
The GRE[®] Uncovered

What is the GRE? Should I go to graduate school?

Find out everything you need to know about the
GRE exams.

Exam Overview and Scoring | GRE Question Types |
What Happens on Test Day | GRE Impact on MBA Applicants |
Preparing for the GRE | Study Tips

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The GRE Uncovered

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1. Introduction to the GRE

The GRE, or Graduate Record Examination, is the most widely accepted graduate admissions test. Worldwide, over 650,000 people take the GRE each year. Like most standardized tests, the exam tests general knowledge and skill base so as to provide a common measure for comparing the qualifications of graduate candidates from different educational and cultural backgrounds. As such, GRE scores, when taken in consideration with a student's education and work histories, personal recommendations, and outside qualifications, are a major factor in determining both admission to graduate programs and the allotment of grants and fellowships.

The exam comes in two types: the General Test, which covers a wide range of non-specific skills developed over a long period of time and years of schooling, and the Subject Tests, which try depth of knowledge in eight specific fields. While we will touch briefly on the Subject Tests, our main focus in this document is the General Test.

The GRE General Test is computer-based and consists of three sections: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing. Both the Verbal and Quantitative sections are scored on a scale of 130–170, in 1-point increments; they also include a percentile rank. The Analytical Writing section is scored on a scale of 0–6 in half-point increments. As the name suggests, the General Test does not cover specifics in any field of study, but rather a set of skills thought to be important for prospective grad students. We'll go into greater detail about the test sections and exam content later on.

The General Test is administered year-round at computer-based test centers around the world. (In areas where computer-based testing is not available, paper-based

GRE testing is offered. A full list of these locations is available on the ETS website: <http://www.ets.org/gre/>.) The exam costs \$195 worldwide, and can only be taken once every 30 days and no more than 5 times within a 12-month period.

The Subject Tests, on the other hand, are paper-based and administered 3 times a year—in October, November, and April. Unlike the General Test, each Subject Test assumes extensive knowledge of a specific area and can often be used as an indicator of a student's strengths and weaknesses. Subjects covered include: Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology; Biology; Chemistry; Computer Science; Literature in English; Mathematics; Physics; and Psychology.

To determine whether you should take the General Test or one of these subject-specific exams, you'll need to check with the programs you're applying to. For any field without a Subject Test, you'll take the General Exam.

2. Exam Format

The GRE General Exam is comprised of three scored sections: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing. The Analytical Writing Section is always first; Verbal and Quantitative Reasoning are broken into two segments each and can appear in any order. There is a 10 minute break that takes place between the third and fourth sections, and a one minute break between the others. Also included on the exam is a sixth, unscored section which can appear in two formats: as an unidentified, experimental section mixed at random with the Verbal and Quant sections, or as an identified research section given at the end of the test. All told, the test time for the GRE is about three hours and forty-five minutes.

| Section | Time Limit | # of Questions |
|---|------------|----------------|
| Analytical Writing Assessment | | |
| Analyze an Issue | 30 minutes | 1 |
| Analyze an Argument | 30 minutes | 1 |
| Verbal Reasoning | | |
| Section I | 30 minutes | 20 (approx) |
| Section II | 30 minutes | 20 (approx) |
| Break After 3rd Section | 10 minutes | n/a |
| Quantitative Reasoning | | |
| Section I | 35 minutes | 20 (approx) |
| Section II | 35 minutes | 20 (approx) |
| Unscored/Research | Varies | Varies |

Analytical Writing Assessment

First on the GRE is the Analytical Writing Section, which consists of two essays that are scored separately from the rest of the exam. The two prompts—Analyze an Issue and Analyze an Argument—have a time limit of 30 minutes apiece. Each of

the essays is graded by two readers, who assign a score from 0 to 6. These 4 results are averaged and rounded to the nearest half point to get your score for this section.

The purpose of the Analytical Writing Section is to measure your ability to draft focused responses to the tasks presented, and the quality of your work is evaluated based on several factors. Be sure, in crafting your essays, to provide a strong sense of organization, a clear point of view, well-defined support, and an established, articulate writing style. Spelling and grammar aren't explicitly considered, but numerous errors can make for a confusing essay and bias the reader against you, so be sure to check over your work as you go.

Because the GRE General Test is a computer-based exam, it is important to keep in mind that, in most cases, you will not be drafting your essays by hand. (Paper-based testing centers are, of course, the exception.) ETS has developed its own basic word processor software for use on the Analytical Writing Section; this word processor does not contain functions for spelling or grammar checks, but it does allow users to insert and delete text, cut and paste, and undo their previous action.

Analyze an Issue Task

The Analyze an Issue task provides a prompt in the form of a quote or other statement on an issue of general interest and then asks you to analyze it and either agree or disagree. The prompt will also include specific instructions on what to consider in writing your response, and it's important that you position your argument within the guidelines of the given instructions. (For examples of what these instructions might look like, check out the ETS website: <http://www.ets.org/gre/>.)

