Setting Cut Scores for WritePlacer

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What do we mean by “Setting Cut Scores” or “Standard Setting”?

- Defining the place on the score scale which represents sufficient knowledge and skills for placement into an upper level course.
- In this case we are focusing specifically on setting one or more cut scores on the WritePlacer Scale of 1 to 8.
Example of Three Performance Levels

- Needs Extensive Remediation
  - Developmental Cut Score
  - Test Scale
- Needs Remediation
- Entry-Level Course Placement
  - Entry-Level Cut Score
  - 8
Policy Considerations

- A series of decisions must be made prior to a standard setting.
- To the extent possible, decisions should be made and documented prior to the start of the standard setting to prevent the appearance of bias in the process.
- For example, specifying how data will be gathered and cut scores computed ahead of time will minimize complaints that decisions about data, such as rounding or dropping the most extreme scores, were made in reaction to the outcome rather than in a thoughtful and planned manner.
Facilitator Selection

- The Facilitator has the responsibility for leading and overseeing the standard setting process.
- Should be trained and experienced in standard setting, should be external to the institution, should remain impartial and direct the process without interjecting opinion as to the “correct placement” for the cut score.
Criteria for Selecting Panelists

• Representative distribution of demographic characteristics, e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, geographic location in system (if multi-site campus)

• Recent experience teaching in the subject matter area and at the course level or levels into which the cut scores will be used to place students

• Distribution of experience level from beginning instructor to veteran.
Performance Level Descriptors

• Describe what students at the borderline of each course level should reasonably know and be able to do

• Relate directly to the course requirements/prerequisites

• Distinguish clearly from one level (developmental course) to the next (entry-level course)
How to Select a Method

• No one best method

• Using different methods will most likely result in different cut scores

• Some methods are better suited to certain types of assessments and decisions than others

• Consider precedent for legal defensibility of the method and your risk of legal challenge
Modified Body of Work Method

• Requires access to samples of student work – in this case essays at each score point. This information is available from the College Board and included in the draft document provided for the convenience of institutions who need to set cut scores prior to collecting data on their students.

• It is preferable to use essay samples collected from your own students when possible. At least 5 essays at every score point are needed. It is especially important to have “extra” essays for score points across the middle of the score scale. Essays should be in original written state and not corrected in any way for grammar, spelling, formatting, etc.

• This method is generally well received by faculty as it closely mirrors work they are familiar with – evaluating student work.
Essay Sorting and Discussion

- Three rounds of judgment and discussion should occur during the process.
- If possible, have panelists complete an essay on the prompt being used under typical student administration conditions at the beginning of the session or prior to attending the session.
- Discussion of the prompt, scoring rubric, and essays should occur following panelists taking the test. This discussion should focus on skills needed to be successful in the courses and not on the score point where the cut score should be placed.
- Placement of essays into performance categories should be the individual panelist’s decision and not a group decision. Only the discussions that occur between placement rounds are group activities.
Round 1 – Rangefinding

English 098
- Essay #3
- Essay #8
- Essay #9

English 099
- Essay #1
- Essay #5

English 101
- Essay #4
- Essay #7
- Essay #6
- Essay #2
Panelist Discussion

• It is very important that panelists discuss the scoring rubric and the skills exhibited by the student in each essay.

• If multiple cut scores are being set on the same test, it is a good idea to conduct all discussion on any one cut score location at a time to allow panelists to focus comments.

• The facilitator should provide feedback to the panelists after Round 1 placements but prior to discussion and encourage judges with placements that differ from the larger group to share their rationales.

• Discussion should focus on essay characteristics and how they relate to the performance level descriptors. No Scores should be provided to panelists at this point.

• Be sure when preparing essay sets for each panelist that essays are numbered to allow easy reference but NOT numbered in order of score – randomly order essays before numbering.
# Feedback Example for Multiple Cut Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay ID Number</th>
<th>Remedial Course</th>
<th>Entry Level Course</th>
<th>Advanced Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Round 2 - Rangefinding

- Following the discussion after Round 1 of Rangefinding, panelists should review their essay placements and resort any essays they feel are not placed appropriately.

