

# GRAD MENTORS



Succeeding with  
Grad Mentors



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. WHAT IS GRAD MENTORS?
2. WHICH TEST DO I TAKE?
3. ONLINE OR IN-PERSON?
4. WHEN DO I TAKE THE TEST?
5. WHAT IS A GOOD SCORE?
6. THE IMPORTANCE OF OFFICIAL QUESTIONS
7. HOW DO I DEVELOP A STUDY PLAN?
8. MASTERING YOUR APPROACH
9. NEXT STEPS



# 1. WHAT IS GRAD MENTORS?

If you're reading this guide, you might have some idea about what we do. We're "an officially registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to enabling opportunities in graduate education for all those who face obstacles and challenges throughout their journey towards achieving a higher education." We recognize that applying to grad school is a difficult, stressful, and expensive process, and we are committed to working with people who lack the resources to pursue their dreams. And most importantly, we are a FREE service! In short, we are here to help you achieve your dream GMAT/GRE score!

The mentor-mentee matching process is very important to best suit your timings, backgrounds, and interests. Our mentors have once been in your shoes. They, too, have been through the difficult process of studying for and taking the GMAT/GRE, and they have all done well. All our mentors have scored 700+ on the GMAT or equivalent on the GRE.

But keep in mind that our mentors are volunteers who have full-time jobs and please respect their timings. It is extremely important to have a strong mentor-mentee relationship as you study for your exam. Also remember that this is not a personal tutoring service. Yes, our mentors will help you succeed on the GMAT, but their role is primarily to set realistic goals, develop study strategies, direct you to the most appropriate resources, and regularly check your progress. The bulk of your test preparation will be done by YOU. So, our role is to help you learn HOW to study on the GMAT/GRE rather than WHAT to study.

Now that you know a little about what we do, let's dive a little deeper. In this guide, we're going to go over how to decide between the GMAT and the GRE and whether to take the online or in-person version, figure out what a good score is, develop a basic timeline for your studies, and understand how to master your approach.

## 2. WHICH TEST DO I TAKE?

A common question that new mentees face is figuring out which test to take. A quick Google search reveals one thing—both tests are more similar than different: Both tests evaluate your quantitative reasoning, verbal reasoning, and analytical writing skills. Both tests are taken by a broad, global population. Both quantitative reasoning sections are based on high-school math. Both tests include reading comprehension, critical reasoning, and quantitative problem solving. Both tests are taken on a computer, either at your home or in a test center. And most importantly, both tests are only part of your holistic graduate school application process.

But there are some key differences, the most important of which is the intent of the tests. The GMAT exam was created almost exclusively for business school. This means that several non-business graduate programs do not even consider the GMAT for admissions but require the GRE instead. Therefore, if you're applying to a non-MBA program, you'd probably want to take the GRE, but be sure to check if the schools you're applying to; some Master of Finance programs actually prefer the GMAT to the GRE.

If you're applying to an MBA program, your choice becomes a bit trickier. Most schools are truly agnostic to which test you take, so there really is quite a bit of freedom to choose the test that's best for you, but the vast majority of students at top schools choose the GMAT. Among the US top schools, only [The Carnegie Mellon Tepper School of Business explicitly states its preference for the GMAT](#).

That being said, let's take a glance at the key differences between the 2 exams

Difference	GMAT	GRE
Sections	1 Verbal Reasoning (65 min, 36 q) 1 Quantitative Reasoning (62 min, 31 q) 1 Integrated Reasoning (30 min, 12 q) 1 Analytical Writing prompt (30 min)	2 Verbal Reasoning (30 min, 20 q, each) 2 Quantitative Reasoning (35 min, 20 q, each) 1 Uncounted Experimental Section (varies) 2 Analytical Writing prompts (30 min, each)
Content	Focuses on grammar, graphs and charts, and the ability to know which data are sufficient to solve a problem	Focuses on vocabulary in context, synonyms, and quantitative comparisons
Structure	All Quant questions are multiple choice	Some Quant questions require a type-in answer
Design	Designed for Business School	Designed for a broad array of graduate programs
Calculator	Not allowed on Quant	On-screen calculator allowed on Quant
Retake Limits	Every 16 days, up to than five times in a rolling 12-month period and no more than eight times total. Only 2 online attempts.	Every 21 days, up to five times within any continuous rolling 12-month period. No lifetime limits.
Cost	\$250	\$205

