

The Keys to GMAT Success

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Mastering Your Approach

The GMAT can be overwhelming. Whether you are a mentee who has experience with the test, or just kicking off your GMAT studies, the sheer volume of things to know is enough to intimidate anyone.

Naturally, questions such as which resources to use and specific strategies for sections will arise. And getting answers to those questions is important – but it shouldn't be the priority, and here's why:

Too often, students of the GMAT will dive straight into studying without first laying down any foundations for success. Overwhelmed by the task in front of them, the first inclination is to start reading textbooks and answering as many questions as possible.

But in doing this, students put the cart before the horse. They start working towards their goals without understanding what those goals are, or how they are going to get there. Often times, students who follow this pattern will encounter one of two things: (1) they will lose motivation on account of directionless effort, and/or (2) they will see a plateau in their learning, and consequently, GMAT score.

But how can students avoid falling into this pattern?

By mastering their approach, of course!

What does that look like in practice? **The following is a list of steps that we encourage mentees to take before initiating their dedicated studying.**

1. **Define your goals:** To what end are you writing the GMAT? And what result on the GMAT will you need to achieve that end? Conduct research into your target schools, and identify a range of GMAT scores that will position you as a competitive candidate for those schools.
2. **Identify your strengths, weaknesses:** Taking time to consider your strengths and weaknesses will be crucial to creating a roadmap to success. Review test basics – what are your strongest/weakest categories? Also, understand your strengths and weaknesses outside of the test. Do you struggle with time management? Sticking to a schedule? Moving past a negative result? Understanding yourself will allow you to plan your study strategy to mitigate weaknesses and amplify strengths.

3. *Create a study roadmap:* Develop a high-level plan for you to periodically review. How many hours do you estimate it will take to hit your target score? Think about how you want to allocate those hours according to your strengths and weaknesses. Consider flaws in the roadmap. Does your roadmap seem realistic? Will it fit with your timeline for applications to schools? These are all questions you can ask your mentor!
4. *Define your schedule:* Implementing your roadmap into a practical schedule may be the most important step in this list. Create a schedule that establishes a consistent studying routine. How likely are you to stick to this schedule?
5. *Consider your resources:* What textbooks and questions do you have at your disposal? How can you order your use of these resources to get the most out of your sessions?
6. *Track and time your performance:* Time every single question and session that you do. Use an error log to track performance, both overall and for each GMAT section. This is an absolutely essential step that many students fail to take. Without taking the time to track and review incorrect (or correct, but guessed!) answers, students are doomed to make the same mistakes. Performance tracking in an error log (if you don't know what this is, [read about it here!](#)) will also allow you to see the tangible results of your studying. It is extremely motivating to see the impact that your studying efforts have had on reaching your goals.
7. *Periodically review your roadmap:* Think back to your target score. How have you been progressing towards it? Re-adjust your roadmap according to your progress. Consider what your priorities were when you created the original roadmap, compared to what they are now. What implications does your new roadmap have for your scheduling?
8. *Stay in touch with your mentor:* You have been granted access to an invaluable resource in your mentor – use it to the fullest! They are people who know what it's like to be in your shoes, making them uniquely qualified to help out. Whether you're struggling with a specific type of question, sticking to a schedule, or general motivation in the test, they are in your corner. We encourage our mentees to keep a short journal of questions to ask their mentor for the next time they connect – this way, you'll be able to quickly reference what it is you've been struggling with most.

A Comprehensive Guide to Resources

This guide offers an overview of most of the resources available to help students study for the GMAT. Use the follow legend to help you navigate the guide:

- Green highlight = Top recommendation
- Yellow highlight = Situational recommendation
- *Italicized title = Free resource*

Quantitative Resources: A Review

In general, quantitative resources are of better quality than verbal resources for the GMAT exam. This is largely because of the nature of quantitative vs. verbal questions: quantitative questions are formulaic, with well-defined criteria for correct and incorrect answers, whereas verbal questions involve more subjectivity and interpretation. This is something to keep in mind while gathering your study resources.

Quantitative: Textbooks

- **Official Guide (OG) Set**: The backbone of any GMAT study plan. These include real GMAT questions from the creators of the test, and are thus exceptionally valuable. Aside from the questions, the learning content is really only worth reading if you are just starting out.
Side note: You do **not** have to purchase the most recent version of the OG in order to have the “best” resource. The OG barely changes year-to-year and has most of the same exact questions as the previous year’s version.

