



THE GRE CHEAT SHEET

A GUIDE TO ACING THE GRE

Navigating all of the online and print resources related to the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) can be daunting.

But don't worry. We've done the heavy lifting to pull together the most useful information, practice tests, and prep courses available to you. That way, you can focus your time and energy on actually [preparing for the GRE](#) vs. spending hours figuring out how to prepare.

If you:

- ✓ **Are currently in school and contemplating grad school**
- ✓ **Have been away from school for a year or 10 years, and are contemplating grad school**
- ✓ **Are contemplating grad school for any reason**
- ✓ **Have decided to go to grad school but are nervous to take another standardized test**
- ✓ **Have decided to go to grad school and have no idea how to even start studying for the GRE**

...this guide is for you.

In this guide, you'll find:



Explanations of what to expect from the GRE



Sample questions from each section of the test



Guide to the best resources available for GRE prep



Answers to frequently asked questions about the GRE

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UNDERSTANDING THE GRE FORMAT AND HOW IT'S SCORED

First, let's cover the basics. The Graduate Record Examination — or GRE — is a standardized exam that can be required for admission to graduate programs. The exam is developed and administered by [ETS](#).

It measures your knowledge of basic math, algebra, geometry, data analysis, and college-level vocabulary, and includes three sections: essay, verbal, and math. Read on for brief descriptions and examples of the types of questions you might encounter in each section.

Analytical Writing Assessment

In this section, you'll be asked to write two essays: one is called the "Issue" and the other is the "Argument." You'll have 30 minutes to complete each essay.

In the Issue essay, you'll be asked to analyze or respond to a general statement (typically about politics, culture, or education) and take a position on the issue.

In the Argument essay, you'll be asked to examine the logic of a text (typically writing no longer than a paragraph). This essay requires close reading and a firm grasp on the rules of logic.

Sample Issue Topic:

Scandals are useful because they focus our attention on problems in ways that no speaker or reformer ever could.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim. In developing and supporting your position, be sure to address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position.

[You can find more sample Issue topics on the ETS website.](#) →

Sample Argument Topic:

The following appeared in a letter to the editor of the Balmer Island Gazette:

"On Balmer Island, where mopeds serve as a popular form of transportation, the population increases to 100,000 during the summer months. To reduce the number of accidents involving mopeds and pedestrians, the town council of Balmer Island should limit the number of mopeds rented by the island's moped rental companies from 50 per day to 25 per day during the summer season. By limiting the number of rentals, the town council will attain the 50 percent annual reduction in moped accidents that was achieved last year on the neighboring island of Seaville, when Seaville's town council enforced similar limits on moped rentals."

Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be answered in order to decide whether the recommendation is likely to have the predicted result. Be sure to explain how the answers to these questions would help to evaluate the recommendation.

[You can find more sample Argument topics on the ETS website.](#) →

Your essays will be scored by professional graders (typically university literature/writing professors) on a scale of 0.5-6.0, based on .5 increments. These graders are looking for the “three c’s:” clarity, coherency, and cogency.

Clarity:

Is your thesis or argument clear to the grader? Choppy sentences, unnecessary words, and grammar and spelling errors will make your essay difficult to read. The graders have about 30 seconds to grade each essay, so it needs to be crystal clear.

Coherency:

A clear essay is usually a coherent essay, meaning that all of your points come together to create a logical whole.

Cogency:

A cogent essay is one in which the argument(s) is supported by solid evidence, either from the text (if it’s an Argument essay) or from one’s own knowledge of the issue.

Again, the graders only have 30 seconds to grade your essay. So it needs to be clear, coherent, and cogent from the get go. As any teacher will tell you, well-written essays take much less time to grade than poorly written essays do. If your grader has to take the entire 30 seconds to read your first paragraph because it’s so unclear, that doesn’t bode well for your score.

Speaking of your score... The total score for the essay portion of the GRE is the average of the two essay scores. A 0.0 means that you either didn’t do the essay at all, or just decided to type a bunch of gibberish instead of answering the prompt. So, it’s difficult to get a 0.0; most students fall between a 3.0 and 5.0. A 6.0 means that you knocked it out of the park with a well-written, insightful essay of 80 lines or more.

