

College Admissions and the GED Graduate

Today, one in twenty college freshmen is a GED graduate. How can admissions officials evaluate these nontraditional applicants?

Nearly all of the colleges and universities in the United States have published policies to admit students without a traditional high school diploma. However, unlike traditional high school graduates, GED holders face the challenge of documenting their academic ability in the traditional manner.

GED graduates have demonstrated academic skills in the core content areas of English language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics. In fact, those who pass the GED have surpassed the performance of least one-third of the nation's graduating high school seniors. The American Council on Education's Commission on Educational Credit and Credentials recommends that persons who earn GED diplomas be considered high school graduates for the purposes of college admission.

About the GED Tests

There are five GED Tests: Writing Skills, Social Studies, Science, Interpreting Literature and the Arts, and Mathematics. The tests take more than seven and a half hours to complete and include a direct writing assessment. To ensure that the content and skills measured by the tests remain closely matched to contemporary high school curriculum, the tests undergo regular review and revision.¹ Test results are expressed as standard scores ranging from 20 to 80. States award a high school credential to individuals who earn at least 40 on each test and an average standard score of 45 or better across all five tests.²

Interpreting GED Test Scores

GED standard scores are normalized scores based on a nationally representative stratified random sample of high school seniors tested in the spring of their graduating year. Only seniors who are expected to meet the academic requirements for graduation are included in the sample. Separate normings are performed for the U.S. and Canada; scores are restandardized only when the norm group shows significant changes. The standard scores currently reported are based on a 1996 standardization study.

The resulting standard scores and percentile ranks can be used to describe the skills of adults who take the GED Tests in comparison to the performance of contemporary high school seniors. GED standard scores have the following properties:

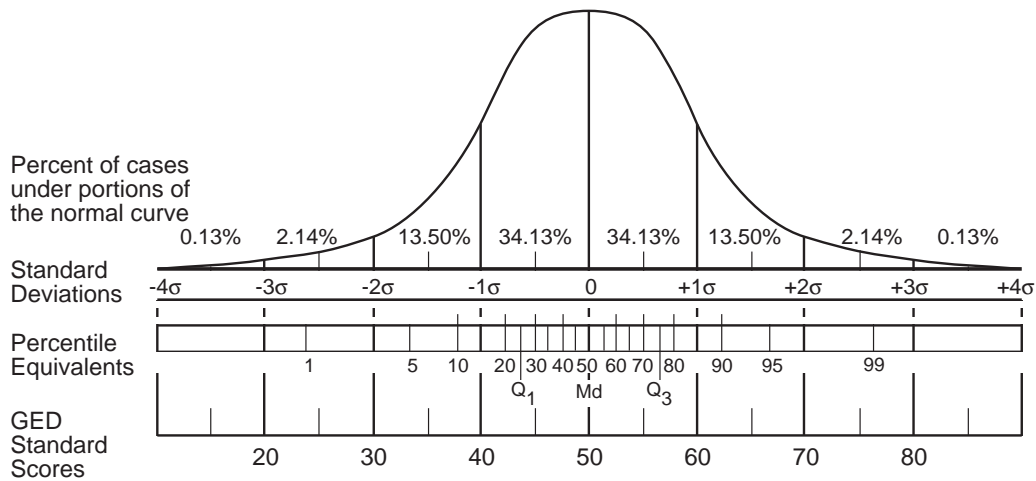
- The median standard score for graduating high school seniors is 50 for each of the five tests.
- The standard deviation is 10 points for recent U.S. graduating high school seniors.
- The percentage of graduating seniors at or below each GED standard score value is the same for each of the five tests.
- The percentile ranks furnished on Official GED Score Reports are those for graduating high school seniors, not for adult examinees.

Percentile ranks can be interpreted as ranks in the national graduating class of high school seniors. Because wide variation exists in academic stan-

¹ Consequently, there have been three versions of the tests since 1942. New GED Tests, based on emerging national and state level content standards, are in development now and scheduled for release in September 2001.

² Participating Canadian provinces and territories require that candidates earn a minimum of 45 on each test.

GED Standard Scores and Percentile Equivalents along the Normal Curve



dards and grading systems, however, scores cannot be directly correlated to grade point averages.

Some colleges and universities require admissions candidates to present higher GED scores than those required by the state for graduation. In such cases, the institution may have the candidate retest to earn the required GED scores or provide data from other academic achievement tests.

The American Council on Education makes the following recommendations concerning GED graduates:

- If applicants are routinely asked to submit admissions test scores (e.g., ACT or SAT), GED graduates should be required to do the same. Institutions should not substitute GED scores for admissions test scores.
- If a minimum class rank is normally required for admission, the information in the accompanying table can be used to set an appropriate GED standard score and scholarship equivalents. For example, if the institution generally admits traditional students graduating in the upper half of their classes, it should require GED graduates to present average standard scores of at least 50. If merit scholarships are offered to seniors graduating in the top ten percent of their classes, similar awards should be made to GED graduates with average standard scores of 62 or better.

- Because the GED Tests reflect general educational skills and not mastery in specific courses, counseling and testing may be needed to place a GED graduate in the appropriate course level.
- Scores from the GED Tests should not constitute the sole basis for admission.

Graduating Rank-in-Class and GED Standard Score Equivalents

National Class Rank	Average GED Score
Top 1%	68
Top 2%	66
Top 3%	65
Top 5%	64
Top 10%	62
Top 15%	60
Top 20%	58
Top 25%	57
Top 33%	54
Top 40%	52
Top 50%	50
Top 67%	46
Top 70%	45

For more information, contact the GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education, (202) 939-9490.