- Panelists should understand that it is to their discretion whether to change the placement of 1 or more essays or leave in the original sorting piles.

- Following Round 2 Placements another round of discussion will follow but more information will be provided to panelists.

- Panelists will receive information on the range of score points where the cut scores are likely to fall based on the Round 2 essay sorting and asked if they feel this is an acceptable range for moving into Round 3 – Pinpointing.

- Scores will be used to pull essay sets but should not be provided to the panelists.
Further Illustration of Finding the Median

Scores from Remedial and Entry Level columns represented by X’s in Sorted Score Table arranged from lowest to highest score:

1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 8

Number of total scores = 42
Middle of range falls between 21\textsuperscript{st} and 22\textsuperscript{nd} score = \((4+4)/2\)
Median = 4
Round 3 – Pinpointing

- New essay sets are distributed to panelists at the start of Round 3. The essay sets have been selected to only represent score points that fall into the determined range as identified following Round 2 Rangefinding and confirmed by panelists in the Round 2 discussion.

- Panelists may request that the range be extended if they feel it is too narrow.

- Using the identified range new sets of essays with 2 to 5 essays per score point within the range are pulled and used in Round 3. Therefore, it is important to have on hand additional essays beyond the Rangefinding sets that can be used to form the Pinpointing sets.
Round 3 – Pinpointing (cont.)

- During Pinpointing the sorting task is the same as that used for Rangefinding but the range of score points in the set is smaller.

- For multiple cut scores separate Pinpointing sets should be used for each cut score unless the cut scores overlap in such a way that it is difficult to separate into unique sets of papers.

- Round 3 Pinpointing is the last round of sorting and the final cut score recommendation will be made based on that data and following the same procedure used to find the median and define the range for Pinpointing following Round 2.
Evaluation and Documentation

• During the process keep a copy of all materials that are distributed or generated during the standard setting meeting for reference if any challenge should be made about the cut score placement.

• Panelists should complete evaluation forms throughout the process to inform the facilitator of their level of understanding and to provide documentation of any concerns that may have been present during the time of the meeting.

• A decision should be made prior to the meeting whether results of the last round will be shared with panelists.
Calculating the Standard Error of Judgment

- Once the recommended cut score per panelists is computed as shown on the previous slide, compute the standard deviation for the set of Round 3 judgments for the panelists.

- Divide the standard deviation for the set of Round 3 Judgments by the square root of the number of panelists participating in the study to get the Standard Error of Judgment (SEJ)
The Final Decision on Cut Scores

• Legitimate authority should have all the information they want or need to make an informed decision

• At a minimum it should include:
  • Overall results
  • Variance in judgments and in measurement
  • Impact on subpopulations in the system
  • Documentation of the process (with as much detail as is necessary)
Online reference guide that answers the basic question, “What is validity?” and highlights why validity is an important issue for colleges and universities as well as assists with the planning and execution of validity studies.

It is designed to serve as a general reference for validity and includes information about validity beyond what is specifically applicable to ACES.

It includes specific information about the types of validity studies and their design that are available through the ACES system and helps interpret ACES study results.

To request an ACES study: http://www.collegeboard.com/highered/apr/aces/aces.html
Final Reminder

• Facilitators do not set cut scores, they simply guide the process and provide the authoritative body with information on the psychometric issues surrounding cut score placements under consideration.

• Panelists do not set cut scores, they recommend cut score locations

• Cut scores are approved and set by the authoritative body at the institution which makes the decision to accept the panel recommendations as they are or to adjust the recommendations for policy reasons. The authoritative body sets the final cut score location(s).
For Additional Information on Setting Cut Scores


• For more information on Standard Setting see Cizek (2001).

• Detailed document with sample essays to use available on the ACCUPLACER platform under the resources tab. Can also request from your SAM representative.