



*Measuring the Power of Learning.™*

# Why and How ETS Questions Test Scores

*Teacher Certification/Licensure*

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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,\* discrepancies in test taker identification or test taker misconduct.**

As a matter of fairness—to test takers, educational institutions, state agencies, professional organizations, state boards of education, 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.

Most test scores are reported by ETS without any question regarding their validity. When we are concerned that test scores may be invalid, we invite the test taker to submit information that addresses our concerns, as described on page 12. We also make available four options, which are described more fully beginning on page 14, for resolving the matter.

\*Testing irregularities refer 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, technical difficulties, defective materials, defective equipment or the failure of testing staff to comply with test administration policies or procedures) and disruptions of exam administrations.

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The test taker may:

1. authorize ETS to cancel the questioned scores and take a future test without charge; **or**
2. authorize ETS to cancel the questioned scores and receive a refund; **or**
3. ask ETS to send the file to the score recipient\*; **or**
4. submit the matter to arbitration\* (for test takers testing in the United States and U.S. territories only).

The test taker has 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 tests are widely viewed as accurate assessments of the abilities they are designed to measure. As a result, the millions of people who take ETS tests each year and the thousands of institutions that receive test score reports count on the validity of the test scores ETS reports. That is why ETS questions test scores when we believe they may be invalid.

\*Some client-based programs do not offer the arbitration or third party review options.

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## Acceptance of ETS Policies

ETS strives to administer tests under secure, standard conditions that afford test takers equivalent opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. During the registration process, upon arrival at the test center, and prior to the start of the testing session, test takers are required to signify their agreement to accept ETS policies and procedures. As part of that agreement, they 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

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 and equitably as possible.



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The test taker's score record and the documents completed that are retained at ETS may be released to any entity which ETS recognizes as an authorized recipient of scores, including without limitation (1) any entity to which ETS reports scores at the test taker's request, (2) any government agency, including agencies responsible for administration or enforcement of U.S. criminal and/or immigration laws and (3) pursuant to a U.S. or foreign subpoena or required by applicable law. ETS may be required by a score recipient or other third party to release the names of test takers whose scores have been questioned, whether or not these scores are canceled, and the reason for the score cancellation. The information that may be released includes, but is not limited to, identifying information, details of any test security investigation, and details regarding the test center where the test was taken. Typically, the reasons for the disclosure of test taker information include score verification, test security investigations, and investigations by score recipients of possible unlawful activity.

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## The ETS Score Review Process

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

**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 Invalidation reviews will not be available even if those options were previously offered.**

## How Questions Arise

Questions about the validity of test scores may arise from:

- inquiries from score recipients about the validity of particular scores (such inquiries often arise from inconsistencies among different measures of the test taker's abilities);

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- communications from test center administrators, or 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
- test content or answers may have been available to the test taker before or during the test administration
- an external source has provided to ETS

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## Comparisons of, including but not limited to:

- 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 from documents completed on test day with handwriting on other documents
- the essay/portfolio with that of another test taker(s), and/or published or unpublished source(s)
- identification documents presented by the test taker on test day with other records
- the information on test day documents with other records
- answers changed to match those of another test taker
- biometric data

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## No Action Taken During Review

When questions are raised before test scores have been reported, ETS does not report the scores to score recipients unless and until ETS's concerns about its validity have been resolved. On the other hand, if *previously reported* scores are in question, ETS does not notify score recipients unless and until it has decided to cancel the scores 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 test scores 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 (OTI) is responsible for the initial review of scores. OTI staff consider whether, based on information available to ETS, there appears to be substantial evidence of invalidity. In each case the OTI prepares a file, called a Score Review Summary, which contains information

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and documentation relating to its concerns.

If the OTI 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 recipients. Any score recipients that have raised questions about the scores are then advised that ETS found no score validity issues that would cause us to cancel the scores.

If OTI staff find substantial evidence that scores may be invalid, they notify the test taker and offer a single opportunity to submit additional information that addresses ETS's concerns. Upon receipt of such information, or expiration of the period for submitting it, OTI staff refer the Score Review Summary and any additional information supplied by the test taker to the ETS Board of Review for consideration and decision/recommendation.\*

Test takers are also offered the options of cancellation of the scores and taking a future test without charge or cancellation of scores and receiving a refund.

\*For some client-based programs, the client will review your case and make the final decision on the cancellation or release of your scores.

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## Submitting Additional Information

Before questioned scores are submitted to the Board of Review, the OTI 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:

- 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, the test taker may submit a doctor's certificate or other relevant information.

The 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 or more test takers.

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## 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 scores are 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 OTI notifies the test taker, or for certain client-based programs, the client is notified. ETS offers options before canceling the test taker's scores at this stage, as listed on the following pages. As discussed on page 11 of this booklet, cancellation of scores is still an option.

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## Options Leading to Resolution\*

### Option 1 — Test Taker May Cancel the Scores and Take a Future Test Without Charge

A test taker may ask ETS to cancel the questioned scores and take a future test at no charge for a subsequent test administration. If the scores have already been reported, ETS notifies score recipients or other third parties that the test taker's scores have been canceled.

### Option 2 — Test Taker May Cancel the Scores and Receive a Refund

A test taker may ask ETS to cancel the questioned scores. ETS then removes the scores from the test taker's record and refunds any applicable test fees paid by the test taker. If the scores have been previously reported, ETS notifies score recipients that they have been canceled.

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## Option 3 — Send File to Score Recipient\*

A test taker may authorize ETS to send its Score Review Summary, which includes the questioned scores, to a college, university, or other designated score recipient so the institution can make its own decision about using the scores. ETS will not send a Summary, however, unless the user agrees to accept it and to protect its confidentiality.

### *Factors to Consider*

Before electing Option 3, test takers should consider three factors:

1. ETS *cancel*s the scores before releasing the Score Review Summary to score users and so notifies all users to whom the Score Review Summary is sent and all other score recipients. Once the scores are canceled, no further record of them may be obtained from ETS.
2. Not all score users are willing to review files and make independent judgments about questioned scores.
3. User judgments are not binding on ETS.

\*Some client-based programs do not offer this option.

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## Option 4 — 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 scores. **The arbitration option is only available to test takers testing in the United States and U.S. territories.**

### *Requirements*

A test taker 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.

\*Some client-based programs do not offer the arbitration option.

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## Cost

ETS usually pays the cost of arbitration. However, the arbitrator is authorized to charge the test taker up to \$325 if the arbitrator finds the test taker's position to be frivolous.

## Questions About Options

Test takers who have questions about any of these options are invited to contact the OTI\* for further information.

## Cancellation Procedures

When ETS cancels test scores, they are no longer reportable. Any applicable test fee the test taker paid is either refunded or the test taker may take a future test without charge. If scores have not already been reported to any score recipients, ETS takes no further action. If the scores have been reported, ETS notifies the score recipients that previously received the scores that they have been canceled.

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



## Advice from Others

Test takers may seek advice from a trusted individual concerning ETS's test score review procedures. The OTI 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. Test takers must give ETS written permission to talk to anyone.



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