point scale—about 500 per subsection). The average score for math is between 520 and 530 (520 is

49th-percentile and 530 is the 53rd). The average SAT score for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing is between 530 (49th percentile) and 540 (52nd percentile).

SAT test scores **follow a normal distribution**. This means that student performance tends to cluster around the middle of the scale. Far fewer test-takers score towards the higher and lower end of the scale.

Here's an abbreviated SAT score chart with percentiles for [2018 SAT composite scores](#) so you can check out the score distribution for yourself:

Composite Score (Out of 1600)	Percentile
1600	99+
1550	99+
1510	99
1450	97
1410	95
1340	90
1240	80
1170	70
1110	60
1060	51
1010	41
950	31
890	21
800	10
750	5
680	1
630	1-
400	1-

As you can see from the percentiles and associated scores, **more people score towards the middle of the scale than at the top or bottom.** For example, a score jump from 1010 to 110 (100 points) moves you from the 41st to the 60th percentile—so you’ve moved up past nearly an entire fifth of test-takers! But moving 100 points from 1240 to 1340 only moves you up ten percentile points, from the 80th to the 90th. And moving from 1450 to 1550, a 100-point margin near the top of the scale, nets you only about three percentiles!

In terms of **what makes for good SAT scores based on this chart**, you already know that 1060 is about average, so anything above that is an above-average score. A 1240 places you at the 80th percentile, in the top fifth of test-takers, which is pretty good. A 1340 puts you in the top 10 percent, which is a strong score. A 1410 is in the 95th percentile—the top 5 percent of test-takers. And any score 1500+ puts you in the top one percent of test-takers!

By contrast, anything lower than a 1060 is a below-average score. A 950, at the 31st percentile, places you in the bottom third of test-takers. A 890, at the 21st percentile, places you in the bottom fifth. Not so great comparatively.

Here’s a chart showing the SAT score percentiles for the two subsections. The distributions are pretty similar, but there are some slight differences. For example, fewer people do really, really well on Evidence-Based Reading and Writing. You can tell because a 750 is a 99th-percentile score for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, placing you in the top one percent of test-takers. But it’s a 97th-percentile score for Math, placing you only in the top three percent.

Section Score (Out of 800)	Math Percentile	Evidence-Based Reading and Writing Percentile
800	99+	99+
750	96	99
700	92	94
670	88	90
640	83	84
610	77	75
590	72	69
560	64	59
530	53	49
500	40	38
470	31	28

440	22	19
400	13	9
360	6	3
310	1	1
200	1-	1-

What's a Good SAT Score for You?

We've discussed how your SAT score (and corresponding percentile ranking) shows how you compare to all the other test-takers.

But how well you did compared to all other test-takers isn't the most important thing for you. What's more important is **what makes a good SAT score for you personally, based on the schools you are interested in.**

A 1280 is an 84th-percentile score, meaning you scored better than 84% of test takers. And a 1280 would be a solid score for schools like the University of Cincinnati (average SAT 1240), ASU (average SAT 1230), and Temple (average SAT 1220). But it would be **a very low score** for highly selective institutions like MIT, CalTech, Duke, University of Chicago, or Johns Hopkins, for example.

Of course, not everyone is trying to get into super-selective schools! A score like 1040 (just below the 1060 average) is solid for schools like UT Rio Grande Valley (average SAT score 1020), Indiana University Northwest (average SAT score 1000) or Flagler College (average SAT score 1030).

So to sum up, a good SAT score is a score that makes you **competitive for the schools that you want to attend.**

It's also worth noting that the higher standardized test scores, the more likely schools that offer merit scholarships are to offer you them. For the purposes of this guide, we're going to focus primarily on figuring out the score you need for admission, but it's something to keep in mind. Another thing to consider is that a test score can help you get admitted at some schools if you have a lower GPA than their typical admits. (However, this won't help you so much at very selective institutions—they expect students to have high marks across the board.)

How to Find Your Goal Score

In this section, we'll walk you through how to figure out what makes a good SAT score for you, based on the schools that you are most interested in. Our quick five-step process only requires a worksheet (linked below), a writing utensil, and an internet-browsing device!

Step 1: Download This Worksheet

First, you'll need to download our worksheet so you can fill it out with information for your schools of interest. [Click here to download it](#), or click the image below.

Step 2: Fill in the Schools You Want to Get Into on the Left

Fill in all the schools that you know you want to apply to already in the leftmost column. If you don't know what schools you're aiming for yet, feel free to use ones that have been suggested to you by parents, friends, teacher, or counselors. However, I recommend that you take the time to [do some research](#) into [schools you might want to attend](#) first, so that you have a realistic target score. The more your list reflects the schools you actually end up applying to, the more accurate your target score will be for your goals.

Step 3: For Each School, Google "[Name of School] PrepScholar SAT"

For some schools, it's hard to find the new SAT information. But if you search for our SAT/GPA page for that school, **we do the searching (and converting of old scores if necessary) for you!**

When we scroll down to the new SAT information for University of Alabama, we can see that the 25th percentile SAT score is 1050. This means that 25% of admitted students have a score of 1050 on the SAT. That would be a below average score for admitted students to U Alabama.

