

Interpretive Guide for LSAT® Score Users

June 2017 LSAT Administration

This *Interpretive Guide* for the June 2017 LSAT was developed to help admission officers, deans, faculty, prelaw advisors, and others who use LSAT scores, to facilitate the law school admission process. This guide does not cover all the technical psychometric information available regarding the LSAT, but it does provide basic information in nontechnical language for those who need to use and interpret these scores.

Interpreting LSAT Scores

Scores on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) are reported on a scale from 120 to 180 and can be directly compared across testing administrations and testing years. Why are scores on the 120–180 scale comparable to each other? These scores have the same meaning from one administration to the next and from one year to the next as a result of a statistical process called *equating*. When scores are equated, a given scaled score represents comparable ability regardless of the administration in which it is obtained.

The average ability level of test takers (*group performance*) is higher at some administrations than at other administrations. Nevertheless, for any individual test taker, a given scaled score represents the same degree of ability regardless of when the score is earned. Information about group performance may be useful to some score users. However, score users should never inflate or discount an individual's score to take into account the administration at which it was earned, since the scores from different test forms have been made comparable through the equating process. An applicant's LSAT score provides the same information about the applicant's ability regardless of the ability of others who tested at the same time. For example, an applicant with an LSAT score of 160 might have a higher relative standing among February test takers than among June test takers, but the ability level represented by a score of 160 is the same regardless of when that score is earned.

Distribution of June 2017 Test Takers

To guide and monitor their admission processes, many LSAT score users use information about the percentage of test takers who earn each scaled score. This is frequently referred to as *distribution data* because it provides information about how test takers are distributed across the score scale. Distribution data based on information available from the June 2016 and June 2017 administrations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows percentile ranks for June 2016 test takers compared to June 2017 test takers. The same score would have a different percentile rank within different groups. LSAT score users are likely to be most interested in percentile ranks for three different reference groups: all test takers, all law school applicants, and all applicants to a particular

law school. This *Interpretive Guide* only shows percentile ranks for test takers to date. The monthly applicant reports sent to each law school show the percentile ranks for applicants to all ABA-approved law schools to date and for applicants to that law school. These percentile ranks for the reference group of applicants are different from the percentile ranks for all test takers.

Some Things to Note

- The test-taker volume for the June 2017 administration was approximately 20 percent higher than reported for the June 2016 administration.
- The mean LSAT score for the June 2017 administration was 0.27 points higher than the mean LSAT score for the June 2016 administration.
- Slight differences were noted between the percentile ranks for the two testing periods.

Reliability, Measurement Error, Score Bands, and Score Differences

To assess the reliability or consistency of LSAT scores, a *reliability coefficient* is computed for each LSAT form. Reliability coefficients indicate how reproducible a test taker's performance would be over repeated administrations of the same test form. Reliability coefficients are measured on a scale from 0 to 1. The larger the value of the reliability coefficient, the more reproducible a test taker's performance should be. Values of at least .9 indicate a very reliable test form.

Table 2 shows the reliability coefficient for the June 2017 (Form 8LSN127) test form. This and previous LSAT reliability coefficient values have typically been over .9, indicating that the LSAT is a very reliable test.

LSAT scores contain a certain amount of measurement error that is assessed with the standard error of measurement for individual scores (SEM_i). The SEM_i is more useful than the reliability coefficient for interpreting the precision of individual test scores. The SEM_i indicates how close a test taker's observed score is likely to be to his or her true score. (A test taker's true score is the score that he or she would obtain on a perfectly reliable test—a test with a reliability coefficient of 1.) The LSAT SEM_i is very stable and tends to be about 2.6 scaled score points. The actual SEM_i value for Form 8LSN127 is 2.63 points (see Table 2). Smaller SEM_i values indicate more precise scores.



