

To Submit or Not to Submit

by William H. Floyd

It's that time of year again. Seniors are submitting their first applications for Early Action, Early Decision, Restricted Early Action, Single-Choice Early Action, Priority Admission, and any other deadlines that arrive in October and November. But there is one lingering question for many students. Should students submit scores to the schools they are applying to?

That answer will be different for each student and each school on that student's list. At the [University of California Schools](#), or any other test free schools, students cannot submit test scores. For public schools in [Florida](#) and [Georgia](#), where scores are required, students must submit scores to be considered for admission. But since the overwhelming majority of colleges and universities are test-optional this year, this forces students into a series of tough questions.

For a student who scored above a 1500 on the SAT or 33 on the ACT, that score should almost always be submitted. By contrast, a student with sub-800 SAT scores or sub-15 ACT scores will likely want to withhold scores, highlighting other aspects of their application. Everyone in between needs to review each school's middle 50 SAT and ACT scores and determine if their scores would be a positive at that school. That usually also depends on a student's GPA, and whether a student's score is better or worse than a student's GPA

This is all well and good in the abstract, but no student is making this choice in the abstract. Every student must determine whether their specific test score will help each specific application they submit in less than a month. Will a school only want to see scores above their published average? And will the scores go up each year? And how can anyone really know if they'll stand out in an applicant pool?

Fortunately, guidance from colleges themselves helps shine a light. [Scripps College](#) notes "We imagine what the applicant would be like as a member of the Scripps community, engaged inside and outside of the classroom." [The University of Michigan](#) informs students that "Admission to the University of Michigan is competitive. That's why we employ an individualized, comprehensive process in reviewing each student's application." [Emory University](#) tells prospective students that their current students "tend to be high achievers who are engaged in their community and who are looking to make the world—in ways big and small—a better place."

Despite their different messages, a small women's college in California, a flagship research university in the Midwest, and a medium-sized university in the South are all saying that applicants are evaluated across multiple factors. A test score is not going to be the one thing that gets students in, because there is very rarely one thing that gets students in at a selective college. At very selective colleges, a strong test score may be helpful, but very selective colleges want a strong GPA, transcript, and personal statement, and for every other aspect of an application to be strong as well.

For current seniors compiling their applications, this should serve as a reminder that their goal is not to show a high test score but to submit the best possible holistic application for each school. For juniors and sophomores, this sends a warning that they should plan to have as strong a test score as they can before applying. After all, if schools are saying that students have the choice to send scores, then students must set themselves up to have as many choices as they can.