You should remember in tackling this essay task that there is no definitive right

answer. Just be sure to choose a position, make your argument clearly, and support it with relevant examples. While it might be tempting to argue both sides of the issue, it's usually best to take a firm stand one way or the other while still acknowledging the issue's complexity.

Analyze an Argument Task

The Analyze an Argument task requires an entirely different type of essay. The prompt consists of a brief passage in which the author presents an argument backed by evidence and reason. Like the Analyze an Issue task, this prompt also contains a set of instructions on what to consider in evaluating the author's statement. Your job, then, is to analyze and critique the argument's logic; rather than take a stand, you'll need to be an objective observer.

In a typical prompt, the argument is poorly reasoned, lacks convincing evidence, and relies on questionable assumptions and logic. You'll need to break it down, analyze its structure and evidence, and criticize the reasoning used. The Analyze an Argument essay is very much a critical thinking task, and so your analytical skills, as well as the clarity with which you convey your ideas, will play an important role in determining your scores for this essay.

Computer-Based Format & Scoring

As we mentioned in the Introduction, the GRE is a computer-based exam. This means that, except for in a few regions of the world where the technology isn't available, the GRE is administered on a computer. Even so, the computer-based format is not unlike paper exams in that you are allowed to move through each section freely, flipping back and forth between questions. (You cannot move between sections freely; once you complete a section and move on to the next, you cannot return to it.) You also have the ability to mark and review problems that you are

unsure of and would like to return to.

One advantage of the GRE being computer-based is that it allows for the exam to be section-level adaptive. This means that the difficulty level of the Quantitative and Verbal Reasoning sections adapt to a student's performance on the exam. However, unlike the GMAT, which varies each question according to a student's demonstrated skill, the GRE only adapts entire sections as a whole.

Essentially, your performance on the first Verbal section will determine the difficulty level of your second Verbal section, and your performance on your first Quantitative section will determine the difficulty level of your second Quantitative section. Do well on the first section, and you will receive a more difficult second section; do poorly, and the difficulty level will decrease.

Because the exam adapts to your individual performance, scoring is not based on a simple survey of right or wrong answers. Instead, the scoring takes into consideration the difficulty level of the questions you receive in combination with your overall performance on those questions. The computer calculates a raw score for each of the 4 Verbal and Quantitative sections based on the number of questions answered correctly. This raw score then undergoes a process called equating, by which the computer takes into account both the difficulty level of the test edition and the difficulty level of your individual exam. The result is a scaled score that accurately reflects your performance, taking into consideration all variations in difficulty level that might have been introduced by the section-adaptive format.

Verbal Reasoning

The Verbal Reasoning section is designed to measure your ability to process and comprehend the written word, make analyses and draw conclusions based on a

given text, and understand the significance of certain words, points, and structures. It is divided into two separate segments that can appear, with Quantitative Reasoning, in any order following the Analytical Writing Assessment. Each Verbal segment is comprised of approximately 20 questions to be answered over a span of 30 minutes, providing you with, on average, a minute and a half per question.

In the Verbal Reasoning section, there are three basic question types: Text Completion, Sentence Equivalence, and Reading Comprehension. These three question types can appear in any order, though the questions associated with a given Reading Comprehension passage will always be grouped together.

Text Completion Questions

Text Completion questions are an updated version of Sentence Completion questions. They can consist of 1–5 sentences with 1–3 missing words, or “blanks.” For every blank, test-takers are given three answer choices; if there is only one blank, five answer choices are provided. At each blank, students must select the answer choice that best completes the text provided, and the answer for every blank needs to be selected independently. There is no partial credit provided on these questions, which means that every blank needs to be solved correctly. To answer these problems, you’ll have to draw on your understanding of the words’ meanings, plus your ability to read context clues in the sentence.

Let’s try an example.

For Kant, the fact of having a right and having the (i) _____ to enforce it via coercion cannot be separated, and he asserts that this marriage of rights and coercion is compatible with the freedom of everyone. This is not at all peculiar from the standpoint of modern political thought—what good is a right if its violation triggers no

enforcement (be it punishment or (ii) _____)? The necessity of coercion is not at all in conflict with the freedom of everyone, because this coercion only comes into play when someone has (iii) _____ someone else.

| <u>Blank (i)</u> | <u>Blank (ii)</u> | <u>Blank (iii)</u> |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| technique | amortization | questioned the hypothesis of |
| license | reward | violated the rights of |
| prohibition | restitution | granted civil liberties to |

On the GRE, you will select your answer choices by actually clicking and highlighting the words you want.

Solution:

In the first sentence, use the clue “he asserts that this marriage of rights and coercion is compatible with the freedom of everyone” to help fill in the first blank. Kant believes that “coercion” is “married to” rights and is compatible with freedom for all. So we want something in the first blank like “right” or “power.” Kant believes that rights are meaningless without enforcement. Only the choice “license” can work (while a “license” can be physical, like a driver’s license, “license” can also mean “right”).

