What Is AScM?

Average Segment size in centiMorgans — a triage method for DNA matches

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AScM stands for Average Segment size in centiMorgans. It's a triage method for working through tens of thousands of matches and focusing on the right ones, not necessarily the ones the testing company ranks as your best. It divides total shared DNA by the number of shared segments. On Ancestry, use the unweighted shared DNA. It is not a hard and fast formula.

Rule number one is to expect exceptions. DNA is random, so a known relative can score lower than you'd expect, and a high score is a lead, not proof. Always confirm with your tree and records.

In endogamous populations, such as Ashkenazi Jewish families, a score of 12 or higher, with a longest segment of 20 or more, marks a priority match worth your time. Say AScM quickly and it sounds like "ask 'em," because these are the people you contact to collaborate with. The method has not been validated for multiple relationships or pedigree collapse, and whether the 12 holds for other populations is still being tested.

An AScM of 12 or greater means yes: do your genealogy on that match first. A lower score doesn't mean they aren't related to you, but they shouldn't be a priority until you've checked the match against your siblings and first cousins. If a shared surname or a shared town or region points to a connection, move that match up your priority ladder.

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