- **GMATClub Math Book**: Exceptional. It essentially covers every single thing you need to know for the entire quant section in terms of content. It will show you all of the essential patterns and formulas needed to answer questions. It also shows you key strategies that will simplify your processes in answering specific types of questions. Even better, it is totally free and is a fairly short read. One criticism would be that it is quite dry, so some concepts will need to be read twice.
- **Manhattan Set**: Good, but not required. They teach great approaches for pattern recognition, as well as practical test taking quant strategies (number picking, for example). Certainly useful, and probably the least dry textbook available. Also pricey if not bought used. It is important to note that this set is full of base-level content. They are best suited for those that need extra help with basics or are starting out completely. Still, there are other resources available that provide the same information. If you are looking to take on more challenging material, this is not the right set for you. We suggest that you take a diagnostic before choosing whether or not to purchase them.
- **Kaplan GMAT Math Workbook**: Has a lot of problems to work through, and teaches the basics of content quite well, making it a great place to start. Be wary though, as the questions don't feel very similar to the real GMAT.

Quantitative: Non-Textbook Resources

- **GMATPrep Software**: Comes with two free CATs from the actual GMAT creators. Option to buy four more exams as well. Best indicator of your actual quant score. The tests should be used over the course of your studying so you can identify your progress.

- **GMATClub.com**: This forum has everything you will ever need to study quant. [Tons of free textbooks](#), [posts on specific topics](#), and a massive database of practice questions. You can actually access a huge number of GMAT questions for absolutely free in the GMATClub forums. If you go to [this question forum for example](#), you can see and click on the tags of PS questions (organized by difficulty level, question type, and source). This is a totally free way to not only access questions, but also hone in on your weaknesses by question type. Lastly, looking up OG questions you got wrong on GMATClub is exceptionally helpful. The OG answer explanations are terribly unintuitive sometimes, while the explanations on the forum (especially by the user “Bunuel”) are fantastic and simple. To do this, just google the first five words of the question you got wrong followed by “GMATClub”, then click the right link.
- **Magoosh**: Very, very cost effective given the sheer volume of questions they have. The rumour is that the verbal questions aren’t the best to practice with, but their math questions are certainly a good tool to use. Would recommend if you are running out of questions in the OG.
- **GMATClub Test Bank**: While still fairly cheap, this isn’t free like most other GMATClub stuff. However, if you are trying to get your quant score up to 47+, this is an awesome tool. It has 20+ CATs that are exceptionally, exceptionally difficult, with questions that are very similar to the real thing. The CAT format forces you to answer in a time efficient manner, and the average question difficulty will make the actual GMAT test feel like a breeze. It also tracks your mistakes for you and provides analytics on your weakest sections, which is very useful and lets you skip your error log entries. Also comes with some verbal questions (of dubious use).

Verbal Resources: A Review

As mentioned earlier, verbal resources are trickier to navigate. Many resources, whether paid or free, suffer from the issue of being unlike the actual verbal questions you will see on test day. You do not want to study from resources like these – rather, stick to resources you can trust to teach you in a manner that is consistent with the actual exam. Practice time is valuable, and you do not want to waste it by learning from the wrong resources.

Verbal: Textbooks

- **Official Guide (OG) Set:** The absolute best set of questions you can get for verbal. Ration them appropriately according to your schedule. The learning content at the start of the book is actually quite useful to read through as well, in addition to doing the questions.
- **Manhattan Set:** Great resource overall. The intuitive theory explanations Manhattan provides, in addition to some very useful strategies, make this a great pick up. If you find yourself struggling in verbal, this might be the right investment for you. However, if you have already read one verbal textbook set, it likely wouldn't be worthwhile to go through Manhattan. Buy used, as it is expensive.
- **GMATClub Grammar Textbook:** Another free GMATClub resource, it can be quite dry. It starts from the very basics of English grammar, so it might be more helpful for those who aren't native English speakers.

Verbal: Non-Textbook Resources

- **GMATClub Verbal Forum:** See: our quant review of GMATClub for more information on how to navigate this resource. Can't say enough about this site. Free questions, textbooks, articles.