The second blank is part of the phrase “punishment or _____,” which we are told is the “enforcement” resulting from the violation of a right. So the blank should be something, other than punishment, that constitutes enforcement against someone who violates a right. (More simply, it should be something bad!) Only “restitution” works. Restitution is compensating the victim in some way (perhaps monetarily or by returning stolen goods).

In the final sentence, “coercion only comes into play when someone has _____ someone else.” Throughout the text, “coercion” means enforcement against someone who has violated the rights of someone else. The meaning is the same here. The answer is “violated the rights of.”

The complete and correct answer is this combination:

| <u>Blank (i)</u> | <u>Blank (ii)</u> | <u>Blank (iii)</u> |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| license | restitution | violated the rights of |

In theory, there are $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$ possible ways to answer a 3-blank Text Completion—and only one of those 27 ways is correct. The guessing odds will go down, but don’t be intimidated. Just follow the basic process: come up with your own filler for each blank, and match to the answer choices.

Sentence Equivalence Questions

For Sentence Equivalence questions, test-takers are given one sentence with a single blank and six answer choices, of which they are asked to select *two* words that could each fill the blank and that are alike in meaning. Like Text Completion questions, no partial credit is awarded for this question type, which means that both correct answers must be selected. In picking two of six choices, there are 15 possible combinations and only one is correct.

Of all the question types presented in the Verbal Reasoning section, Sentence Equivalence depends the most on vocabulary and also yields the most to strategy. Think of it this way—if you have six choices, but the two correct ones must be “similar in meaning,” then you have, at most, three possible PAIRS of choices. Maybe fewer, since not all choices are guaranteed to have a “partner.” If you can match up the “pairs,” you can seriously narrow down your options.

Here is a sample set of answer choices:

[A] tractable

[B] taciturn

[C] arbitrary

[D] tantamount

[E] reticent

[F] amenable

We haven't even provided the question here, because we want to point out how much you can do with the choices alone if you have studied vocabulary sufficiently.

TRACTABLE and AMENABLE are synonyms (tractable/amenable people will do whatever you want them to do). TACITURN and RETICENT are synonyms (both mean “not talkative”). ARBITRARY (based on one's own will) and TANTAMOUT (equivalent) are not similar in meaning and therefore cannot be a pair. Therefore, the ONLY possible answers are {A, F} and {B, E}. You have improved your chances from 1 in 15 to a 50/50 shot without even reading the question!

Of course, in approaching a Sentence Equivalence, you do want to analyze the sentence the same way you would with a Text Completion—read for a textual clue that tells you what type of word MUST go in the blank. Then look for a matching pair.

The sentence for the answer choice above could read:

Though the dinner guests were quite _____ , the hostess did her best to keep the conversation active and engaging.

Thus, B and E are the best choices. Let's try a complete example:

While athletes usually expect to achieve their greatest feats in their teens or twenties, opera singers don't reach the _____ of their vocal powers until middle age.

[A] harmony

[B] zenith

[C] acme

[D] terminus

[E] nadir

[F] cessation

Solution:

Those with strong vocabularies might go straight to the choices to make pairs. ZENITH and ACME are synonyms, meaning “high point, peak.” TERMINUS and CESSATION are synonyms, meaning “end.” NADIR is a low point and HARMONY is present here as a trap answer reminding you of opera singers. Cross off A and E, since they do not have partners. Then, go back to the sentence, knowing that your only options are a pair meaning “peak” and a pair meaning “end.”

The answer is {B, C}.

Reading Comprehension Questions

When it comes to Reading Comprehension, a short passage (400–600 words) appears on the left half of the screen and a question about it on the right. As you answer, the passage remains and you're prompted with another question. Reading Comprehension passages are pulled from a variety of different materials, both academic and every day, and, as such, can vary enormously in topic, from the physical sciences to the social sciences to arts and humanities. When it comes to the questions, there are three types: “Select One Answer Choice,” “Select One or More

Answer Choices,” and “Select-in-Passage.”

Both “Select One Answer Choice” and “Select One or More Answer Choices” are multiple choice questions. “Select One Answer Choice” is the traditional question with five answer choices, of which you need to choose one. For the question type, “Select One or More Answer Choices,” you are given three statements about a passage and asked to “select all that apply.” One, two, or all three can be correct; there is no “none of the above” option. There is also no partial credit, so you must select all the correct choices and none of the incorrect choices.

For the question type “Select-in-Passage,” you are given an assignment such as “Select the sentence in the passage that explains why the experiment’s results were discovered to be invalid.” Clicking anywhere on a sentence in the passage will highlight it. (As with any GRE question, you will have to click “Confirm” to submit your answer, so don’t worry about accidentally selecting the wrong sentence due to a slip of the mouse.)

Let’s take a look at the two, less traditional question types using the passage below.

