

Block **1**

GRE Overview in 20 minutes

The GRE isn't an IQ test, nor is it a measure of your worth as a human being or a predictor of your ultimate success in life. The GRE is designed to assess your ability to excel in grad school by sizing you up in three areas.

- » **Work ethic:** How hard you're willing and able to work to achieve an elusive academic goal — in this case, performing well on the GRE — reflects your work ethic. Graduate schools consider this to be a measure of how hard you'll work in their programs.
- » **Study skills:** How well you can master some basic study skills and be able to process and retain new information.
- » **Test-taking ability:** How well you can perform on a test, under pressure, which is a separate ability from being able to answer the questions. Exams are *ubiquitous* (appearing everywhere) to grad school, so you need to prove that you can take one without folding under pressure.

This book can guide you in the first area, but it's mostly up to you. As a study guide, however, this book shows you how to achieve in the second and third areas, enabling you to study more effectively and efficiently and improve your overall test-taking skills. By knowing the material and taking the practice tests, you establish a foundation for doing well on the GRE. And usually, if you know what to do and how to do it, you might find yourself working a little bit harder. In this way, this book helps you further in that first area.

In this chapter, I discuss what you need to know about signing up for the GRE, the GRE's structure, some test-taking strategies, and the GRE's scoring system. With this guidance, you're better equipped to avoid surprises that may throw you off your game.

Signing Up for the GRE

When you sign up for the GRE, you have to decide whether to take the test in a testing center or at home. If you need accommodations or financial assistance, the GRE has a process you need to understand and follow. After walking you through some tips for both of these options, this section explains how to sign up for the test.

Choosing when and where to take the test

You can take the GRE at a testing center or at home. Because the computerized GRE is administered to individual test-takers, testing centers tend to have few seats, and those seats fill up quickly during peak admission deadline months (April and November). If you're planning to take the GRE in a testing center (as opposed to at home) around these months to get your test scores in on time, schedule your test early and secure your ideal time slot. You can always reschedule, but the last thing you need is an inconvenient time or location. Before at-home testing was available, I had a student wait until the last minute to schedule his exam, and he had to drive from Phoenix to Tucson (about 120 miles) to take his GRE and get his scores in on time. He called me during his drive, and we reviewed math formulas, but this wasn't an ideal way to ramp up for the test.

At the time of this writing, the at-home GRE test is an option. You will have to submit proof that you're not set up to cheat. ETS provides detailed requirements when you sign up, but anti-cheat measures include taking a video of your room and using software that ensures no other app is open on your computer. This may be invasive, but ETS has to make sure you're not stealing an advantage with your at-home setup. You also have to use a small whiteboard or laminated sheet for your scratch work, along with a dry-erase marker for your scratch notes, instead of the traditional pencil and paper that you get at the testing center.

Some students prefer the testing center so there are no home-based distractions (such as family, dog, or phone notifications). On the other hand, at-home testing ensures you can grab a time that works best for you, rather than selecting from the remaining open time slots at the testing center. Give it some thought and go with what works best for you.

Applying for accommodations

If you need an accommodation or financial support, the folks at ETS are usually accommodating as long as you give them a heads-up. Following is a brief list of special circumstances and how to obtain assistance for each.



REMEMBER

» **Learning disabilities:** These disabilities refer to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and other related or similar conditions. To find out whether you qualify for accommodations or a disabilities waiver of any sort, contact ETS Disability Services, Educational Testing Service, P.O. Box 6054, Princeton, NJ 08541-6054; phone 866-387-8602 (toll free) or 609-771-7780 (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time), fax 609-771-7165, www.ets.org/gre, or stassd@ets.org.

Qualifying for accommodations is an involved process that takes time, and gathering the required documentation may require significant effort on your part. If you have a qualifying disability, act sooner rather than later to find out what's required and when you need to submit your request and documentation.

» **Physical disabilities:** ETS tries to accommodate everyone. Folks who need special arrangements can get Braille or large-print exams, have test-readers or recorders, work with interpreters, and so on. You can get the scoop about what ETS considers to be disabilities and how the disabilities can change the way you take the GRE in the *Supplement for Test Takers with*

Disabilities. This publication contains information, registration procedures, and other useful forms for individuals with physical disabilities. To get this publication, send a request to ETS Disability Services, P.O. Box 6054, Princeton, NJ 08541-6054. Or better yet, head to www.ets.org/gre and click the Test Takers with Disabilities or Health-Related Needs link for all the info you need to know, along with contact information if you have questions or concerns.