To learn more, check out the [sample essays](#) available on the ETS website, as well as ETS’ [Score Level Descriptions](#) page.

Verbal Reasoning

The Verbal Reasoning section is, not surprisingly, about how well you know words and how to use them. An average American vocabulary will not get you through the intense sentence completion questions or reading comprehension exercises.

To prepare for this section, the best thing to do is read, read, read. Read scholarly articles. Read great American (and British) novels. Read high-level nonfiction. Vocabulary flashcards can help, too. But any English teacher will tell you that if you learn a new word in the context of a book or article, especially one that interests you, you are much more likely to remember it when the time comes.

ETS has developed three types of questions, each designed to test a different facet of your verbal reasoning skills.

Types of questions:

Sentence Equivalence

Think of these questions as a variation of text completion, but they'll also test your knowledge of synonyms.

Sample Question:

Select the two answer choices that, when used to complete the sentence, fit the meaning of the sentence as a whole and produce complete sentences that are alike in meaning.

1. *Although it does contain some pioneering ideas, one would hardly characterize the work as _____.*
 - A. *orthodox*
 - B. *eccentric*
 - C. *original*
 - D. *trifling*
 - E. *conventional*
 - F. *innovative*

[Find the answer and more sample questions on the ETS website.](#) →

Reading Comprehension

In grad school, you'll have to read. A lot. It's no surprise that half of the verbal reasoning section on the GRE is devoted to testing your ability to read closely, carefully, and with a reasonable degree of comprehension. You'll be asked questions on passages of varying lengths (~100-450 words) and levels of difficulty, taken from various fields of thought and study: literary criticism, the sciences, philosophy, etc.

Sample Question:

Question is based on this passage.

Reviving the practice of using elements of popular music in classical composition, an approach that had been in hibernation in the United States during the 1960s, composer Philip Glass (born 1937) embraced the ethos of popular music in his compositions. Glass based two symphonies on music by rock musicians David Bowie and Brian Eno, but the symphonies' sound is distinctively his. Popular elements do not appear out of place in Glass's classical music, which from its early days has shared certain harmonies and rhythms with rock music. Yet this use of popular elements has not made Glass a composer of popular music. His music is not a version of popular music packaged to attract classical listeners; it is high art for listeners steeped in rock rather than the classics.

1. *The passage suggests that Glass's work displays which of the following qualities?*
 - a. *A return to the use of popular music in classical compositions*
 - b. *An attempt to elevate rock music to an artistic status more closely approximating that of classical music*
 - c. *A long-standing tendency to incorporate elements from two apparently disparate musical styles*

To read the answer to this question, head over to the ETS website. →

Text Completion (TC)

As the name suggests, these are fill-in-the-blank questions. Some have one blank, others will have multiple blanks, but they'll always have a word bank with options to choose from.

Sample Question:

For each blank select one entry from the corresponding column of choices. Fill all blanks in the way that best completes the text.

- It is refreshing to read a book about our planet by an author who does not allow facts to be (i) _____ by politics: well aware of the political disputes about the effects of human activities on climate and biodiversity, this author does not permit them to (ii) _____ his comprehensive description of what we know about our biosphere. He emphasizes the enormous gaps in our knowledge, the sparseness of our observations, and the (iii) _____, calling attention to the many aspects of planetary evolution that must be better understood before we can accurately diagnose the condition of our planet.*

<i>Blank (i)</i>	<i>Blank (ii)</i>	<i>Blank (iii)</i>
<i>A. overshadowed</i>	<i>D. enhance</i>	<i>G. plausibility of our hypotheses</i>
<i>B. invalidated</i>	<i>E. obscure</i>	<i>H. certainty of our entitlement</i>
<i>C. illuminated</i>	<i>F. underscore</i>	<i>I. superficiality of our theories</i>

[Find the answer and more sample questions on the ETS website.](#) →

Both the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning (aka Math) sections are “section-level adaptive,” which means that based on your performance in the first section, you’ll get either a more difficult or less difficult second section of questions.