Physicist Robert Oppenheimer, director of the fateful Manhattan Project, said, “It is a profound and necessary truth that the deep things in science are not found because they are useful; they are found because it was possible to find them.” In a later address at MIT, Oppenheimer presented the thesis that scientists could be held only very nominally responsible for the consequences of their research and discovery. Oppenheimer asserted that ethics, philosophy, and politics have very little to do with the day-to-day work of the scientist, and that scientists could not rationally be expected to predict all the effects of their work. Yet, in a talk in 1945 to the Association of Los Alamos

Scientists, Oppenheimer offered some reasons why the Manhattan project scientists built the atomic bomb; the justifications included “fear that Nazi Germany would build it first” and “hope that it would shorten the war.”

For question #1, consider each of the three choices separately and select all that apply.

1. The passage implies that Robert Oppenheimer would most likely have agreed with which of the following views:

- ☐ A Some scientists take military goals into account in their work
- ☐ B Deep things in science are not useful
- ☐ C The everyday work of a scientist is only minimally involved with ethics

2. Select the sentence in which the writer implies that Oppenheimer has not been consistent in his view that scientists have little consideration for the effects of their work.

(Here, you would highlight the appropriate sentence with your mouse. Note that there are only four options.)

Solutions:

1. {A, C} Oppenheimer says in the last sentence that one of the reasons the bomb was built was scientists’ “hope that it would shorten the war.” Thus, Oppenheimer would likely agree with the view that “Some scientists take military goals into account in their work.” B is a trap answer using familiar language from the passage. Oppenheimer says that scientific discoveries’ possible usefulness is not why scientists make discoveries; he does not say that the discoveries aren’t useful. Oppenheimer specifically says that ethics has “very little to do with the day-to-day work of the scientist,” which is a good match for “only minimally involved with ethics.” A and C, then, are the correct answers.

2. The correct sentence is: Yet, in a talk in 1945 to the Association of Los Alamos Scientists, Oppenheimer offered some reasons why the Manhattan project scientists built the atomic bomb; the justifications included “fear that Nazi Germany would build it first” and “hope that it would shorten the war.” The word “yet” is a good clue that this sentence is about to express a view contrary to the views expressed in the rest of the passage.

Quantitative Reasoning

The GRE’s Quantitative Reasoning section aims to assess your math mechanics, your comprehension of basic math concepts, and your ability to reason quantitatively. As with the Verbal Reasoning section, questions are divided into two separate segments that can appear in any order following the Analytical Writing Assessment. Each segment consists of approximately 20 questions and lasts 35 minutes, giving you a little under two minutes per question.

As you progress through these sections, you are allowed the use of a small four-function calculator. For those taking the computer-based exam, the calculator is provided on-screen; at paper-based testing centers, a handheld calculator is provided on site. It’s important to remember that, while having access to a calculator reduces the time and emphasis placed on computation, you will *never* need it to solve a problem.

The Quantitative Reasoning section tests four broad areas: arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis. Questions are typically at the high school level, though some test-takers may see slightly more difficult problems in probability or statistics. Higher-level mathematics, such as calculus and trigonometry, are not tested.

When it comes to the questions themselves, there are three distinct problem types:

Quantitative Comparisons, Multiple Choice, and Numeric Entry. Questions can appear in any order and are either presented independently of one another or as part of a set of questions. Questions presented in a group are referred to as a Data Interpretation set and they typically all relate back to a shared set of data (presented in tables, graphs, or other displays).

Quantitative Comparisons

Quantitative Comparisons present you with two statements—Quantity A and Quantity B—and ask you to compare them. In some cases, the question will provide you with background information, but, at other times, the only information provided is the statements themselves. These statements might be anything from a simple number to a complicated word problem; your only job is to determine which statement is larger. The answer choices for this type of question are always the same, so you would do well to become familiar with them.

Here's a quick example of a Quantitative Comparison question:

Quantity A

x

Quantity B

x^2

- (A) Quantity A is greater.
- (B) Quantity B is greater.
- (C) The two quantities are equal.
- (D) The relationship cannot be determined from the information given.

Solution:

If $x = 0$, the quantities are equal. If $x = 2$, quantity B is greater. Thus, you don't have enough information. The answer is D.

Multiple Choice

On the GRE, there are two different types of multiple choice questions. The first of these, called “Select One Answer Choice,” is a traditional multiple choice question. It presents as a question with five answer choices, of which you are asked to choose one.

The second kind of multiple choice question on the GRE is called “Select One or More Answer Choices,” and, as the name implies, it asks that you select one or more correct answers. At times, the question may not specify how many choices you should select, but, like most of the other questions on the GRE, there is no partial credit. We’ve included the official directions for this question type (from *The Official Guide to the GRE Revised General Test*) below so that you can get a sense for what this question type entails.

Directions: Select one or more answer choices according to the specific question directions.

