



Interpreting Your Scores FAQs

Does the PA-CAT have a passing score and if so, what is it?

The PA-CAT is a type of exam called “norm referenced” which means it does not have a passing score. Candidate scores are ranked and compared based on the results of all other candidates who took the exam. Candidates are ranked based on the performance of their peers not on a “passing” grade.

What types of scores are reported on the PA-CAT?

The PA-CAT reports two types of scores, a composite score, which is the score for the entire exam, and sub-scores for the three largest components of the exam: Anatomy and Physiology, Biology, and Chemistry.

What is meant by a scaled score?

Results from tests administered in high school and college are typically reported as raw scores on a 100 point scale (e.g. 90 would be considered a very good score). However, there are quite a few limitations to using raw scores since they do not account for question difficulty, they do not allow for accurate comparisons of different versions of an exam, and they do not allow for accurate comparisons of an exam over time. Virtually all standardized exams have their scores scaled to allow for accurate statistical measure and comparison over time.

Both the PA-CAT composite score and the sub-scores are reported as scaled scores.

What are quintile rankings?

Because the PA-CAT is a new program and because there were delays in testing center availability because of the COVID virus, initial candidate rankings are presented as quintiles rather than individual percentile rankings for better statistical validity. Quintiles are used to group candidates into five equal buckets or scoring ranges based on how they did on the exam. A candidate whose score is equal to or better than 80% of all the candidates who took the exam would be in the top quintile on the PA-CAT. A candidate’s score alone does not determine which quintile they fall into, rather it is that candidate’s score compared to the scores of all of the other candidates that determines which quintile that score falls into. For example, a candidate who scored in the lowest quintile means that 80% or more of the candidates achieved a higher score on the PA-CAT than that particular candidate.

What is a good score on the PA-CAT?

Getting accepted into PA school is very competitive. The PA-CAT is designed to help PA programs better determine the academic preparedness of the candidates who apply to their

program. Because the PA-CAT is a comparative exam, not an exam with a passing score, the better a candidate scores in comparison to his or her peers, the more competitive the score. PA programs will use PA-CAT scores as part of an overall admissions decision process, taking many candidate attributes and qualifications into account. Some PA programs may focus on overall composite scores or give more weighting to one or more of the sub-scores which are in Anatomy and Physiology, Biology and Chemistry. Because the PA-CAT is new for 2020, and with just early candidate data, some PA programs will give less weight to PA-CAT scores this year as compared to future years.