

## **GRE – Frequently Asked Questions**

The GRE is the exam of choice for students looking to pursue a master's degree abroad in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines and for students looking to go abroad for a Ph.D. Although, in recent times, the GRE has gained popularity among B-schools as well. The GRE is scored on a scale of 340 points and a score of 320 puts you in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile. Percentiles are ranking systems, which means that if you score in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, then your score is better than 90% of test-takers.

My students are consistently among the top scorers and it gives me immense joy to know that I have played a part in writing their success story. There are various aspects about the GRE that you should be aware of and I will try my best to give comprehensive answers to all your questions. So let us have a detailed discussion about the GRE examination:

### **What is the GRE?**

The GRE stands for Graduate Record Examination and it is taken by aspirants who are planning to go for master's programs abroad, especially technical programs. The GRE is also required for applications to various Ph.D. programs in USA and in other countries as well.

### **Which organization conducts the GRE?**

The GRE is owned by a U.S. based organization known as ETS (Educational Testing Service).

### **What is the pattern of the GRE?**

The GRE has three sections, viz. Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA), Quantitative Reasoning and Verbal Reasoning. The AWA section requires you to write 2 essays, the Issue Task, which is an opinion-based essay and the Argument Task, which is a critical essay. There are two Quantitative Reasoning and Verbal Reasoning sections as well, in addition to an unscored experimental or research section which can be either quantitative or verbal.

The experimental section can appear anywhere in the exam and will be unidentified, which means that you will not know whether you are attempting a scored section or an experimental section. In contrast, the research section is always identified and placed at the end of the exam. Each quantitative section has 20 questions and lasts for 35 minutes, whereas each verbal section also has 20 questions but lasts for 30 minutes. Following is a tabular representation of the format of the GRE:

<b><u>Section</u></b>	<b><u>Questions</u></b>	<b><u>Time (minutes)</u></b>	<b><u>Estimated Time Per Question (minutes)</u></b>
AWA (Issue Task)	1	30	30
AWA (Argument Task)	1	30	30
Verbal #1 / Quant #1	20	30 / 35	1.5 / 1.75
Quant #1 / Verbal #1	20	35 / 30	1.75 / 1.5
<b>Optional Break (10 minutes)</b>			
Verbal #2 / Quant # 2	20	30 / 35	1.5 / 1.75
Quant #2 / Verbal #2	20	35 / 30	1.75 / 1.5

Experimental	Unspecified	Unspecified	Unidentified and can appear after any section
Research	Unspecified	Unspecified	Identified and always appears at the end of the test

### How is the GRE scored?

The GRE is score on a scale of 340 points, with 260 being the lowest possible score and 340 being the highest. The Quantitative and Verbal Reasoning sections carry 170 marks each. The AWA section is scored separately on a scale of 0 to 6, wherein the Issue Task and the Argument Task are each scored on a scale of 0-6 points in half-point increments and finally, their average score is taken. Following is a break-up of the scoring pattern of the GRE:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Min Score</u>	<u>Max Score</u>	<u>Scoring System</u>
Analytical Writing Assessment	0.0	6.0	In 0.5-point increments
Quantitative Reasoning	130	170	In 1-point increments
Verbal Reasoning	130	170	In 1-point increments

The first quant section and the first verbal section are always of a medium difficulty level and the GRE is adaptive between sections. This means that if you do well in the first quant / verbal section, then the second section will be tougher than the first one. If you perform badly in the first section, then the algorithm will give you a penalty and you will get an easy second section. As we have already seen, there are 40 scored quant and 40 scored verbal questions split into two sections on the GRE. Each question on the GRE carries one mark, which means that whether a question is easy or difficult, it carries the same weightage and there are no brownie points for solving difficult questions.

Let's try to understand how the scoring works a little more in detail. First of all, we need to understand how the questions are graded on the GRE by their level of difficulty:

<b>Level of Difficulty</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Classification</b>	Easy	Easy / Medium	Medium	Hard	Hard

Another way of looking at the table given above is:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Difficulty of Questions</u>
Easy	1-2
Medium	2-3
Hard	4-5

As you can see, there is a significant overlap between the easy and medium sections, which means that neither section is particularly difficult to solve, but the questions in the hard section are considerably tougher.

Now that we have a fair idea of how the questions are graded, let's see how the algorithm works in the exam and how it rewards or penalizes you depending on your performance:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>	<u>Performance (number of correct answers)</u>	<u>Bonus / Penalty</u>	<u>Section</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>
Quant #1	Medium	0-6	-4 to -5	Quant #2	Easy
		7-13	-		Medium
		14-20	-		Hard
Verbal #1	Medium	0-6	-4 to -5	Verbal #2	Easy
		7-13	+2 to +3		Medium
		14-20	+4 to +5		Hard

From the table given above, you can see that the verbal scoring has penalties to be avoided and bonuses to be earned, but in the quant scoring, there are no bonuses, only a penalty for doing poorly in the first section. Therefore, in order to avoid these penalties and gain the bonuses in the verbal section, you must answer at least 7 questions correctly in the first sections of quant and verbal.

