

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

The GRE is a standardized test that is an admissions requirement for many graduate schools. Created and administered by the Educational Testing Service (or ETS), the exam is primarily focused on testing abstract thinking skills in the areas of math, vocabulary, and analytical writing. The GRE is typically a computer-based exam that is administered by select qualified testing centers (in Lincoln Tower at OSU).

In the graduate school admissions process, the level of emphasis that is placed upon GRE scores varies widely between schools and even departments within schools. The importance of a GRE score can range from being the most important selection factor, in some Ivy-league schools, to being a mere admission formality, as in the case of professional arts programs which have become part of universities.

Structure

The following section refers to the typical computer-based test. The structure of a paper-based test or a test with special accommodations will differ. See www.gre.org for details.

The exam consists of three graded sections, plus a required experimental section that is not included in the reported score. The three graded sections are analytical writing, verbal, and quantitative. The analytical writing section will always appear first, while the verbal, quantitative, and experimental sections may appear in any order on the test. An additional non-scored and clearly-marked optional research section may also appear at end of the test. The entire test procedure takes about 3 hours.

Analytical writing section

The analytical writing section consists of two different essays, an "issue task" and an "argument task". The writing section is graded on a scale of 0-6, in half-point increments. The essays are written on a computer using a word processing program specifically designed by ETS. The program allows only basic computer functions and does not contain a spell-checker or other advanced features. Each essay is scored by at least two readers on a six-point holistic scale. If the two scores are within one point, the average of the

scores is taken. If the two scores differ by more than a point, a third reader examines the response.

Issue task

The test taker will be able to choose between two topics upon which to write an essay. The time allowed for this essay is 45 minutes.

Argument task

The test taker will be given an "argument" and the test taker will be asked to write an essay that explains why one "side" of the argument is superior. Typically, the task requires that the taker identify and critique the logical fallacies of the argument. The time allotted for this essay is 30 minutes.

Verbal section

One graded multiple-choice section is always a verbal section, consisting of analogies, antonyms, sentence completions, and reading comprehension passages. Multiple-choice response sections are graded on a scale of 200-800, in 10 point increments. This section primarily tests vocabulary, and average scores in this section are substantially lower than those in the quantitative section. In a typical examination, this section may consist of 30 questions, and 30 minutes may be allotted to complete the section.

Quantitative section

The quantitative section, the other multiple-choice section, consists of problem solving and quantitative comparison questions that test high-school level math. Multiple-choice response sections are graded on a scale of 200-800, in 10 point increments. In a typical examination, this section may consist of 28 questions, and test takers may be given 45 minutes to complete the section.

Experimental section

The experimental section will be either a verbal, quantitative or the essay section which contains new questions that ETS is considering for future test editions. This section will not count toward the test-taker's score; however, the section will appear identical to either the "actual" verbal or quantitative section and will likewise be a multiple-choice test with the same amount of questions and the same time allotment as the "real" verbal or quantitative section. The

test taker will have no way of knowing which section is experimental, so the test taker is forced to complete this section.

If the experimental section appears as an analytical writing question (essay), if an "issue" type question is presented, a choice between two topics will not be given. This coupled with the fact that the true analytical writing section is the first test given can help the test-taker to deduce which is the experimental section and the taker can thus lower the importance of that section.

Research Section

An additional research section may appear at the end of the test. Unlike the experimental section, this section will be clearly marked and will be completely optional. The test taker's participation or refusal to participate will not affect the reported score in any way.

Scoring

Computerized adaptive testing

The common (Verbal and Quantitative) multiple-choice portions of the exam currently use computer-adaptive testing (CAT) methods that automatically change the difficulty of questions as the test taker proceeds with the exam, depending on the number of correct or incorrect answers that are given. The test taker is not allowed to go back and change the answers to previous questions, and some type of answer must be given before the next question is presented.

The first question that is given in a multiple-choice section is considered to be an "average level" question that half of the GRE test takers will answer correctly. If the question is answered correctly, then subsequent questions become more difficult. If the question is answered incorrectly, then subsequent questions become easier, until a question is answered correctly. This approach to administration yields scores that are of similar accuracy while using approximately half as many items.

Scaled score percentiles

The percentiles of the current test are as follows:

Scaled score	Verbal Reasoning %	Quantitative Reasoning %
800	99	94
780	99	90
760	99	86
740	99	82
720	98	77
700	97	72
680	96	68
660	94	63
640	91	58
620	89	53
600	85	49
580	81	44
560	76	40

540	71	35
520	65	31
500	60	28
480	55	24
460	49	21
440	43	18
420	37	15
400	31	13
380	26	11
360	21	9
340	15	7
320	10	5
300	6	4
280	3	3
260	1	2

240	1	1
220	0	1
200	0	0
mean	465	584

Analytical Writing score	Writing %
6	96
5.5	88
5	73
4.5	54
4	33
3.5	18
3	7
2.5	2
2	1
1.5	0

1	0
0.5	0
mean	4.1

GRE Subject Tests

In addition to the General Test, there are also eight GRE Subject Tests testing knowledge in the specific areas of Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature in English, Mathematics, Physics, and Psychology.

Preparation

A variety of resources are available for those wishing to prepare for the GRE. Upon registration, ETS provides preparation software called PowerPrep, which contains two practice tests of retired questions, as well as further practice questions and review material. Since the software replicates both the test format and the questions used, it can be useful to predict the actual GRE scores. ETS does not license their past questions to any other company, making them the only source for official retired material.

ETS has claimed that content of the GRE is "un-coachable"; however, many test preparation companies like IMS Learning Resources, VISU etc claim that the test format is so rigid that familiarizing oneself with the test's organization, timing, specific foci, and the use of process of elimination is the best way to increase a GRE score.