If the question does not specify how many answer choices to select, select all that apply.

The correct answer may be just one of the choices or as many as all of the choices, depending on the question.

No credit is given unless you select all of the correct choices and no others.

If the question specifies how many answer choices to select, select exactly that number of choices.

Now try your hand on a sample problem:

If $ab = |a| \times |b|$ and $ab \neq 0$ which of the following *must* be true?

Indicate all such statements.

☐ A $a = b$

☐ B $a > 0$ and $b > 0$

☐ C $ab > 0$

Solution:

If $ab = |a| \times |b|$, then you know ab is positive, since the right side of the equation must be positive. If ab is positive, however, that doesn't necessarily mean that a and b are each positive; it simply means that they have the same sign. Take a look at the answer choices.

For A, it is not true that a must equal b . For instance, a could be 2 and b could be 3. Therefore, you know A is incorrect. Looking at answer B, it is not true that a and b must each be positive—both variables could be negative, and the equation would still be correct. That leaves you with C. Since $|a| \times |b|$ must be positive, ab must be positive as well.

Numeric Entry

Numeric Entry questions, to a degree, are very similar to multiple choice questions. They present you with a problem that, to solve, might involve computing a number, manipulating an equation, analyzing a geometric figure, or some other math skill. However, rather than provide you with answer choices to choose from, questions of this type ask you to key a numeric answer into a box on the screen (in the case of a fraction, two boxes). This means that you are unable to “work backwards” from the answer choices, and that guessing will be much more difficult.

Here's a sample question:

If $x \star y = 2xy - (x - y)$, what is the value of $3 \star 4$?

Solution:

You are given a function involving two variables, x and y , and asked to substitute 3 for x and 4 for y :

$$x \star y = 2xy - (x - y)$$

$$3 \star 4 = 2(3)(4) - (3 - 4)$$

$$3 \star 4 = 24 - (-1)$$

$$3 \star 4 = 25$$

The answer is 25. Thus, you would type 25 into the box.

A Note on Data Interpretation Sets

As we mentioned before, it is possible, in the Quantitative Reasoning section, for questions to be grouped together into a set. In these Data Interpretation sets, you will be given a graph, table, or other data presentation and then asked several questions about the information contained therein. Typically, you'll just need to look closely at the figure to come up with your answer, though some problems do require simple computation. These sets can contain both multiple choice and Numeric Entry questions.

3. Test Day Info

Registering to Take the Test

The GRE General Test is available around the world—at 700 testing centers in over 160 countries. Most of these locations offer the exam year-round and signing up to take the exam is relatively straightforward—you can register online, over the phone, or through the mail.

If you need to request accommodations because of disabilities or health-related needs, fee reductions, or standby testing, keep in mind that you cannot make these requests online and thus should register by phone or mail. Similarly, if your religious beliefs don't allow you to take the test on a Saturday, you need to register by mail to request a Monday test time. In each of these cases, ETS has specific rules that must be adhered to, so be sure to visit their website <http://www.ets.org/gre/> before registering.

As we mentioned in the introduction, registration for the General Test costs \$195, while registration for the Subject Tests runs at \$150. There are additional fees that can be incurred if your application requires special handling, such as changing your testing center or rescheduling your sitting. ETS accepts payment by credit, debit, check, or money order; they also provide vouchers that will allow you to pay by mail even if signing up by other means.

When you register, make sure to use the full legal name on your primary form of ID. The name on your admission ticket must match your ID *exactly* when you show up at the testing center, otherwise you may not be allowed to take the exam. If you are registering online and already have a My GRE Account, be sure to verify your name against your identification card before registering for the exam.

If you want to ensure that you get your desired test date and location, we recommend that you sign up early. We also advise that you avoid taking the exam right before your applications are due. Remember, you can only take the GRE General Exam once every 30 days and 5 times in a single year, so you should consider leaving yourself a buffer in case you are unsatisfied with your score and want to retake the exam.

At the Testing Center

When test day arrives, you should plan on getting to the testing center at least 30 minutes early with the understanding that you will be there for at least 5 hours. You will need to provide identification to be allowed in, so be sure to bring a current ID that has your name, signature, and photograph. Passports, state-issued drivers' licenses, and national and military IDs are all accepted. As we said before, the name on your ID has to exactly match the name you registered under, and test administrators are extremely strict on this point. If you don't produce the required identification, you won't be allowed into the exam and your registration fees will not be refunded.

Other than your ID, personal items like cell phones, purses, and cameras aren't allowed in the testing room, and you won't have access to them during the test. Follow the individual center's rules for storing these items, but keep in mind that storage space may be limited and that ETS is not responsible for any personal items brought into the testing center. Also worth noting: any clothing items such as hats, scarves, and jackets that are taken into the test room may be inspected by the test administrator, and failure to comply with inspection instructions may have detrimental results.