### **How much do I need to score on the GRE?**

A score of more than 320 on the GRE is considered sufficient to apply to top-tier universities, whereas a score between 310 and 320 will also get you admission into a few good colleges. Many universities with technical courses give more importance to your quant score, whereas for other courses, the importance to your quant and verbal scores is given in a fairly even manner. Following is an illustration of the percentiles different GRE scores will put you in:

<u>Score</u>	<u>Percentile</u>		<u>Analytical Writing Assessment</u>	
	Quant	Verbal	Score	Percentile
170	96 <sup>th</sup>	99 <sup>th</sup>	6.0	99 <sup>th</sup>
169	95 <sup>th</sup>	99 <sup>th</sup>	5.5	98 <sup>th</sup>
168	93 <sup>rd</sup>	98 <sup>th</sup>	5.0	92 <sup>nd</sup>
167	90 <sup>th</sup>	98 <sup>th</sup>	4.5	81 <sup>st</sup>
166	89 <sup>th</sup>	97 <sup>th</sup>	4.0	57 <sup>th</sup>
165	86 <sup>th</sup>	96 <sup>th</sup>	3.5	39 <sup>th</sup>
164	84 <sup>th</sup>	94 <sup>th</sup>	3.0	15 <sup>th</sup>
163	82 <sup>nd</sup>	93 <sup>rd</sup>	2.5	7 <sup>th</sup>
162	79 <sup>th</sup>	90 <sup>th</sup>	2.0	2 <sup>nd</sup>
161	76 <sup>th</sup>	88 <sup>th</sup>	1.5	1 <sup>st</sup>
160	73 <sup>rd</sup>	86 <sup>th</sup>	1.0	1 <sup>st</sup>
159	70 <sup>th</sup>	83 <sup>rd</sup>	0.5	1 <sup>st</sup>
158	67 <sup>th</sup>	80 <sup>th</sup>	0.0	1 <sup>st</sup>
157	64 <sup>th</sup>	76 <sup>th</sup>		
156	60 <sup>th</sup>	73 <sup>rd</sup>		
155	56 <sup>th</sup>	68 <sup>th</sup>		
154	53 <sup>rd</sup>	64 <sup>th</sup>		
153	49 <sup>th</sup>	60 <sup>th</sup>		
152	45 <sup>th</sup>	54 <sup>th</sup>		
151	41 <sup>st</sup>	51 <sup>st</sup>		
150	37 <sup>th</sup>	46 <sup>th</sup>		

**For how long is the GRE score valid?**

Your GRE score will remain valid for a period of 5 years from the date of your exam.

**How many re-attempts are allowed for the GRE?**

There is no limit on the total number of times you that you can take the GRE. However, you cannot take the GRE more than 5 times in any 12-month period and there must be a gap of at least 21 days between any 2 attempts.

**What are the documents that I need to carry with me for the exam?**

The only document that you need to carry to the examination hall is your passport and a print-out of the e-mail confirmation of your exam slot sent to your registered e-mail ID by ETS. You must carry your ORIGINAL passport. This is very important because if you do not carry the original passport, the invigilators will not allow you to take the test and you will not be given any refund of the examination fee either.

**Is the GRE a computer-delivered test or a paper-delivered test?**

The GRE is available both in the computer-delivered and the paper-delivered formats. The computer-delivered GRE is an adaptive test, whereas the paper-delivered GRE is not. Moreover, the computer-delivered GRE is vastly more popular than the paper-delivered one. Consequently, in this article, I have primarily discussed about the computer-delivered GRE.

**How often is the GRE conducted?**

The computer-delivered GRE is available multiple times a month throughout the year. You will have to check the available dates at a centre near you and book a date that is suitable for you. On the other hand, the paper-delivered GRE is available only three times a year.

**How can I book the GRE?**

You can book the GRE by visiting the official website of ETS and creating an account there. Subsequently, you can login to your account, check the available dates at your chosen test centre and proceed to book the exam.

**Where can I take the GRE?**

The GRE is available at test centres designated by ETS in various cities across the world. You can find a centre near your location on the official ETS website.

**What is the exam fee?**

The registration fee to take the GRE is \$205.

**In how many days will I get the result?**

For the computer-delivered GRE, the unofficial scores of your Quantitative Reasoning and Verbal Reasoning sections are displayed on the computer-screen at the end of your test. The official scores of your GRE, including the Analytical Writing Assessment, Quantitative Reasoning and Verbal Reasoning, are made available 10-15 days after you take the exam. On the other hand, if you take the paper-delivered GRE, your test results may take up to 6 weeks to be declared.

**For how long do I need to prepare for the GRE?**

It will take you around 3 months to prepare for the GRE if you follow a proper study plan and dedicate 2-3 hours to study every day. If your work timings are hectic and you are not able to dedicate enough time to practice, then it may take longer depending on your study plan.

**How do you train for the GRE?**

I will ask you to take a diagnostic mock-test before we start classes and I will help you prepare a study plan based on your current level of conceptual understanding. We will have classes 2-3 times a week depending on how well you are able to follow the study plan and how much time you are able to devote to solving questions on a daily basis. You will also need time to learn words as there are several questions in the GRE Verbal Reasoning section that require the use of complex vocabulary. I will give you a study plan to learn words on a daily bases and you should ideally dedicate one hour every day to learning new words. Moreover, I will monitor your progress based on bi-weekly mock-tests and give you feedback to strengthen your weak areas. Additionally, I will ask you probing questions to help you uncover your biases and assumptions, thereby increasing your timeliness and accuracy.

**Where do you conduct classes for the GRE?**

I conduct online classes for the GRE using platforms such as Skype, Google Hangouts, Zoom, etc.

**What preparation material should I buy to study for the GRE?**

You can buy the Official Guide GRE to study concepts and practice questions. The 5 lb. Book of Practice Problems by Manhattan Prep is also an excellent resource for solving questions and learning new words. Moreover, if you enrol for my GRE classes, I will mail you preparation material that I have compiled after extensive research and we will use that material in class and for practicing questions. To solve mock-tests, you can use the official tests provided by ETS or you can use mock-tests provided by other test prep companies. Various organizations such as Manhattan Prep and Kaplan Test Prep also offer high-quality GRE mock-test with detailed analysis and explanations.

I hope that I have answered most of your questions regarding the GRE and that you have a good amount of clarity about the structure of the exam, how to prepare for it and where your score is applicable.