Of course, a tabulated set of differences isn't enough for you to make that choice. For more detailed information on content, check out our GMAT and GRE guides, and try out some free official practice questions on MBA.com and ETS.org to see which test feels more comfortable for you. Down the road, if you feel like you have picked the wrong test, don't fret! It's not uncommon to switch from one test to the other. The skills in preparing for one test transfer to the other, and our mentees are proficient with both tests. In the end, a higher score matters more than which test you selected.

### 3. ONLINE OR IN-PERSON?

Now that you know a little bit about both exams, let's look into the two ways they're offered— online and in-person. The online exam is taken in the comfort of your own home while you are monitored by a human proctor. The in-person exam is taken in the test center, as you would've done before the pandemic. To maximize your test score, it's important to understand which type of exam works out best for you.

Your first consideration, without question, should be your health, vaccination status, and the COVID situation in your region. If the COVID situation is particularly bad, the in-person exam might not even be offered in your area. If the in-person exam is available, keep in mind that you will be taking this exam in a relatively cramped, airconditioned room in proximity to other people, so if you or your family members are unvaccinated and/or at high risk for severe COVID, you might want to take the exam online.

Your second consideration should be your internet access. A high-speed uninterrupted internet connection, in addition to a computer, is required for the online exam. There have been several reports of interruptions or even cancellations caused by poor internet connection. So if you are unable to obtain a high-quality internet connection, you might want to take the in-person exam if it's available.

If both the online and in-person exams are viable for you, your most important considerations should be convenience and comfort. Some of you might suffer from test anxiety when taking the exam with other people, so the online exam might work better. Most test centers still require candidates to wear a face mask, so if you find this uncomfortable, the online exam might be preferable. If you live with noisy roommates or neighbors, it might be a good idea to take the exam in-person to minimize your distractions.

## 4. WHEN DO I TAKE THE TEST?

Once you've decided to go to grad school, you should start studying for the GMAT or GRE as soon as possible, ideally at least a year before you apply. This allows for enough time to retake the exam if necessary.

Keep in mind that you must leave at least 16 calendar days between consecutive GMAT attempts. In addition, you can take the GMAT no more than 5 times in a rolling 12-month period and no more than 8 times total. You can take the GRE once every 21 days, up to five times within any continuous rolling 12-month period (365 days), but there is no lifetime limit. Canceled attempts count towards the limit on both tests.

If you're still in undergrad and plan to apply after 3-4 years of work experience, it might be a good idea to take the test around the end of your senior year. If you're applying in your senior year for a deferred MBA program or for graduate school, try to take the GMAT during one of your summer breaks. That way, you will still be in touch with your general study habits.

Your test results are valid for up to five years, so don't plan too far in advance. That said, it's a good rule of thumb to have a score you're satisfied with at least 2 months before the deadline of the school. That way, you have ample time to work on the rest of your application. See below for a general idea about when to take the test for next year's application but be sure to check the specific deadlines of your target school. If you're applying for non-MBA grad school, simply look at the application round that's closest to your target schools' deadlines.

Application Round	Application Deadline	Start Studying for the Test by:	Have your Score Ready by:
<b>MBA 1</b>	September-October 2022	September-October 2021	June-July 2022
<b>MBA 2</b>	December-January 2022	December-January 2021	September-October 2022
<b>MBA 3</b>	March-April 2023	March-April 2022	December-January 2022

## 5. WHAT IS A GOOD SCORE?

Now that you've figured out which test to take, let's take a closer look at what a good score means. This isn't as easy as it sounds, because every graduate school's admissions process is holistic, taking into some factors that are totally beyond your control.

