



Listening. Learning. Leading.[®]

Why and How ETS Questions Test Scores

Graduate Record Examinations[®]
Teacher Certification/Licensure

Office of Testing Integrity
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, NJ 08541

Phone: 1-800-750-6991 (U.S. only)
609-406-6530 (International)

Fax: 609-406-9709

E-mail: tsreturns@ets.org

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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 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. Only a tiny fraction of test scores are ever questioned by ETS. When we are concerned that a test score may be invalid, we invite the test taker to submit information that addresses our concerns. We also make available four options, which are described more fully beginning on page 12, 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.

The test taker may:

1. take a specially arranged retest without charge to confirm the questioned score* (for test takers testing in the United States only); **or**
2. authorize ETS to cancel the questioned score; **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 only).

Test takers 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 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

*The questioned score can be confirmed even if the retest score is lower. See page 14.

**This option may not be applicable to some testing programs.

reports. That is why ETS questions test scores when we believe they may be invalid.

Assuring Score Validity

In making score validity determinations, it is not ETS's intention or responsibility to make judgments about whether a test taker cheated, and ETS does not express any such judgments to third parties. Our paramount goal is to ensure, to the extent possible based on information available to us, that test scores we report are valid.

Mutual Agreement

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 test, they agree 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 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 test taker's score record and the documents completed that are retained at ETS may be released to third parties (e.g., government agencies, parties to a lawsuit) if requested pursuant to a subpoena or required by applicable law.

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 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 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);

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- 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
- 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

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 with that of another test taker(s), and/or published or unpublished source(s)
- identification documents
- the information on test day documents with other records
- answers changed to match those of another test taker
- scratch work in the test book and the corresponding answers

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 (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 some instances, ETS staff contact test center staff or other

sources to obtain more information. In each case the OTI prepares a file, called a Score Review Summary, which contains information 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 users. Any score users 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 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, 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.

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 14 of this booklet.

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.

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 or more 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 OTI notifies the test taker. ETS offers four options* before canceling the test taker's scores at this stage, as listed on the following pages. As discussed on page 12 of this booklet, the first two options are also available before the case is submitted to the Board of Review.

*The retest option is only available to test takers in the United States or Canada. The arbitration option is only available to test takers in the United States.

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. The OTI staff are available to discuss the retest option.

For paper-based testing, the retest option is available only to test takers in the United States or Canada at the time of the retest.

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.

*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.

ETS does not refund test fees when test takers choose to have a retest score reported.

Requirements for Retaking the Test

The retest 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, employers, or people in supervisory positions who are not related to the test taker and 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 or issues a voucher. 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.

Option 3 — Let Score User Decide

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 user 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 score 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 score is canceled, no further record of it 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.

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 score. **The arbitration option is available only to test takers in the United States at the time the scores are questioned.**

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.

*This option may not be applicable to some testing programs.

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 a test score, it is removed from ETS's files. Any registration fee (not including a late fee or additional score reporting fees) 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 score recipients that previously received the score that it has been canceled.



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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