

Designated versus non-designated subjects

Making informed choices when choosing subjects for Grade 10

{Notes provided courtesy of [Prof. Zak Nel](#)}

{Formatted by Matthew Hains}

In the South African school system, the subjects available to Grade 9 learners who must make their subject choice for Grades 10 to 12 are categorised into two, namely designated and non-designated subjects. This unfortunate categorisation of school subjects has often caused some confusion with learners and parents, especially when making career choices and in positioning learners for university studies.

An unintended outcome of the category system is that non-designated subjects are often regarded as being of lesser "value," particularly regarding university studies. In some extreme cases, there is even the misinformed perception that the inclusion of a non-designated subject will prevent a learner from qualifying for university studies.

One of the non-designated subjects that has often been unfairly affected is Computer Applications Technology (CAT). By labelling CAT as a subject not "suitable" for university studies, or as one that prevents a student from qualifying for a degree, is contrary to the general perception given by universities, which welcome the inclusion of CAT as a matric subject.

As is well-known, a Grade 9 learner must select at least seven subjects for Grade 10.

Four of the subjects are compulsory:

1. Home language
2. First additional language
3. Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy
4. Life orientation

Therefore, when making an informed choice regarding designated and non-designated subjects, it is important to remember that there are two considerations for university studies, namely:

Consideration one: to qualify for admission to a Bachelor's Degree

Consideration two: to gain a sufficient Admission Points Score (APS).

Designated subjects only play a role in **Consideration one** where a learner must achieve a National Senior Certificate (NSC) with an achievement rating of at least a 4 (50—59%) in four subjects from the designated list that all schools will normally make available to learners and parents.

As the home language, first additional language, Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy are all regarded as designated subjects, only one additional designated subject is therefore required to qualify for admission to a Bachelor's Degree. This clearly implies that a learner can include up to two non-designated subjects in their choice of seven subjects and still qualify for a Bachelor's Degree.

However, by just barely qualifying for enrolment for a Bachelor's Degree does not mean that a learner will be admitted to a university as specific minimum APS scores are required for admission to degree studies.

Normally, it is much easier to meet the requirements stated in **Consideration one**, compared to **Consideration two**. Under **Consideration two** the impact of non-designated subjects becomes crucial because the inclusion of one or two non-designated subjects can often secure sufficiently high enough APS scores so that a learner will qualify for admission to a degree of his/her choice.

If a learner meets the minimum requirements set in **Consideration one**, universities will then also allocate APS scores to any non—designated subjects included in his/her choice. Some examples of factual statements in this regard are:



University of Cape Town: "The UCT Admission Point Score (APS) uses the percentage obtained for any approved NSC subject, whether or not on the designated list."



University of the Witwatersrand: "Wits does not distinguish between designated subjects and non designated subjects when calculating the admission point score (APS)"



The **University of Pretoria** has drawn up a useful guide for Grade 9 learners and parents, in which it clearly indicates that subjects from the non-designated list can be included in study areas such as:

- B Engineering: Computer Applications Technology, Civil Technology and Mechanical Technology
- B Com: Computer Applications Technology and Tourism
- MBChB: Computer Applications Technology
- B Sport Science: Computer Applications Technology
- BSc: Computer Applications Technology
- BSc Architecture: Computer Applications Technology
- B Ed: Computer Applications Technology
- BA: Computer Applications Technology, Tourism

Based on the explanation above, it is evident that non-designated subjects, in particular CAT, can be legitimate considerations when choosing subjects for university admission purposes.