» **Financial difficulties:** Until you ace the GRE, get into a top-notch graduate school, and come out ready to make your first million, you may have a rough time paying for the exam. However, fee waivers are available. Note that the waiver applies only to the actual GRE fee, not to miscellaneous fees such as the test-disclosure service, hand-grading service, and so on. Your college counselor can help you obtain and fill out the appropriate request forms. (If you're not currently in college, a counselor or financial aid specialist at a nearby college or university may still be able to help you. Just call for an appointment.)

Registering for the test



REMEMBER

If you plan to take the GRE at a testing center, sign up early so you can choose the day, time, and place that work best for you. The time-slot availability varies per testing center, so if one testing center doesn't have a time slot that works for you, you may be able to try another nearby testing center, or you can schedule the test for home.

To sign up for the GRE, see the current *GRE Information and Registration Bulletin* (available through most college admissions offices), register online at www.ets.org, or register via phone by calling 800-473-2255. You can also check the GRE testing center locations and available time slots at www.ets.org.



TIP

To get into the right mindset, take at least one practice test at the same time of day that you plan to take the real thing. (Check out the practice test in Block 4.) If you're used to eating or relaxing at a certain time each day, make sure these tendencies don't sneak up on you during the exam. A recurring theme of this book is to make the exam and testing experience as familiar as possible, so that you're used to it and it's almost no big deal. (See Block 5 for more on gearing up for exam day.)

Knowing What to Expect on the GRE

On the morning of the exam, there's no such thing as a pleasant surprise. This section helps you avoid these surprises so you know exactly what to expect on exam day. This way, you can focus on the GRE in a more relaxed and confident frame of mind. Confidence comes from being prepared, and the last thing you want is to show up rushed and stressed *before* starting the exam.

Following the exam-room rules

If you take the GRE at a testing center, you must bring certain things and leave other things behind in order to be allowed into the testing room. Here's what you need to get together the night before the exam.

» **Photo ID:** Your identification needs three key elements.

- A recognizable photo
- The name you used to register for the test
- Your signature

Usually, a driver's license, passport, employee ID, or military ID does the trick. A student ID alone isn't enough (although it works as a second form of ID in case something's unclear on your first one). Note that a Social Security card or a credit card isn't acceptable identification.

» **Water and a snack:** You may want a refreshment before you start the exam, so bring a bottle of water and a light snack, such as an energy bar or a granola bar. If you're like me, you'll have a to-go cup of coffee. Avoid snacks high in sugar, simple carbohydrates, or fats.

» **Map or directions:** Know in advance where you're going. Map your directions, and it doesn't hurt to check the satellite view so you can see where to park. You could drive to the testing center a few days before to check out the drive time, parking, fees, and so on. If you're taking public transportation, find out where and when you need to board the bus or train, how long the ride is, how much it costs, and where you get off.

One student had to take the test at a center in the middle of a downtown area. She had checked out the area on a Saturday, when the streets were empty and parking was clear. But her exam was Monday morning, when the streets were jammed and the parking was taken. Naturally, she wasn't expecting this, and it was an extra stressor that morning.

Another option is Uber or Lyft. When Google Mapping the route to plan your trip, be sure to set the ride time to *the morning of the exam* so the trip time reflects the traffic. It doesn't hurt to plan on being there 30 minutes early, so if your driver or friend is late or doesn't know the roads, you have a time cushion.

» **Comfortable clothes:** Dress in layers. Testing centers can be warm, or more typically, cold. Shivering for hours won't help your performance. Dress in layers so you can be comfortable regardless of how the testing center runs the A/C.

» **Authorization voucher from Educational Testing Service (ETS):** If you pay with a method other than a credit/debit card or have a disability or require certain testing accommodations, ETS provides an *authorization voucher*. Not everyone gets this voucher, but if you do, be sure to bring it with you on the day of the test.



TIP

Just as important as knowing what to bring to the testing center is knowing what not to bring. Leave these things at home or in your car:

» **Books and notes:** Forget about last-minute studying. You aren't allowed to take books or notes into the testing center. Besides, if you don't know the material by that time, cramming won't help.

» **Calculator:** You aren't allowed to use your own calculator, but an on-screen calculator is available during the math sections of the exam. One nice thing about the on-screen calculator is that it features a button that transfers the number from the calculator field to the answer space. Your handheld calculator won't do that.

» **Friends for support:** Meet them after the exam. However, having a friend drop you off and pick you up isn't a bad idea, especially if parking is likely to be a problem, such as at a downtown testing center.

» **Phones, tablets, or other electronics:** Any electronic device, including your phone or iPad, is strictly prohibited. You can bring these to the testing center, but they stay in a locker while you're taking the GRE.

» **Scratch paper (at the testing center):** You aren't allowed to bring in your own scratch paper; the testing center provides it for you. If you run low during the test, request more from the proctor. Although you have plenty of room to do calculations and scribbling, your scratch paper stays at the testing center when you're done.