- **Magoosh**: As mentioned before, be skeptical when using non-OG questions for verbal in general, and especially for SC. Would only really recommend for verbal if you have run out of questions.
- **Veritas Prep**: Worth a mention seeing as how highly they are regarded for verbal. If you really want to increase your verbal score, and are willing to shell out some money, these guys are likely the way to go.

GMAT Verbal Guide

Verbal is trickier to handle because each subsection requires special attention. However, for the Verbal section overall, there are 3 general steps that you want to take in improving your score.

1. Learn the fundamental Verbal topics
2. Apply your Verbal knowledge in practice question sets
3. Move to practice tests while continuously working on weak points

Learn the fundamental Verbal topics

This step is the starting point and will vastly vary for individuals. If you are a native English speaker, there is no doubt that you will have an easier time than a non-native English speaker. A native English speaker may already inherently possess many of the fundamentals for Verbal and may be able to breeze through this starting step. However, if English is not your first language, there is no circumventing the required learning of Verbal fundamentals. One the best way to learn the fundamentals is through the use of a prep company's E-Learning platform. For example, the Magoosh GMAT platform will contain lesson videos for all the Verbal topics that will appear on the GMAT. If you would rather go the traditional book route, simply find a source from a reputable company and check out the reviews for the book.

Apply your Verbal knowledge in practice question sets

For practice questions, you want to make sure that you have Official Guide (OG) content since the OG will reflect the actual GMAT exam. If you have a fresh copy of the OG, use the product code that comes in the back of the book. This will allow you to practice your questions online instead of in the book which is not recommended. Practice questions should be done by specific subsections and in reasonable sets like 10-15 questions. You also want to make sure that you are timing your sets. You should always start with the easy questions and progress to medium then hard. Try to aim for a high accuracy in easy before moving onto medium. 90% should be a good number for easy and 80-90 should be good for medium. Make sure that you are always analyzing and mastering your mistakes. If you do not understand the solution from the OG, search the question on Google and use GMATClub or other sites.

Move to practice tests while continuously working on weak points

When you have achieved a satisfactory accuracy on your practice problem sets, you can start taking practice tests. For your practice tests, you want to make sure that you replicate the testing environment as closely as possible. Take your practice tests at the same time as your actual scheduled test to minimize any risk factors. You should keep an error log of all your troublesome questions. Make sure to master all the questions in your error log by treating the

error log as a practice problem set. If you are able to truly master all your mistakes, your score should increase with each practice test.

Here are some subsection specific comments.

Sentence Correction

1. SC is the most mechanical Verbal subsection. Make sure you understand the topics for SC such as parallelism, SV agreement, modifiers, etc.
2. You should approach SC by trying to find the wrong answers instead of trying to scan all 5 answers for the correct one. Your goal is to identify errors, eliminate that answer choice, and continue eliminating wrong answers until one answer is left.
3. When looking at the answer choices, be aware of the 2-3 split.
4. A less common approach is to look at the end of each answer choice and determine the split that way
5. SV agreement is one of the easiest ways to eliminate answer choices

Critical Reasoning

1. For Critical Reasoning, learn the common types of questions and determine which ones you need to spend more time practicing:
 - Strengthen/weaken the argument
 - Find the assumptions
 - Inference
 - Determining the structure of an argument
 - Evaluating a conclusion
 - Completing an argument
2. If you are deciding between two answer choices, go for the answer choice that you don't understand. If there's an answer choice that you sort of understand but cannot absolutely say is the correct answer, you are better off choosing the other answer choice.
3. Similar to SC, you should approach CR by trying to find the wrong answers instead of trying to scan all 5 answers for the correct one. Your goal is to identify errors, eliminate that answer choice, and continue eliminating wrong answers until one answer is left

Reading Comprehension

1. For Reading Comprehension, there are two general approaches you can take. We recommend you try each approach and figure out which works best for you.
2. First approach - Do not read the passage as quickly as you can. Read the passage carefully and absorb the crucial details. This method allows you to spend less time reading for each question since you already absorbed a lot of the details. You may also benefit from taking notes on your notepad if you are having difficulty mentally noting the passage content.
3. Second approach - Some people find that reading the passage quicker at first saves them time overall. Start by reading the first paragraph fairly thoroughly so that you can get a good sense for the overall point of the passage. Then skim through the rest of the passage, just understanding the main theme of each paragraph. As each question arises, dive back into specific areas of the passage for more details as needed.
4. You should also familiarize yourself with the common question types:
 - Main idea
 - Inference
 - Supporting idea
 - Logical structure
 - Tone and style
 - Analogy
5. Read news articles in your free time and treat them like they are RC passages. Try to read articles that you would not normally read so that you can toughen yourself up for boring/hard passages on the real test

