Keys to GRE Success

Grad Mentors

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1. MASTERING YOUR APPROACH

The GRE is an exam designed to test the types of skills that have been identified as crucial for success in graduate education — verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking and analytical writing — regardless of your field of study. As a first-time candidate, 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 GRE 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. Oftentimes, 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, GRE 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 GRE? And what result on the GRE will you need to achieve that end? Conduct research into your target schools, and identify a range of GRE 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?
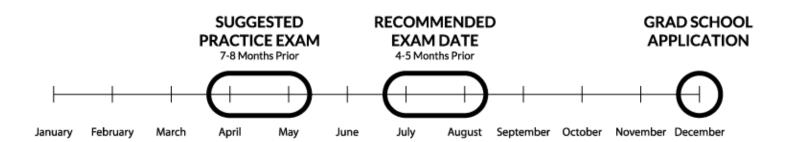
5. *Consider your resources:* What textbooks and questions do you have at your disposal? How can you order your use of these resources to get the most out of your sessions?

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 GRE 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. A template for the error log can be found here.

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.

You should take the GRE approximately one year before you intend to start graduate school. This allows for enough time to retake the exam if necessary. Your test results are valid for up to five years, so don't plan too far in advance. That said, if you are applying to a graduate school with rolling admission, you'll want to have your GRE done early to maximize your chances of being accepted.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE EXAM
7-8 Months Prior

RECOMMENDED EXAM DATE
4-5 Months Prior

GRAD SCHOOL APPLICATION

January February March April May June July August September October November December

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This section provides a general overview of the GRE exam. A more detailed guide can be found [here](#). There are three main sections in the GRE General Test. These sections include Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing. Each unit is designed to test your general intelligence and is not related to your expertise in a chosen field of study. Some would say that the General Test is much more relevant than the chosen field of study.

Verbal Reasoning:

- Conduct an analysis of a piece of discourse and derive conclusions from it.
- Determine the writer or author's perspective or assumptions from reading the written content.
- Understand different kinds of meanings such as figurative meaning, literal meaning, and intended meaning.
- Identify significant points and distinguish them from less significant points.
- Make sense of textual structure and also summarize the given text.
- Understand the meanings of specific words, sentences, and whole paragraphs.
- Understand the connection between words and concepts/ideas.

Quantitative

- Interpret quantitative data or information and then analyze it.
- Find solutions to problems using mathematics.
- Implement mathematical systems such as algebra, arithmetic, data interpretation, and geometry to solve problems.
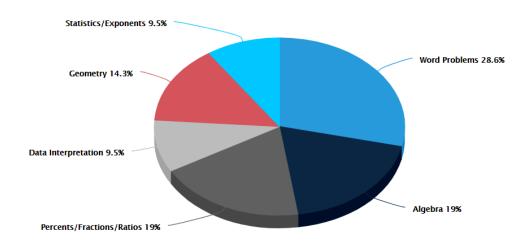

Figure 1 Common Quantitative Reasoning Section Composition

Analytical Writing

- Articulate or explain ideas fluently.
- Support these ideas with the help of examples and reasoning skills.
- Analyze claims and their related evidence.
- Discuss coherently and with focus.
- Manage the various core aspects of written English.

The entire purpose of the Analytical Writing Section is to help you showcase your skills in responding appropriately to a given task.

4. EXAM STRUCTURE

While GRE is offered both in computerized and paper versions, the ETS wants more test takers to go for the computerized version of the exam. Generally, the paper-based GRE is only offered at locations where computer-based testing facilities are not available. The following breaks down what you can expect from each type.