Inside the test room, your seat will be assigned by the exam administrator. The

proctors will provide you with scratch paper, and you aren't allowed to bring in your own or leave with any from the testing center. If you run out of scratch paper at any point, you can request more. Because of extra security surrounding the section adaptive format, you'll have to hand-write (in cursive script!) and sign a confidentiality agreement, as well.

As noted before, there is one optional 10-minute break after the third section of the test and there are one-minute breaks between each of the other sections. If, for some reason, you need to leave your seat at any other point in the test, you can alert the administrator by raising your hand, but be aware that the timing of the exam section will *not* stop.

Reporting Your Score

Upon completing the GRE General test, your unofficial scores for the Verbal and Quantitative Reasoning sections will be viewable on the computer. Because of how the Analytical Writing Assessment is scored, you will not be able to immediately see how you performed on this section. However, ETS sends out official score reports 10–15 days after the test date, and those reports contain your official scores for all three sections of the exam. You can also view your scores online or have them reported to you over the phone. (For more information on these options, go to <http://www.ets.org/gre/>.)

Aside from providing individuals with their scores, ETS allows test-takers to send up to four free score reports to graduate programs or fellowship sponsors. Later score reports incur a fee of \$23, so we recommend taking advantage of the free reports. For computer-based testing centers, this means designating your score report recipients at the test center; if you are taking your exam at a paper-based testing center, you'll select your recipients upon registration.

GRE scores are valid for 5 years, but using the ScoreSelectSM option, GRE test takers are able to choose which valid test scores they send to their graduate institutions, meaning students can choose to send only their best GRE scores. While, students are only allowed to send reports as a whole (meaning they cannot mix and match individual sections from separate tests), they can send more than one report should that best reflect their ability level.

The Test's Significance

The GRE's weight in admissions decisions varies across universities and among graduate programs within a single school. It's important to contact the admissions office for each school you're considering and investigate what they value most in a potential student. Generally speaking, a smaller program, such as a comparative literature program admitting 4 students out of 20 applicants each year, might value recommendations and previous academic work more highly. A clinical psychology program taking 100 out of 500 applicants would likely use the GRE more aggressively, as a way to compare potential students from a variety of backgrounds. Professional programs often place more weight on the GRE, while those leading to an academic career look more at research interests and background.

That said, even if you're applying to a program that looks first at other aspects of the application, it's still important to take the exam seriously. Many universities have a central graduate studies office that must approve applicants to the different departments, and a low GRE score could be a problem. Test scores are also a determining factor in who receives grants, fellowships, and teaching assistantships; don't jeopardize a potential source of funding by underestimating the exam's importance.

As for what score you should strive for, that depends on the specific programs

you're applying to. Be sure to research your top choice schools to determine what they recommend. Some schools have minimum score cut-offs, while others only require the exam as a formality. Humanities programs often skew toward higher verbal results, while a math-heavy discipline like accounting typically requires higher quantitative results. When you take the exam, you should aim for whichever score will get you into the university and program that you aspire to.

4. GRE Impact on MBA Applicants

In recent years, some MBA programs—including Harvard, MIT, and Yale—have begun accepting GRE scores in lieu of the GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test). If you're applying to one of these schools, you'll need to decide which test to prepare for and submit with your application. (For a complete list of business schools that accept the GRE, go to https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/mba/programs/.)

Both exams are standardized tests measuring verbal, math, and writing abilities, but there are also significant differences between the two. Many find that the Quantitative section on the GRE is, in general, less difficult than the GMAT. While this may be true, the difference in difficulty can often be attributed to the challenging way in which questions are worded on the GMAT.

With regard to the Verbal sections, many people consider the GRE to be harder than the GMAT. Although both tests focus on Reading Comprehension and Critical Reasoning, the GRE's passages tend to be more difficult than those on the GMAT. Furthermore, the GRE demands a broad vocabulary while the GMAT focuses on grammar skills, which are usually easier (and less time consuming) to master.

The best way to decide between the two exams is to take a practice test for each and compare your percentile scores. You can download a free practice GMAT at www.mba.com and a GRE at www.ets.org.

5. Preparing to Take the GRE

Set your target score.

The first step in preparing to take the GRE is to set a target score for yourself. The best way to go about this is by making a list of the graduate programs that interest you and researching the average GRE scores (quantitative, verbal, and writing) of students accepted to each program. You can usually access this information by visiting the schools' websites, but in certain cases you may need to call the admissions office. Once you have sense for what the schools are looking for, you can determine a target score for yourself.

Set your test date.

Having a set test date gives you something to work towards, so we recommend choosing a test day early on in your preparation. You should select your test date based on the application deadlines for the programs that interest you, making sure to leave yourself with adequate time to prepare.

We recommend that you also plan as though you are going to take the exam twice, as many students perform better the second time around. Remember, though, you can only take the GRE once within any given 30 day period! That means that you should arrange to take your first test no fewer than 40 days before your application deadlines, and your second exam no fewer than 2 weeks before.