All answers contribute equally to your final score in each section, and the raw score — which is converted to a scaled score that adjusts for difficulty level and the differences in test editions — is the number of questions you answered correctly.

If you want a more in-depth look at how the reasoning sections are scored, your best bet is, once again, the [ETS website](#).

Quantitative Reasoning

Nonmath lovers, don't worry. You won't have to do any advanced math on the GRE. The type of math you'll be asked to do is the stuff you learned in high school: basic geometry, algebra, probability, word problems, etc.

The difficult part isn't necessarily the level of math (although if it's been awhile since you took high school math classes, you'll need a bit more of a refresher), but the complexity of the problems created by ETS.

You don't even have to show your work! But as you'll see from the sample questions below, that doesn't mean you'll be able to do all of the problems in your head.

Problem Solving Questions:

1. If $5x + 32 = 4 - 2x$, what is the value of x ?

- A. -4
- B. -3
- C. 4
- D. 7
- E. 12

[Find the answer and more sample questions on the ETS website.](#) →

Quantitative Comparison Questions:

Compare Quantity A and Quantity B and select one of the following four answer choices:

1. Quantity A

The least prime number greater than 24

Quantity B

The greatest prime number less than 28

- 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.

[Find the answer and more sample questions on the ETS website.](#) →

Data Interpretation Sets:

Use the information from the following chart to answer the question below:

*Annual Percent Change in Dollar Amount of Sales
at Five Retail Stores from 2006 to 2008*

Store	Percent Change from 2006 to 2007	Percent Change from 2007 to 2008
P	10	-10
Q	-20	9
R	5	12
S	-7	-15
T	17	-8

1. If the dollar amount of sales at Store P was \$800,000 for 2006, what was the dollar amount of sales at that store for 2008?

- A. \$727,200
- B. \$792,000
- C. \$800,000
- D. \$880,000
- E. \$968,000

Find the answer and more sample questions on the ETS website. →

The Quantitative Reasoning (aka Math) section is graded in the same way as the Verbal Reasoning section.

Here's some additional [advice on how you can improve your GRE score.](#)



FREE GRE TEST PREP RESOURCES

Gone are the days of driving to the local Barnes & Noble to scour the shelves for GRE prep resources. Everything you need to prepare, you can easily find online — and usually for free.

[Magoosh GRE Blog](#)

Magoosh provides new tips, practice questions, and study techniques on a regular basis. They've also created some [thorough overviews of the GRE](#). From [flashcards](#) to a [free study plan](#) to [math assistance](#), Magoosh is designed to prepare you for GRE test day.

[ETS](#)

ETS is responsible for the creation and grading of the GRE, so their website is an informative place to go for resources. They have lots of sample questions, study tips, and free resources available to you.

[Manhattan Prep](#)

Manhattan Prep offers a free practice test that's specially designed to be as similar to the real GRE as possible. They provide a way to mimic the “section adaptive format” (i.e., the questions increasing or decreasing in difficulty, based on your performance in the previous section.) Plus, after you take the practice test, you can review all of your answers, and see explanations for the correct answers.

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting at desks in a library, both focused on their laptops. The man in the foreground is wearing glasses and a light blue shirt. The woman in the background is wearing a white top. Bookshelves filled with books are visible in the background.

OTHER RESOURCES FOR STUDYING FOR THE GRE

If the free resources aren't cutting it, and you have the means to take your prep game up a notch, there's a paid prep course out there for you. Below, you'll find a list of the top-reviewed GRE study courses.

[Economist GRE Tutor](#)

The Economist offers both one-on-one chats with tutors as well as video tutoring sessions so that you can get more personalized help. They'll also grade and mark up your essays, so you can fine-tune your writing skills.

[Magoosh](#)

Magoosh is largely designed for those who self-study, those who learn best by watching videos, and those who are too busy for an in-person course. They also guarantee a five point increase on your score if you've taken the GRE before using their program.

[Manhattan Prep](#)

Manhattan Prep offers a wide range of courses, from private tutoring to on-demand options.