The Paper-Delivered Test:

- **Time:** The time given is 3 hours and 30 minutes for the entire test. The test contains six sections with a 10-minute break provided after the completion of the second section.
- **Time per section:** Each test is provided with a particular time limit. The Analytical Writing Test is divided into two sections. Each section must be answered in 30 minutes. The first section involves analyzing a problem, while the second one involves the analysis of an argument. Similarly, the Verbal Reasoning Test is divided into two sections, 25 questions per section. The time provided is 35 minutes for each section. As for the Quantitative Analysis Test, there are two sections again with 25 questions each. The time provided for each section is 40 minutes.
- **Order of the tests:** The Analytical Writing Test is always the first part of the GRE General Exam. However, the other two tests may arrive in any order.

Candidates can skip and return to questions in the sections provided under Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning. The answers can also be changed if needed.

The Computer-Delivered Test:

- **Time:** The time provided for the Computer-Delivered GRE General Test is 3 hours and 45 minutes. There are six sections in the test, with a 10-minute break being provided after the completion of the third section.
- **Time per section:** The Analytical Writing Tests contains a single section that is divided into 2 separate tasks. Each task must be completed in 30 minutes. The first task is to analyze a problem, and the other is to analyze an argument. Similarly, the Verbal Reasoning Test has two sections with 20 questions each. The time allotted per section is 30 minutes. The Quantitative Reasoning Test has two sections with 20 questions each and a 35-minute time limit per section.
- **Extra sections:** There will be an Unscored Section or a Research Section provided, too. The Research Section will usually turn up right at the end of the test. The Research Section is provided for ETS's (Educational Testing Service) research purposes. Simultaneously, the Unscored Section helps ETS try out questions that may be incorporated into the GRE General Test in the future. The Unscored Section also helps ETS compare the scores between earlier and newer editions of the test.
- **Order of the tests:** The Analytical Writing Test is always the first, while the others may appear in any order. This is why even the Research Section or the Unscored Section must be treated as scored sections to complete the test on time.

Questions can be skipped and returned to later, for which you are provided with 'Mark' and 'Review' features for each question. Answers can also be edited and corrected if required.

5. SCORING SYSTEM

The GRE General Test scores are valid for up to 5 years from the date of testing, after which you must take part in the test again if needed. These are the following scoring patterns for the GRE General Test:

GRE Section	Possible Score
Verbal Reasoning	130 to 170, in 1-point increments
Quantitative Reasoning	130 to 170, in 1-point increments
Analytical Writing	0 to 6, in half point increments

Sections that go unanswered will be marked as 'NS' or 'No Score.' The scoring processes for the Computer-Delivered Test and Paper-Delivered Tests are similar. First, a raw score is calculated for the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning sections based on the correct answers. The number of questions with the right answers and the questions' statistical aspects are factored into the raw score. So, two candidates who give the right answers to the same number of questions end up with varying scores, which is explained by the complexity of the questions each of the candidates answered.
The raw score is then is scaled to the final score using the method of equating. The final score is then fixed to reflect the differences in the questions' complexity in different test versions.
As for the Analytical Writing Test, scoring is carried out by two readers who assess the answers based on writing skills and critical thinking abilities. Minor grammatical errors are usually overlooked; however, serious ones end up affecting the overall score. The readers score answers on a 0-to-6-point scale with half-point increments. The average for both reader scores is calculated and rounded off to the closest 1.5 points, resulting in the Analytical Writing Test's final score. If there is a vast difference between the first two readers' scores, the test is evaluated by a third reader.

7. RECOMMENDED FREE RESOURCES

You have a lot of GRE preparation resources available for free. It's up to you to check them out and start using them. Just remember, the more you practice, the better you will become, thus boosting your chances of achieving an impressive score.

1. Online GRE strategy session

The GRE strategy session is a useful guide if you are unsure how to start your GRE preparation. You can register for one of Veritas Prep's upcoming free live online GRE strategy sessions - an hour-long workshop hosted by instructor Brian Galvin - where you will learn helpful strategies to help start your GRE preparation.

For more assistance from Veritas Prep, check out their free GRE articles and resources section. There, you will learn how to save time on test day, tackle the most challenging questions, and build confidence while preparing for the GRE. You will also have the chance to familiarize yourself with the structure and components of the test and become a more effective test-taker.