The 75th percentile score for University of Alabama on the SAT is 1280. That means that students with that SAT score scored better than 75% of all the other admits. So scoring at 1280 or above puts you in the top quarter of admits score-wise—a very competitive score for admission! In summary, the 25th/75th percentile range describes the scores of the middle 50% of all students admitted to a particular school.

If you score at the 75th percentile for any school, you have a great chance at getting in (assuming your other credentials are on point for the school). So that's a good SAT score for that school. If you're at the 25th percentile, you'll need to have a particularly strong application to boost your odds of getting in.

For each school on your list, google the Prepscholar SAT score information and write down the 25th and 75th percentile scores for the new SAT in the appropriate row for that school on your goal score sheet.

Step 4: Calculate Your Final SAT Target Score

To calculate your target SAT goal score, look at the 75th percentile column. Find **the highest score in that column. That's your SAT total score goal.** If you score at the 75th percentile level for the most competitive school on your list, you'll be competitive at all your schools for test scores. So that is a good SAT score for you!

Another advantage of choosing a **high goal score** is that if you end up falling 10-50 points short, **it's not a huge deal because you'll still be competitive for most of your schools.**

You might be thinking—hey, wait! Why did I fill out that entire sheet if I was just going to pick the highest 75th percentile score? Well, the advantage of filling out all that information is that **you now have it handy as a reference.** You'll be able to check your SAT score against the 25th-75th percentile ranges of all your schools of interest as soon as you get your scores back!

Good SAT Scores for Popular Schools

To help you with determining your goal score, here's an SAT score chart with 25th-75th percentile SAT scores for 2017 for 38 popular schools. I've also provided the current *US News* ranking (from the National Universities list) and the 2017 acceptance rate to give you some reference points as to how selective the school is.

School	25th Percentile SAT	75th Percentile SAT	<i>US News</i> Ranking	2017 Acceptance Rate
Princeton University	1470	1590	1	6%
Harvard University	1470	1600	2	5%
Columbia University	1470	1590	3	6%
MIT	1480	1590	3	7%
University of Chicago	1490	1590	3	9%
Yale University	1490	1600	3	7%
Stanford University	1450	1590	7	5%
Duke University	1480	1590	8	10%
University of Pennsylvania	1450	1570	8	9%
Johns Hopkins University	1460	1570	10	12%
Northwestern University	1400	1560	10	9%
CalTech	1530	1600	11	8%
Dartmouth University	1410	1580	12	10%
Brown University	1440	1580	14	9%
Cornell University	1330	1530	16	13%
Rice University	1450	1570	16	16%

University of Notre Dame	1410	1550	18	19%
UCLA	1250	1500	19	16%
Emory University	1350	1520	21	22%
Georgetown University	1320	1500	22	16%
University of California, Berkeley	1330	1540	22	17%
Carnegie Mellon	1430	1560	25	22%
New York University	1380	1520	30	28%
Georgia Tech	1380	1530	35	23%
University of Florida	1220	1390	35	42%
Boston College	1350	1510	38	32%
Boston University	1290	1470	42	25%
Northeastern University	1400	1530	44	27%
Lehigh University	1270	1430	53	25%
Rutgers University--New Brunswick	1190	1400	56	58%
Penn State	1160	1340	59	50%
George Washington University	1280	1440	63	41%
Clemson University	1220	1390	66	47%
Fordham University	1230	1410	70	46%
University of Pittsburgh	1240	1420	70	60%
American University	1180	1350	78	29%

North Carolina State University--Raleigh	1230	1390	80	54%
Bucknell University	1250	1420	36 (Liberal Arts Colleges)	31%

What If My Score Is Too Low?

What if your SAT score ends up being lower than your goal score? What should you do? In this situation you have a few options to consider. We'll go over them here and help you figure out which one is best for you.

Strategy 1: Retake the Test

If you have the time to do additional preparation for the test and retake it, this is probably your most straightforward strategy. However, **keep in mind that if you really want a better score, you'll need to invest a lot of time** and really work on shoring up your weaknesses. These are the estimated time estimates for particular score improvements for the SAT:

- 0-30 point improvement: 10 hours
- 30-70 point improvement: 20 hours
- 70-130 point improvement: 40 hours
- 130-200 point improvement: 80 hours
- 200-330 point improvement: 150 hours +

Strategy 2: Don't Worry About It

If you were just under your goal score (think within 50 points), **you might not actually need to do anything if that slightly lower score is still competitive.** If you were going for a 1580 for your most selective school, Dartmouth, but you got a 1540, you're definitely still in the competitive range for that school. Depending on how soon you'll be applying to college, it might make more sense to use the time and energy you would spend preparing for and retaking the test on other parts of your application.

However, if you were more than 50 points short of your goal score, you should at least consider strategy 1 or 3

Strategy 3: Adjust Your List of Schools

If you are 50+ points short of your goal score and you don't have time to retake the test, you may need to **make some adjustments in your list of schools.** While you definitely should still apply to your dream schools as reach schools, you'll probably need to pad out your list of match and safety schools to be in line with the lower scores.

Maybe you were going for a 1510 but you got a 1410 instead. With your goal score, you had NYU (middle 50% 1290-1490) as a match, but with 1410 it's more of a reach. And then you had Lehigh University (middle 50% 1270-1430) as a safety, but now it's a better match. Consider adding some additional safety schools for your 1410, like UC Santa Cruz (middle 50% 1160-1370) and Penn State (middle 50% 1160-1340).