Learn the basics.

One of the keys to success on any standardized exam is understanding the exam format. How long is the test? How many sections does it have? What types of questions are tested? We've covered a lot of that information here, and you should spend some time familiarizing yourself with it. Knowing exactly how the exam works will better enable you to prepare for it.

Take a practice exam.

You have established your target score and set your test date, which means it's time to hit the books! Or is it?

Before you begin studying for the exam, we recommend that you take a complete practice test. Not only will it give you a better sense of what you are up against, it will also allow you to assess how far you have to go.

We offer a free GRE practice exam on our website; that is a good place to start. The exam is section-adaptive to mirror the real GRE, and it comes with a set of comprehensive assessment reports. Once you have completed your practice test, you can use these reports to pinpoint your strengths and weaknesses. The reports break down your entire exam, allowing you to review every problem, see the difficulty level of each question, analyze what question types gave you the most trouble, and determine which problems you spent the most time on. With this information in hand, you can then personalize your study plan.

Did you rock the Reading Comprehension but fall short on Text Completion? Were you spending too much time on Geometry? Were you getting only high-difficulty problems wrong? The answers to these types of questions can significantly decrease your study time and allow you to hone on those areas where you really need help.

Plan your prep.

Once you've taken a practice exam and set a final goal for yourself, you'll need to determine how to use your time most effectively. Start by choosing certain assignments for yourself. Get a calendar and block off the time periods during which you will study during the upcoming week, and, next to each scheduled appointment,

list tasks that you intend to accomplish during that time. Prioritize your weaknesses as determined by your practice test and place them earlier in the week.

We've found that studying a little each day is more effective than studying for an extended period of time, so think about plugging in shorter blocks of time. This works especially well if you don't have a lot of room in your schedule. Try and plug in 20-minute periods during the day—one session in the morning (on the subway on the way to work), one during your lunch break, and one during the evening. You can spend extra time on the weekends for more extended study sessions.

Even then, keep in mind that studying for long hours at a stretch can sometimes have diminishing margins of return. If you are planning to study for more than an hour at a time, be sure to mix it up. Either work on a different content area during each hour (e.g. first hour Algebra, second hour Sentence Equivalence) or do different types of assignments during each hour (e.g. first hour reading and taking notes, second hour working through and reviewing practice problems). Be sure to take a 15-minute break halfway through!

At the end of each study session, write down what you accomplished that day, what you think went well, and what areas still need more work. If something didn't go as well as you'd hoped, feel free to adjust your calendar in order to dedicate more time to that particular area. At the end of the week, review your notes and plan for the next week!

6. Study Tips

Start Early

If you majored in philosophy and haven't seen a polynomial since high school, be realistic regarding how much time it will take you to refresh your knowledge of algebra and geometry. If it took you two years to learn algebra the first time around and you feel like you've forgotten it all, you should expect to need several months (at least) to get back in the game.

Similarly, if you majored in engineering and haven't been regularly reading and digesting college-level material in areas such as social science, literature, and historical analysis, it's going to take a while to become comfortable with and confident about those passages. You may also need some time build up your vocabulary to the level tested on the GRE.

Even if you feel confident in these areas, you will still need to dedicate time to learning GRE-specific content, such as the Quantitative Comparison format, and to practice under timed conditions and on actual computer-based tests. Don't underestimate the significance of these areas in your studying—familiarity with the exam and confidence under pressure can go a long way toward securing your target score.

Learn Vocabulary in Context

One of the most common mistakes students make in learning vocabulary is in blindly memorizing the dictionary definitions of words. Sure, you can recite the definition exactly, but do you actually understand what that word *means*? Would you be able to use it comfortably in a sentence? When studying for the GRE, you want to learn words like “traduce” and “bonhomie” the same way you know words like “study” and “mistake”—so that you can barely even remember a time when you

didn't know those words.

While vocabulary lists, flash cards, and the like are important study tools, some of the best vocabulary accrual occurs when you are reading difficult material and you go look up a word you just read in context but didn't understand.

If you've ever learned a foreign language, think about the words that were easiest to learn. When you're in class, most of the words you learn (stove, tire, classroom, grandmother) seem equally important. But when you are actually in a foreign country, trying to speak that language, words and phrases like "bathroom" and "How much?" and "No pigs' feet, please" begin to take on much greater significance. You find that the easiest things to learn are things that you really wanted to know at the time that you looked them up; it's easier to retain a new word when there's a "hole" in your knowledge that you cannot wait to fill.

The same process applies when you are reading something interesting and come across a word you don't know. When you look up the word and consider its usage in the sentence you were just puzzling over, it's almost as significant as learning the word "bathroom" when you really needed to use one.

Similarly, don't hesitate to look up or ask someone about words you thought you knew, but seem to be used in novel ways. If you read a definition of a word—on a flash card, in a test prep book, or anywhere else—and it doesn't make sense to you, look the word up in several online dictionaries, ask someone, or simply Google the word to see how other people are using it.