If you're interested in an MBA program, a good starting point might be the median GMAT or GRE score of your target school. Of course, by definition, a median means that about 50% of the MBA class scores below the median and about 50% scores above. Why do some people get in with lower scores? The answer lies in the holistic process. Some students might have demonstrated work experience, played Division I varsity sports, and overcome significant adversity caused by systemic factors. In short, they've already demonstrated their caliber beyond a test score. For others, particularly those from overrepresented careers, such as banking, consulting, or technology, or overrepresented countries, such as India or China, you might need a score considerably higher than the median. Similarly, if you have particularly poor grades, work experience, or extracurriculars, you might need a very high score to compensate for the deficiency. Therefore, a good score for you might be a bad score for someone else.

For non-MBA grad school, things are even less clear cut. Because most students enter these programs from similar fields, there is less of a need of a standardized test to uniformly evaluate students. Consequently, there is relatively less information about the GRE scores at top master's programs, and several schools don't even release their GRE medians. Some non-quantitative programs might not even consider your GRE Quantitative score, nor would some heavily quantitative programs consider your GRE Verbal score. So, the answer is a big "it depends." That being said, the key points still hold, about overrepresented candidates requiring higher scores and a high test score partially compensating for a deficiency in another factor.

# 6. THE IMPORTANCE OF OFFICIAL QUESTIONS

Before we delve into creating a study plan, we need to understand a key constraint: the amount of official prep material. To better understand this constraint, let's look at how important these official questions are.

In short, official questions and practice tests are without question the most important resources at your disposal. This is obvious! What else but the material created by the test makers is best for your prep!? But the GMAC and ETS have been rather stingy about releasing official tests, so there are only 6 Official GMAT tests (2 free, 4 paid) and 5 Official GRE tests (2 free, 3 paid), so you need to understand the best time to take them.

Let's also understand why the GMAC and ETS are so stingy. The simple explanation is money. Creating official tests questions is very expensive, often costing several thousands of dollars per question. This is because of the rigorous quality control that each question goes through. Every question is created by a highly trained team of content experts who have postgraduate degrees. Each question is then pretested as experimental items on the actual exams. Experienced psychometricians analyze the "performance" of each question. A "good" question is one that effectively differentiates between high performing and low performing candidates, i.e. high scoring candidates get it right but low scoring candidates don't. If a question is too easy or too difficult, or if it is ambiguous, culturally biased, or flawed in any other way, it is thrown out and will never count towards anyone's score. So, the questions you see on your exams, official practice tests, and official guides have been through a scrutiny. No other prep company has the resources to do this, and they often shamelessly steal official content, making superficial changes to names and scenarios while often adding unnecessary complications

Because there's a limited number of practice questions and because the unofficial content doesn't hit the mark, we make 2 key recommendations.

- **Stick to only Official GMAT or GRE material:** This applies more to verbal than quant, but the quality of the official material cannot be matched. If you are running out of official material, talk to your mentor, and we'll figure out a way to maximize the content.
- **Take your first practice test only after you have understood the basics of the exam:** If you take your first practice test without knowing anything about the exam, your score might not be representative of your ability. Because you only have 5 or 6 tries to gauge your ability before your exam, we advise taking these practice tests under highly representative conditions.

## 7. HOW DO I DEVELOP A STUDY PLAN?

So, we're finally at the point where we discuss how to develop a study plan. Grad Mentors recommends an customized iterative study plan, as this maximizes flexibility and efficiency. An customized iterative study plan is based on blocks of preparation, each culminating in a practice test. Your performance on the current block determines the structure of your upcoming block, and your mentor will work with you to develop your next block.

Each block can be as long as you want it to be, but we recommend about 4-6 weeks. The first block, as shown on the next page, is the same for everyone. It lasts 6 weeks and is designed to get everyone up to speed on the content and types of questions on the GMAT/GRE. Note that every "week" is flexible. If you have prior understanding of the content of that week, you can shorten it to a day, but we don't recommend skipping it. Also, keep in mind that the amount of content assigned to each week is targeted to a working professional or student who isn't preparing for the GMAT full-time. If you're studying for the GMAT full-time, feel free to combine the content of several weeks to use your time appropriately.