Table 1: Score Distributions for the June LSAT Administration

Score	June 2017 % Below	June 2016 % Below
180	99.9	99.9
179	99.9	99.9
178	99.9	99.9
177	99.7	99.7
176	99.5	99.7
175	99.5	99.5
174	99.2	99.3
173	98.7	98.9
172	98.3	98.6
171	97.8	98.0
170	97.0	96.9
169	96.3	96.2
168	94.8	94.7
167	93.7	93.8
166	91.7	92.0
165	90.6	90.8
164	88.4	88.7
163	86.0	86.3
162	83.2	83.8
161	80.7	81.4
160	77.7	78.7
159	74.7	75.6
158	71.5	72.5
157	68.5	69.3
156	65.3	65.7
155	61.9	63.6
154	58.2	60.1
153	54.6	56.2
152	50.9	52.5
151	47.2	48.6
150	43.6	44.5
149	39.7	42.2
148	36.0	38.1
147	34.2	34.2
146	30.6	32.2
145	27.2	28.2
144	23.8	24.2
143	22.0	22.3
142	18.8	18.8
141	17.4	17.3
140	14.4	15.6
139	12.8	12.6
138	10.3	11.2
137	9.0	10.0
136	7.9	7.7
135	6.8	6.6
134	5.7	5.7
133	4.9	5.0
132	4.2	4.2
131	3.4	3.6
130	2.7	2.9
129	2.2	2.4
128	1.8	2.0
127	1.7	1.7
126	1.4	1.3
125	1.1	1.0
124	0.9	0.8
123	0.9	0.6
122	0.7	0.5
121	0.6	0.4
120	0.0	0.0
Test Takers	27,589	22,970
Mean	150.88	150.61
Std Dev	10.64	10.60

Score bands, or ranges of scores that contain a test taker's true score a certain percentage of the time, can be derived using the SEM_I. Score bands are constructed by adding and subtracting a multiple of the SEM_I to or from a scaled score. By adding and subtracting one times the SEM_I to or from a score, the score band will contain an individual's true score approximately 68 percent of the time. By adding and subtracting two times the SEM_I to or from a score, the score band will contain an individual's true score approximately 95 percent of the time.

For reporting purposes, LSAC constructs score bands by subtracting one times the rounded SEM_I from the LSAT score to obtain a lower bound value, and adding one times the rounded SEM_I to the LSAT score to obtain an upper bound value. LSAC adjusts the score bands for LSAT scores lying in the upper and lower regions of the LSAT score scale (i.e., scores close to 120 or 180), which makes them asymmetrical.

Given that the SEM_I for Form 8LSN127 is 2.63 points (which we round to 3 to create score bands), the score band for most LSAT scores will be 7 score points. For example, the score band for an LSAT score of 150 will be 147 to 153.

LSAT score users are sometimes interested in comparing score differences among test takers. When this is done, users must keep in mind that the SEM for score differences (SEM_D) is larger than the SEM associated with individual scores (SEM_I). In fact, it is approximately 1.4 times larger. The interpretation of the SEM_D is similar to the interpretation of the SEM_I: the difference between scores from two test takers is within one SEM_D on either side of the true score difference, approximately 68 percent of the time.

Table 2 shows the SEM associated with score differences for Form 8LSN127. For this form, the SEM_D is 3.72 points, which we round up to 4 points to compare scores. If two test takers have scores of 150 and 154, for example, their true score difference will lie in the range of 0 to 8 points (4-point difference, plus or minus the rounded 4-point SEM_D), approximately 68 percent of the time.

Note: This example illustrates that small score differences between two test takers may be due to measurement error and may not represent real differences in the abilities of test takers. This underscores the LSAC cautionary policy against putting undue weight on small score differences among test takers. The LSAT is just one source of information that should be considered when evaluating an applicant.

Table 2: Reliability and Standard Error of Measurement to Date: 2017–2018 Testing Year

	Reliability Coefficient	Standard Error of Measurement	
		Individual Scores (SEM _I)	Score Differences (SEM _D)
8LSN127 (June 2017)	.94	2.63	3.72