Once you've studied the definition, read the word in context, and worked the word into conversation three times (this can cause your friends to look at you funny, but it'll be worth it!), that word is probably yours for life!

Don't Leave "Holes in the Foundation"

It's very satisfying when you figure out the greatest possible value of n such that 40 to the 60^{th} power is divisible by 2 to the n^{th} power (its 180). However, the GRE is an adaptive test. That means that you will never even see a difficult question like the one above unless you have correctly answered easier questions. Students who focus only on the "brainteasers" while neglecting the basics do poorly on the exam.

Before focusing on the most difficult level of material, make sure you are completely solid on long division and remainders, the difference between adding and multiplying fractions, the occasions when you can cancel in an equation with many fractions, the rules of converting decimals to percents and fractions to decimals, the formula for area and circumference, and many other high school math topics you may have forgotten.

If you feel like you understand all the material in your GRE prep books or class, yet you are still performing poorly on practice tests, take a step back and reevaluate yourself. Consider that understanding is not the same as executing. Of course understanding the material is important, but *doing* the material—regularly, the way you would physically practice for a sport—is the other half of that. Make sure that when you review your notes, you actually pull out a timer and *do* the problems in your notes, even if you already know what the answer will be.

If you find yourself missing problems due to silly mistakes, don't just say, "Oh, I get it—that was just a silly mistake." The GRE doesn't give you points for understanding a concept but missing the question anyway. Figure out why you are making silly mistakes. Correct your misconceptions (Did you cancel the top of a fraction on one side of an equation with the bottom of a fraction on the other side? Did you, when multiplying exponential expressions with the same base, accidentally

multiply rather than add the exponents?). Keep an error log. Root out every mistake and make sure that these “holes in the foundation” get filled.

Take Your Online Practice Tests Seriously

When you work through the Manhattan Prep Strategy Guides or the *Official Guide to the GRE Revised General Test*, do you work at your own pace, write in the book and on the geometry diagrams (rather than redrawing them), and do problems one or a handful at a time before taking a break or stopping to reflect?

If so, your practice is nothing like the real experience of taking the real GRE. On the real test, most people are incredibly pressed for time. You typically do not have time to check your work, or to run back over or reflect on your work. You have to redraw any geometry diagrams, and otherwise copy down relevant information to your paper. You only get one break, after writing two essays and completing your first two GRE math or verbal sections without stopping.

No water! Obviously, no coffee, no sandwiches. You can't absentmindedly apply lip balm, pet the cat, grab a ponytail holder and put your hair up, go grab a sweater, or check your text messages. You have to sit in the chair, dehydrating by the minute, and go through about two hours of testing at a time, without stopping.

Before taking the real GRE, you should have achieved your goal score on three consecutive practice tests. Needless to say, you should take those practice tests under the conditions described above. Ideally, you could even take your practice tests at the same time of day as your actual exam appointment.

Where can you access online practice tests?

ETS offers two free computer-based exams via the PowerPrep II software on their

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7. How We Can Help

Manhattan Prep has a number of preparation resources available to you. The options listed below are arranged from least intensive and least expensive (often free) to most intensive and most expensive. Of course, feel free to take advantage of only the resources that you find useful, and leave the rest.

OPTION 1: “My practice score was just about where I need it to be. I don’t need any serious prep.”

- Take advantage of our free GRE blog with study tips, vocabulary practice, and exam strategies.
- Try our free [math challenge problem of the week](#).
- Sign up for a free in-person or online workshop.
- Purchase 5 more full-length practice exams for \$30.

OPTION 2: “My practice score was decent, but I could use some brushing up on the fundamentals.”

- Take advantage of the free resources listed above.
- Purchase our [Complete Prep Set](#) for \$144. This set includes our 8 GRE Strategy Guides, *The Official Guide to the Revised GRE*, and access to 5 practice exams (in addition to the one you took for free earlier).

OPTION 3: “My practice score wasn’t great. I need a comprehensive prep program, but I’m on a tight budget.”

Our [Self-Study program](#) (\$450) offers all of the resources, books, and practice exams listed above, in addition to full recordings of our 9-session course (27 hours of instruction), our 4-part Foundations of Math recordings (6+ hours of instruction), and a 2-hour Quest for 170 Quant recording.

OPTION 4: “I need a lot of help, and I need a live class to keep me committed and motivated.”

- We offer in-person (in select cities) and live online courses. All resources listed above are included. Check the course listings on our website for dates and course specifics.

OPTION 5: “I need lots of help, and I need a program that is tailored to my individual needs.”

- We offer [private tutoring packages](#). Your tutor will help you diagnose your weaknesses and develop a study plan to address your specific needs. All resources listed above, including class recordings, are included.

For more information on any of these study options, or just to talk about your specific situation, call us at 646-254-6479 or email us at GRE@manhattanprep.com. We’re always happy to talk!