[Kaplan](#)

Kaplan offers a diverse selection of resources: everything from online courses to one-on-one tutoring. Kaplan also offers the Official Test Day Experience — you get to take a practice GRE test at a real testing center.



ONLINE VS. IN-PERSON GRE PREP COURSES

If you're going to pay money for a GRE prep course, you need to choose one that best fits your needs.

Self-motivated students who prefer to study on their own or one-on-one with a tutor should be fine with the online options. If you're a learner who needs the interaction of a classroom to reach your full potential, it's probably worth it to shell out the extra money for an in-person class.

Based on our research, most people find that online courses work best for them. They're flexible, offer the most variety in terms of study tools, save time and money, and typically provide one-on-one help (when needed).

If you're still not sure about which prep course is best for you, check out the following sites for more insight:

- [Crunch Prep](#)
- [Reviews.com](#)

None of the free or paid resources mentioned are endorsed by WVU in any way



IS THE GRE REQUIRED FOR GRAD SCHOOL? — A GRE FAQ

Is the GRE required?

Not necessarily. If you're applying to graduate school in the humanities, then the GRE is most likely required. The best way to find out is to peruse the program's website or contact the program director.

For example, at West Virginia University, you can [search by program](#) to find out if the GRE is necessary. Also, here is a quick list of some [WVU programs that don't require the GRE](#).

If you're applying to law school or medical school, you shouldn't take the GRE. Instead, you should look into taking the [LSAT](#) or [MCAT](#). Some business schools require the [GMAT](#), but some are now also accepting the GRE.

How much does the GRE cost?

The cost of the test can vary, so visit the [ETS website](#) for the latest information. Also, if you have to travel a long distance to take the test at an approved testing site, the cost will go up considerably.

How do I sign up to take the test?

Go to the [ETS website](#), and follow the instructions.

When should I take the GRE?

If you're currently in college, it's probably best to take the GRE before you graduate. This is because your brain is in good test-taking shape, and you'll find it easier to do well on the test — even if you don't have as much time to prepare as someone who is not in school. If you don't do as well as you want to, you can always retake the test. This won't impact your transcript or chances of admission to the graduate school of your choice.

If you haven't been in school for a while, it's really up to you when you take the test — but obviously, it's best to take it before your graduate school's application deadline. If you want to give yourself time to retake it (if necessary), it's best to take the test at least a month before the deadline. Keep in mind that scores take 10-15 days to be sent to universities.

Where can I take the GRE?

You must take the GRE at an [approved testing center](#).

What kind of score should I be shooting for?

It depends on the school you're applying to, the program that you're interested in, and the scores of the other students who are applying to similar programs. As vague as that sounds, it's tough to get more specific without knowing your specifics.

Do I have to take the test on a computer?

Unless you live in a country [without computer-based testing centers](#), you have to take the test on a computer. Staring at a screen for four hours is no easy task, which is why it's so important to take practice tests that simulate the GRE as often as possible.

What are the GRE Subject Tests?

The GRE is a general examination of your intellectual abilities. If you want to show schools what you can do in a specific subject — such as physics, psychology, and mathematics — the GRE Subject Tests are for you. They're computer-delivered and only offered at specific times.

Note: The subject tests don't replace the general test, but schools will accept them, and they can help you stand out in the application pool. You can find more information about the subject tests on the [ETS website](#).



PUT YOUR GRE RESULTS TO GOOD USE: WVU WELCOMES YOU

WVU offers a variety of graduate degree programs to suit your needs and career goals. At WVU, we're dedicated to equipping tomorrow's changemakers to make a difference. As a top-ranked R1 institution, we integrate excellence and compassion into every facet of our community.



Here are a few ways to learn more about all that WVU has to offer:

WVU Resource Library

WVU's Resource Library contains a comprehensive list of downloadable guides and digital resources — all related to earning a graduate degree at WVU.

[Visit the Resource Library](#)

The Summit Ahead

The Summit Ahead is a weekly blog that helps make the journey from considering graduate school to enrolling in a graduate program easier by publishing content that will be helpful to you as you figure out if, when, and where, to pursue your next degree.

[Visit the Blog](#)

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