» **Scratch paper (at home):** Note that if you take the GRE at home, you're not allowed to use paper of any kind, or pens or pencils for that matter. Plan ahead and pick up an ETS-approved small whiteboard or laminated sheet to write on, along with an erasable marker and eraser. At the end of the exam, you'll hold the erased whiteboard or sheet up to the camera to show the proctor that all your notes have been erased.

If the thought of bending these rules to give yourself an extra edge on the test even enters your mind, banish that thought. Cheating on the GRE simply doesn't work, so don't even consider it. They're on to you. When you get to the testing center, and before you begin your test, the proctors separate you from anything that you can possibly use to cheat, including your phone, wristwatch, water bottle, jacket, and hat. On top of that, you're monitored by a camera while taking the test. Any semblance of privacy goes right out the window. How would you cheat anyway? You can't copy all those vocabulary words or write all the math formulas on anything accessible during the test. Besides, the GRE tests your critical-reasoning and problem-solving skills more than your memorization skills.



REMEMBER

If you test at home, the GRE has controls in place to keep you honest. ETS monitors everything from the software on your computer to the electronics in your room. Be careful, and make sure you follow the rules — even a misunderstanding could cost you your score. Refer to the full set of rules on the At Home Testing page at www.ets.org.



WARNING

Someone caught cheating can be banned from taking the test for up to ten years! In the world of college education, that's nearly a lifetime.

Surveying each section of the GRE

Standardized tests tend to bring on the chills. Telling someone you have to take the SAT, ACT, or GRE usually gets the same response as saying that you need to have your wisdom teeth pulled. However, with this book, the GRE isn't such a chilling experience, and breaking it down to its component parts makes it more manageable and less threatening.

Table 1-1 provides a quick overview of what's on the GRE. The essay is always first, but the multiple-choice sections may be in any order.

TABLE 1-1 GRE Breakdown by Section

Section	Number of Questions	Time Allotted
Analyze an Issue	1 essay	30 minutes
Math (2 sections)	27 questions	47 minutes
Verbal (2 sections)	27 questions	41 minutes
Total Time		1 hour, 58 minutes



REMEMBER

At nearly two hours plus time spent checking in, the GRE challenges your stamina as much as your ability to answer the questions. No matter how solid your math and verbal skills are, you have to maintain your focus for the whole stretch, which isn't easy on a challenging task such as this. If you need to build your test-taking stamina, complete the blocks in this book so they add up to two-hour sessions. If you have extra time after completing this *GRE 5-Hour Quick Prep For Dummies*, you can take one or two free, timed practice tests online at www.ets.org/gre/test-takers/general-test/prepare/powerprep.html.



TIP

The GRE allows you to skip questions and return to them later, within that section. When you reach the end of a section, the GRE displays a review screen that indicates any unanswered questions. If you have time remaining in the section, return to these questions and answer them as well as you can. This feature is nice because you can knock out the easy questions first before spending time on the hard ones. (See “Understanding General Test-Taking Strategies” later in this chapter for more details about managing your time and flagging questions for review.)

Math question types

So what types of questions can you expect on the GRE? On the Math sections, you’ll see the following types of questions mixed throughout the test:



REMEMBER

» **Multiple-choice with exactly one correct answer:** You know a multiple choice question has only one answer because the instructions tell you to pick one answer and the answer choices are marked with an oval.

» **Multiple-choice with one or more correct answers:** Other GRE questions go overboard with multiple-choice. You can select more than one answer, and you have to get them exactly right: A missed answer or an extra answer costs you the point, and there’s no partial credit. When you have one of these questions, the instructions always tell you to pick *all* correct answers, and the answer choices are marked with a square.

Note that with the squares, there could be one right answer, or two or more, or even all of them. The correct answer will never be *none* of the choices, though: You always have to select *something*.

» **Fill-in-the-blank with the correct answer:** Some GRE math questions aren’t multiple-choice. Instead, you type the answer into a box. This process isn’t much different from a multiple-choice question: You still have to answer it, but instead of selecting your answer from a list, you type it into a box. Here are a few things you need to know about fill-in-the-blank questions on the Math section:

