

Age grading – what is it and why is it important?

Fact: The way you perform on a run is unlike the way anyone else performs, and that's especially true if you're a different age or gender. So how do you really compare your performance to theirs? With age grading.

If the phrase 'age grading' makes you scratch your head, think of it like a golf handicap. It's basically a method of scoring races that the oldest and the youngest runners "compete" in head to head, even though they may not be racing for the finish line next to one another. Here's everything you need to know about doing the math, and how calculating your age-graded score can actually help you become a better runner.

Every few years, statisticians at World Masters Athletics review global race records to identify the best possible time an athlete can run at every distance from 5K to the marathon. Then, they use a formula to calculate an age factor for every age; this serves as the "best possible time" an athlete of that gender and age should be able to run.

On those statistic tables, you'll find the factors for each age and distance, which, when multiplied by your time, give you an "equivalent" performance for an open runner or a percentage "age grade" that compares your time with the best possible for your age. Thankfully, you don't actually need to *use* those tables; you can just use an online calculator, like the one on our website.

In running, age-graded scoring is based on how fast you run (by correcting it to what your speed would have been at your prime age) and a percentage value of the world record for your gender.

- 100 percent = world record
- 90 percent = world class
- 80 percent = national class
- 70 percent = regional class
- 60 percent = local class

So here's an example of how that works: Let's say an 80-year-old man finished a half marathon in fortieth place and achieved an age-grade score of 91 percent—meaning he ran very close to the top time expected for an 80-year-old man. Meanwhile, a 30-year-old finished in fifth place but achieved an age grade score of 70 percent—meaning his time is further away from the top time of a 30-year-old male elite athlete. Despite the younger athlete having a better time, by age grading standards, the 80-year-old would be considered the better athlete for his age.

You can use age grading to compare your current performance to that of your younger self, putting your new race times in perspective (a 10K certainly isn't going to feel the same at 50 as it did at 20, but that doesn't mean you aren't still fit). You may have run a sub 20 min 5k when you were 35 but now you are 52 that's likely to be out of your reach. However, if you compare the age grading for the 5k you ran at 35 with your current 5k runs you may actually run an age graded pb! What a way to incentivise your running and maintain your motivation.

And age grading can help you set goals—like, say, running a "national class" 5K. You'd enter your age and the percentage (80) into the calculator, and the time that pops up would be your goal time. From there, you can calculate just how much time you'd need to shave off your 5K time to be considered a "national class" runner.

At the start of each year I calculate a set of times for race distances between 5k and marathon at age graded levels 55% upwards in increments of 5% as targets. These targets are my motivation for the year and help me track my progress.

The age grading calculator we use for our Personal Achievement Awards is the same calculator as used for parkruns.

Finally, whichever way you motivate yourself with your running keep doing it! Most of all, enjoy your running and see you at training!