

# Job Hunting? Dig Up Those Old SAT Scores

## Employers Still Want Candidates' Test Results—Sometimes Decades Later

By  
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Plenty of employers, from consulting firms such as Bain & Co. and McKinsey & Co. and banks like Goldman Sachs, still care about a job candidate's SAT score. Melissa Korn explains why on the News Hub. Photo: Getty Images.

Stephen Robert Morse was a candidate for a communications job when the recruiter told him to be ready to discuss his SAT score in a coming interview.

Mr. Morse, 28 years old, said he was "shocked" that a potential boss would be interested in the results of a test he took more than a decade earlier. He passed on the opportunity.

Proving the adage that all of life is like high school, plenty of employers still care about a job candidate's SAT score. Consulting firms such as Bain & Co. and McKinsey & Co. and banks like [Goldman Sachs](#) Group Inc. ask new college recruits for their scores, while other companies request them even for senior sales and management hires, eliciting scores from job candidates in their 40s and 50s.

The SAT, originally known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test and taken during junior or senior year of high school, is a common element of college applications. The exam is scored on a scale of 2400, with up to 800 points each for critical reading, math and writing sections. The average SAT score last year was a combined 1498. (Before March 2005, the test had just two sections and was scored on a 1600-point scale.)

A low score doesn't necessarily kill a person's chances, hiring managers say; instead, they say they believe SATs and other college entrance exams like the ACT help when comparing candidates with differing backgrounds or figuring out whether someone has the raw brainpower required for the job.

But some companies do set targets, particularly on the math section. Mark Rich, managing director of consulting-industry recruiting firm Whitehouse Pimms, says clients often tell him to screen for candidates whose SAT scores placed them in or above the 95th percentile. Investment firm D.E. Shaw Group asks candidates to break out their math and verbal results.

Boston Consulting Group Inc. has long used SAT scores as a factor in its hiring process. The firm doesn't set a minimum score for applicants, said Jennifer Comparoni, head of Americas recruiting. But candidates with weak math results would need to demonstrate other strengths, such as subject-matter expertise or leadership ability, she added.

BCG managers won't say that SAT results predict job performance, but Ms. Comparoni said the company uses the test as a standard measure of "the basic building blocks of success," such as critical thinking, problem-solving skills and quantitative abilities.

### How They Read Your Résumé

Recruiters like to see candidates with the right mix of education, experience and skills, but certain companies put added weight on particular résumé lines for recent college grads:

- **GPA:** Accounting firms and other professional services companies often set minimum grade-point averages for college hires; at service organization **Teach for America**, the average undergraduate GPA for the 2013 corps was 3.55.
- **INTERESTS:** Law-school graduates generally have near-identical transcripts and little work experience. Quirky interests, such as 19th century French poetry or a stint as a sports team mascot, can differentiate candidates for **law firms**.
- **WORK EXPERIENCE:** Time at an early-stage startup excites recruiters at **small tech firms**.

Sources: recruiters, companies, Teach for America

[Cvent](#) Inc., [CVT +1.37%](#) a McLean, Va., event management software company, asks all job applicants to provide SAT or ACT scores, results from graduate-school entrance tests and grade-point averages along with their work history. Scores count most heavily for candidates in their first years out of college, though the company has received scores from applicants well into middle age, said Eric Eden, Cvent's vice president of marketing.

"When you're hiring people and they don't have a lot of work experience, you have to start with some set of data points," he said, adding that he likes to hear about recent graduates' extracurricular activities, too.

Cvent, which employs more than 1,400 people, hasn't tested whether its best employees are also its top SAT scorers. "Knowing it's a standardized test is really enough for us," Mr. Eden said.

SATs and other academic artifacts remain relevant in part because they are easy—if imperfect—metrics for hiring managers to understand. This despite the fact that increased use of personality tests, data analytics and behavioral interviews have given employers more information about a candidate than ever before. Academic research has proved that cognitive ability can predict job performance, but there is scant evidence linking high SAT scores with employee success.

<b>Score Sheet</b>				
SAT scores of some CEOs				
NAME				
TITLE	<b>Philippe Dauman</b> CEO, Viacom	<b>Steve Hafner</b> CEO and co-founder, Kayak	<b>Spencer Rascoff</b> CEO, Zillow	<b>Zach Sims</b> CEO and co-founder, Codecademy
SAT SCORE	<b>1600</b>	<b>1430</b>	<b>1480</b>	<b>2340</b>
YEAR TAKEN	1967	1987	1991	2007
AVG. SCORE THAT YEAR	1059	1008	999	1508
<p>Note: The highest possible score on the SAT increased in March 2005 from 1600 points to 2400 points with the addition of a third, written portion of the test.</p> <p>Sources: the executives; College Board (avg. score) Photos: Bloomberg (Dauman, Rascoff) Kayak (Hafner); Tom Vigliotta for The Wall Street Journal (Sims) The Wall Street Journal</p>				

The College Board, which administers the SAT, maintains that the exam is designed mainly to predict first-year college success. The group hasn't studied employers' use of scores, a College Board spokeswoman said.

"It is a little confounding how a test somebody took when they were 17 predicts success in a competitive workplace when they're 22," said Kevin Monahan, a career-services dean at Carnegie Mellon University.

Few companies request official score reports from the College Board in the same way they demand formal college transcripts, though they often require candidates to attest that they are providing truthful information. Employers also spot-check candidates' credentials after making offers. (The College Board keeps SAT scores indefinitely, though requests for scores older than one year take up to five weeks to fulfill and cost \$30.50 to retrieve.)

Putting too much stock in standardized tests can put minority candidates at a disadvantage. In 2013, SAT test-takers in the "Black or African-American" category scored an average 431 on the exam's critical reading section, 429 on math and 418 on writing. White test-takers, meanwhile, scored nearly 100 points higher on average in every section. There is a racial divide for ACT score reports as well.

Still, many college students and recent graduates now list their scores voluntarily on résumés and LinkedIn.

Patricia Rose, director of career services at University of Pennsylvania, advises students to put forth any information on their profiles that might impress an employer, even test scores. She also recommends recent graduates who want to change industries to list their results as proof that they are up to new intellectual challenges.

But what impresses one hiring manager may annoy another, said In-Sue Oh, a professor of human resources and management at Temple University's Fox School of Business. Listing SAT scores on a résumé could make an applicant come across as narcissistic, overqualified or hung up on high-school successes, he added.

Asking for SAT scores may turn off candidates, too. Mr. Morse, now head of marketing and communications at freelance marketplace SkillBridge, said a firm's request for test scores "made me a little bit skeptical of wanting to work with them," despite scoring "in the 1450 range" on the 1600-point test. "I don't see why it's relevant," he said.

[Google](#) Inc. [GOOG +0.62%](#) famously fixated on job candidates' grade-point averages, test scores and alma mater, but the company changed tactics about two years ago, when data showed that traditionally pedigreed candidates didn't always make better hires.

Internal studies found "very little correlation between SAT scores and job performance," said Kyle Ewing, head of global staffing programs at Google. The company now relies on interview questions that probe how a potential hire has solved complex problems in the past.

Not everyone is glad when companies shift ever so slightly away from SATs.

One former McKinsey analyst who conducted recruiting for the firm was content to share his own scores. "For me, it was great," he said. "I test much better than I am intelligent."