2. GRE study guide

A comprehensive study guide was designed to help students get their bearings at the start of their GRE preparation. The guide is packed with all kinds of useful information such as a description of the sections and an explanation of the scoring system. You can learn how to choose a study strategy and also find a lot of other helpful tips.

3. Powerprep II

The Powerprep II software offers free online practice tests from ETS, the organization that administers the GRE. You can also learn the basics of the test, such as how the calculator works or how to flag and return to questions.

This free software includes the option to take practice tests under extended time and extra break conditions.

4. Practice book for the paper-based GRE exam

This is the second edition of the ETS practice book that offers a simulated test-taking experience of the paper-delivered exam. It includes one full-length paper-delivered test, test-taking strategies, sample Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning questions with explanations, sample Analytical Writing topics, scored Analytical Writing responses, plus reader commentaries and information on how the test is scored.

5. ETS essay topic pools

ETS has made available the entire pool of tasks from which the essay prompt will be chosen. This means that you can find the topic that you will see in your GRE exam.

you can find the Issue topics for the Analytical Writing section and are the Argument topics. Practice writing essays with these prompts.

6. Magoosh's GRE vocabulary flashcards

Magoosh's GRE vocabulary flashcards cover more than 1,000 of the most important GRE words. You can either download the app or use the desktop version.

The flashcards are designed to help you:

- Improve your GRE Verbal Score
- Master the 1,000 most important GRE words
- Master words on every level
- Focus on words that are the right difficulty for you, regardless of your verbal skills
- Study on the go thanks to the Android and iPhone apps
- Focus on the words you most need to review, saving you time and making sure you remember what you have studied.
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7. Manhattan Review GRE diagnostic test

It is important to begin preparing for the GRE by taking a practice test under similar time limits and conditions as the real test, to assess where to focus your efforts. The Manhattan Review GRE Practice Test is a section-adaptive test just like the GRE General Test.

Manhattan Review's online GRE practice tests are designed to imitate the look and feel of the actual exam. Use this free GRE practice exam to familiarize yourself with the GRE and to pinpoint the areas where you need the most practice.

8. Manhattan Prep's GRE practice test

Manhattan Prep offers a free, high-quality GRE practice test complete with explanations. It is specifically designed for the GRE General Test, previously known as the GRE revised General Test. All of Manhattan Prep's GRE practice tests are delivered via the web; there is nothing to install or download.

The exam is calibrated to mimic the behavior of the latest section-adaptive format of the GRE exam. This means that test-takers will have a realistic test-taking experience, and will know exactly what they will be dealing with on test day. Under standard testing conditions, the GRE practice test takes about 3 hours and 30 minutes.

9. Quizlet flashcards

Here you will find a vast source of flashcards about the GRE exam made by other students.

10. Kaplan GRE practice test

The Kaplan practice test is somewhat similar to Manhattan Prep's. However, bear in mind that Kaplan tests are widely regarded as tough. The questions in this practice test are more difficult than those you will see in the real GRE, so don't worry if your scores are lower than expected.

Actually, it doesn't hurt to raise the bar a bit. Facing the challenging Kaplan test will help you master the real GRE exam. You will need around four hours to complete this test.

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11. McGraw-Hill GRE practice test

McGraw-Gill offers one [free test](#) on their website. In addition, you will find explanations for each and every question on the test. You will also find problem-solving videos and other GRE preparation resources.

12. Khan Academy

While it has no specific GRE section, [Khan Academy](#) offers courses on pretty much everything. Just look for the topic that you want to learn more about and you are very likely to find a video offering a clear explanation.

The ETS [recommends](#) Khan Academy as a valuable source of free resources that may be helpful to test-takers.

As you see, you have a lot of GRE preparation resources available for free. It's up to you to check them out and start using them. Just remember, the more you practice, the better you will become, thus boosting your chances of achieving an impressive score.