GMAT Quantitative Guide

We recommend the following steps to improve your quant score on the GMAT:

1. Remember / understand general math principles
2. Do the official guide practice questions to identify strengths and weaknesses
3. Learn “tips and tricks” for each type of math principle tested, then practice to reinforce strong understanding
4. Continue identifying tested principles using practice questions and tests

Remember & understand general math principles

Depending on your background, this process will vary in time. Simply put, this is making sure you review generic math principles and formulas to make sure you know commonly used theories. This can be done through many sources and free sources online! You can search google for formulas or additional details for any type of theories you are unfamiliar with, but one good free resource is: <https://gmatclub.com/forum/new-resource-interactive-flashcards-for-gmat-math-209481.html>

Official guide practice questions

This is pretty self-explanatory, but highly recommended. No other source can replace the official guide questions and you can buy them very cheaply online. Go through both the data sufficiency and problem solving questions. When practicing questions, ALWAYS TIME YOURSELF :) This is extremely important. A huge part of the difficulty of the test is because of the time component, and you need to familiarize yourself with this from the beginning.

You should not take longer than 2 minutes per question, and if you hit ~2.5-3 min on a question, stop the question. Almost every question has a tip or trick that you can learn (see next section) to take less time and answer the question confidently every time.

As you practice questions, you will naturally start to understand your strengths and weaknesses. This is important as you can focus on areas that you are weak on to turn around and master those types of problems.

Learn the “tips and tricks”

This is such an important part of mastering the quant section. Almost every type of problem has a tip or trick that can be learned to complete problems faster and ensure a higher probability of success.

The best way to find a tip or trick is to google the problem or type of problem you are facing! Every single official guide question and mba.com practice test question (the type of practice test we recommend, see section 5) can be found on several GMAT forums. If you type in google the exact question, the first links will be multiple forums outline the questions. In the forums, you will find suggestions from people on a quick and easy way to solve the problem. Find the method that you find makes the most sense, and practice that method on other similar problems. Remember, you are trying to perfect a type of question, the principle or theory being tested, so you can confidently repeat that type of question in a short amount of time, every time.

So you can see what we mean by “tip or trick”, two examples are below. Simply put, understanding a principle is most important! Google and utilize other peoples’ solutions, no need to waste time. Once you learn a principle, great, reinforce it with practice questions that you can also google. These are all free resources!

1) Terminating decimal problems.

- a) If you google “GMAT quant terminating decimal tip or trick” you will find forums discussing ways to solve this problem.
- b) The answer - A fraction in its lowest term can be expressed as a terminating decimal if and only if the denominator has powers of only 2 and/or 5 after breaking down the fraction into the smallest prime factors.
- c) $1/10$ is terminating because this breaks down to $1/(2*5)$, however $1/9$ is not terminating because it breaks down to $1/(3*3)$
- d) Boom - now you can solve this problem quickly, easily, and confidently EVERY time.

2) Overlapping sets

- a) If you google “GMAT quant overlapping sets tip or trick” you will find forums talking about ways to solve these problems
- b) There are two types of problems here (two sets and three sets)
 - a. Two sets - We suggest using the table method which can be learned through this link , however there is also equation methods if that works better with how you https://www.meetuniversity.com/video/gmat-math-double-matrix-question-left-right-handed_20def5191.html
 - b. Three sets - We suggest using the venn diagram method <https://www.veritasprep.com/blog/2012/09/quarter-wit-quarter-wisdom-three-overlapping-sets/>

Continue identifying tested principles using practice questions and tests

We highlighted above our suggestion to use the official guide questions. Similarly, we suggest you take practice tests through the official mba.com. These tests are made by the actual creators of the GMAT, so they are the most accurate predictors of your score on the real test. Two of the tests are free, and four are available for purchase for \$100 total. They are titled (GMATPrep Exam Pack 1 and 2). You can also retake all 6 of the tests, only receiving a couple of repeat questions (each test has a test bank).

<https://www.mba.com/us/the-gmat-exam/prepare-for-the-gmat-exam/test-prep-materials/free-gmat-prep-software.aspx>