After the end of the block's practice test, we recommend meeting your mentor to discuss the next steps. Your mentor will probably recommend structuring your next block to focus on your weakness. However, if you have already reached your target score on the first practice test, we recommend taking a second practice test soon after. If you've hit your target score on both practice tests, it might be a good idea to schedule your actual exam as soon as possible.

Note that Integrated Reasoning and Analytical Writing scores are of comparatively less importance and so should be worked on towards the end of your test preparation.

# BLOCK 1

## Week 1 (Intro)

- Read this guide!
- Reach out to your mentor!
- Buy a NYTimes subscription and read everyday
- Register on GMATClub

## Week 2

- GRE: Magoosh Vocabulary Flash Cards
- GMAT: GMATClub's Grammar Textbook
- Practice OG vocab or sentence correction questions

## Week 3

- Read extra NYTimes
- Learn the basics of argumentation (Khan Academy's LSAT course)
- Practice OG RC and CR (if GMAT)

## Week 4

- Review high-school math from the GMATClub math textbook (even if GRE)

## Week 5

- Practice Official Data Sufficiency or Quantitative Comparison
- Practice OG Official Problem Solving

## Week 6

- Take an Official full Practice Test!
- Meet with mentor

# 8. MASTERING YOUR APPROACH

We've already gone over quite a few general points about these exams, so you surely have questions about specific strategies for sections. And getting answers to those questions is important – but it shouldn't be the priority, and here's why:

Too often, prospect test takers 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, test 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. **Read this guide:** If you've read through this guide and already made it here, good job! You've completed the first step to success. If you've skipped through the guide and have jumped straight here, please go back and read from the beginning! Everything in this guide is important.
2. **Define your goals:** To what end are you writing this test? And what result will you need to achieve that end? Conduct research into your target schools and identify a range of scores that will position you as a competitive candidate for those schools.
3. **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? How did you fare on the SAT/ACT? A high score doesn't guarantee the same on the GMAT or GRE but a low score indicates a knowledge gap.
  - 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.

# 8. MASTERING YOUR APPROACH

4. 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!
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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. A template for the error log can be found [here](#).
8. Develop a Reading Habit: Both the GMAT and the GRE require strong reading skills across many types of reading passages for success. The type of reading material on these tests is very dense, with several arguments, counter arguments, assumptions, and conclusions. Even if you consider yourself a voracious reader, you might not be an **active** reader. An active reader skillfully identifies these arguments, counter arguments, assumptions, and conclusions across all types of reading passages, be it science, arts, social science, or humanities.
  - Consider buying a New York Times subscription. For \$1/week, you can access a wide variety of complex, argumentative reading material, just as you would on the GMAT and GRE. To become an active reader, try reading articles and editorials in various sections of the NYTimes on a regular basis.
9. 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?
10. 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.

## 9. NEXT STEPS

Congratulations on making it this far! You're already on the road to get a great test score! To really get your preparation started, send an email to your mentor, if you haven't already. Tell them a little bit about yourself, and clearly define your goals, availability, and academic background.

It might also be a good idea to become a member of [GMATClub.com](https://www.gmatclub.com) or [GREPrepClub.com](https://www.greprepclub.com). These websites have thousands and thousands of questions, often with helpful explanations by experts. They also contain useful information to gauge the difficulty of the questions, such as the percent of people answering them correctly and the average time taken to answer each question. To make your future practice exams as representative as possible, avoid solving questions marked with "GMATClub" or "PowerPrep", as these questions overlap with your exams. Be sure to check out the GMAT and GRE subreddits, as these are helpful places to exchange tips and communicate directly with high-achieving tutors. In addition, follow Grad Mentors on social media and stay current on our emails.

Please keep in mind the tips outlined in this guide and other guides. Everyone learns differently, but it's crucial to have a very structured preparation methodology. We at Grad Mentors hope you develop a fruitful relationship with your mentors on your way to achieving the score of your dreams!

