

# A Guide to Applying in a Test-Optional World

## THE LANDSCAPE

### Vast Majority of Schools are Test-Optional

- On [one slide](#), we can fit *all* the colleges that are currently test-blind or test-required

### Temporary vs. Permanent

- Colleges with [permanent test-optional policies](#)
  - Only 9 of the top 100 national universities are on this list
- Colleges with [temporary test-optional policies](#)

### Test-Optional Policy Variation

- Philosophical vs. Logistical Motivation**
  - Philosophical:** Some colleges are test-optional because they believe that testing is not an accurate measure of student success; they prefer to focus on other application materials.
  - Logistical:** Many colleges are test-optional because the pandemic shut down test centers and they had to go test-optional in order for students to be able to apply. Now that test centers are open again, these colleges may remain test-optional because of the enormous application increases they experienced once they allowed students to apply without test scores. However, test scores may still carry significant weight in the evaluation process.
- Framework: Test-Neutral, Test-Aware, Test-Preferred**

*\*Data from the 2020-2021 application cycle\**

  - Test-neutral** colleges offer little to no admission advantage to test submitters. Northeastern, for example, had no difference between acceptance rates for test submitters and non-submitters, leading to a testing advantage factor of 0%.
  - Test-aware** colleges offer some advantage to test submitters. At Amherst, for example, the admit rate for test submitters was 64% higher than the admit rate for non-submitters.
  - Test-preferred** colleges offer a significant advantage. Emory and Georgia Tech offered the most advantage, with admit rates for test submitters 123% and 121% higher than for non-submitters.

WHICH COLLEGES ARE NOT TEST-OPTIONAL? (FOR 2022)

**THESE COLLEGES WILL NOT REVIEW YOUR TEST SCORES AT ALL (TEST-BLIND)**

- California State University (all campuses)
- California Institute of Technology
- Dickinson College
- Hampshire College
- City University of New York (all campuses)
- Loyola University New Orleans
- Pitzer College
- Reed College
- University of California (all campuses)
- University of San Diego
- Washington State University
- Worcester Polytechnic Institute

**THESE COLLEGES REQUIRE TEST SCORES (TEST-REQUIRED)**

- All Florida public universities
- Georgetown University
- Georgia Institute of Technology
- Georgia College and State University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- University of Georgia

### Test-Neutral

Institution	Testing Advantage Factor	Overall Admit Rate
Northeastern	0%*	18%
Swarthmore	9%*	8%
Boston College	13%	19%
Vanderbilt	22%	7%
USC	27%	12%
Fordham	29%	58%

### Test-Aware

Institution	Testing Advantage Factor	Overall Admit Rate
U. Georgia	50%	39%
Tufts	50%	11%
Wellesley	56%	16%
Barnard	62%	10%
Amherst	64%	8%
Bucknell	70%	34%

### Test-Preferred

Institution	Testing Advantage Factor	Overall Admit Rate
Boston U.	83%	18%
U. Virginia	86%	21%
Notre Dame	87%	15%
Georgetown	90%	12%
U. Penn	94%*	6%
Davidson	103%	17%
Colgate	116%	17%
Georgia Tech	121%	18%
Emory	123%	13%

Of over 300 test-optional schools researched, only 21 have released detailed test-optional related admissions stats.

\*Based on early admissions data only

Source: Institution admissions pages, press releases

**\*Note:** Georgetown, Georgia Tech, and the University of Georgia have since returned to requiring test scores

**\*\*Keep in mind that there are many other factors that likely influence these admit rates. Test submitters may be more likely to have stronger applications overall. This data set shows only correlation, not causation.**

# A Guide to Applying in a Test-Optional World

## WHAT TEST-OPTIONAL MEANS FOR YOU

### You are in control

- You now have the power to choose, both whether or not to test and whether or not to submit scores.
- Take a diagnostic test to see if testing could be additive for you; if it is, prep for a test and give it your all.
- **Wait to receive your scores, then make a decision about where to submit them.**
  - Testing early helps you keep open as many doors as possible. You can then refine whether and where to submit once you know your scores.
  - Together with your Tutors and Advisors, you will make informed decisions about how to use your scores in a way that will be most advantageous to your applications.

### Develop a test submission **strategy** with your Advisor

- **You may not send test scores to all the schools you apply to – and that's okay!** It doesn't mean that preparing for the tests was a waste of time. The foundational skills you build during test prep, particularly grammar and reading comprehension, will still benefit you during essay writing and in college itself.
- **Test-optional policies allow you to apply to schools that might have otherwise been beyond your reach** (based on your test scores); but that doesn't mean that your scores won't benefit you at other schools on your list (such as your target or likely schools).

### You get to make individualized and strategy-driven decisions. **Context matters...**

- ...both of the schools you're applying to ([not all test-optional policies are the same](#)).
- ...and of you (how strong are the other parts of your application, what's your narrative, etc.).

### DOs

**DO play to your strengths:** Test prep isn't right for everyone and may not be right for you. If that's the case, focus your energy on grades and activities to get the most value out of your efforts.

**DO commit to your decision:** If you decide not to pursue test prep, maximize your time by pursuing extra rigorous classes and leadership opportunities. If you decide to pursue test prep, you must invest the effort. **If you're not fully committed, you won't see results.**

### DON'Ts

**DON'T decide before taking a diagnostic test:** This will inform how much effort test prep will require from you and what your potential scores could be. You may be surprised at what you can do!

**DON'T base your decision on what tour guides tell you:** It is true that some schools really don't care about tests, but [others really do \(even if they're test-optional\)](#). Sometimes these biases are implicit, meaning the admissions staff may believe they don't care about tests, but the data show otherwise.

### Testing is just one piece of a much larger puzzle

#### The strongest college applications highlight all of the following:

- **Challenging academic rigor** (which looks different depending on your high school's curriculum)
- **Excellent grades** across all subject areas (especially those that align with your intended major)
- A **compelling narrative** about who you are and who you hope to be.
  - Ask yourself:
    - What impact have you had on your community?
    - Why do you want to study your chosen major? What experiences have influenced you?
    - What traits and contributions are your counselor and teachers likely to share in their recommendation letters?
- Specific **demonstrated interest** in your chosen colleges (shown through essays and/or interviews)