- **Rounding:** The question may ask for the answer to be rounded, such as to the nearest *whole number*, as in 13 instead of 12.8, or the nearest *tenth*, as in 3.7 instead of 3.72. Watch for these instructions, and remember that 0.5 rounds *up*. 4.135 rounds to 4.14, not 4.13.
- **Fractions:** If the answer is in the form of a fraction, such as 2 over 3, the answer entry will have two boxes, one over the other. Naturally, with this example, you’d place 2 in the top box and 3 in the bottom one. Note that an equivalent fraction is considered to be correct: If you type 4 over 6, or 20 over 30, you’ll get the answer right.
- **Possible answers:** Sometimes a question has more than one correct answer, commonly in algebra topics. If x can equal 2 or 3, simply enter *one* of the answers in the box, and don’t worry about the other answer. Your answer will be correct. Note that the question typically reads something like this: “What is one possible value of x ?”
- **Answers with percentage or dollar signs:** If the answer is \$42 or 37 percent, the question typically instructs you to disregard the percentage or dollar sign when entering your answer. The dollar sign is a no-brainer; simply enter 42 for \$42. But the percentage can trip you up. Remember that 37 percent as a decimal is 0.37, *not* 37. Pay attention to whether the question asks for the answer *as a percentage* so that you’re sure to answer correctly.
- **Calculator’s Transfer Display button:** The GRE on-screen calculator has a button marked Transfer Display. You click this button, and the computer transfers the number from the calculator’s display right into the typed answer box. Amazing! But be careful. To expand on the previous point about not mixing decimals with percentages, if the answer needs to be a percentage, and you correctly calculate 0.15, clicking Transfer Display places 0.15 in the

answer box, whereas the computer is expecting the equivalent answer of 15 percent, which you should enter as 15.

» **Data Interpretation (based on graphs):** A single set of graphs. These questions aren't harder, but they take more time to figure out because of the graphs.

» **Quantitative Comparisons:** These questions tend to be based more on the math concept than the math calculation. You review two quantities side by side and select the one that's greater. For these questions, you always see the same four answers choices:

- Quantity A is greater.
- Quantity B is greater.
- The two quantities are equal.
- The relationship cannot be determined from the information given.

Verbal question types

The GRE Verbal sections have a totally different set of question types. Here's what you'll see on these sections of the test:

» **Text Completion:** A Text Completion question consists of a sentence or paragraph with one, two, or three missing words or phrases, along with a short list of word or phrase choices to complete the text. If the text has one word missing, the list has five choices, while if the text has two or three words missing, each blank has a list of three choices.

Each choice gives the text a different meaning. Your job is to choose the word or words that best support the meaning of the sentence. If the text is missing more than one word, you don't get partial credit for choosing only one correct word.

Text Completion questions tend to have slightly easier vocabulary but are more challenging to interpret.

» **Sentence Equivalence:** A Sentence Equivalence question consists of a single sentence with exactly one word missing and a list of six choices to complete it. Your job is to select the two words that fit the sentence *and* mean the same thing, and, as with the Text Completion questions, you don't get partial credit for choosing only one correct word.

Sentence Completion questions tend to be easier to interpret but have more challenging vocabulary. The correct answers are *almost always* synonyms. If you find a word that works well but doesn't have a match, then you've likely found a *trap answer*.

» **Argument Analysis:** You've probably heard the expression, "You can't believe everything you hear." That's what Argument Analysis is all about: challenging arguments and plans that you read in books, magazines, newspapers, and on the web; examining assertions that you see on the nightly news; and questioning claims that you hear from politicians, not to mention sales pitches. Graduate schools expect you not only to read with understanding but also to apply critical thinking to sort out what's supported by the facts and what isn't.

An Argument Analysis question consists of a short passage and a single question, though it may also appear as one of the Reading Comprehension questions. An argument is easy to spot because it presents a plan or a conclusion based on a set of facts. Your job is to determine what new fact strengthens, weakens, or completes the argument.

» **Reading Comprehension:** Each Reading Comprehension question concerns a single passage that is sort of like a graduate-level journal article on a science, social sciences, or humanities topic that you've probably never considered before and never will again. The computer screen is split, with the passage on the left and a question on the right. You get the questions one at a



REMEMBER



TIP

time while the passage stays in place. The GRE presents each question in one of the following three formats:

- **Multiple-choice:** Choose one answer only.
- **Multiple-choice:** Choose one or more answers.
- **Sentence-selection:** Choose a sentence from the passage.

Note that the question types are mixed throughout the sections, so you may encounter them in any order. Sometimes the software groups similar questions at the beginning or the end. For example, if you're halfway through a Verbal section and haven't seen a Text Completion question, you will.

Understanding General Test-Taking Strategies

As I mention at the beginning of this chapter, the GRE is not an IQ test, a measure of your worth as a human being, or a predictor of your ultimate success in life — but it is, at least in part, a measure of how well you take tests. If you understand and practice the test-taking strategies outlined in this section, you'll build the test-taking skills you need to score well on the GRE.

Planning question time

Don't obsess over giving each question a specific number of seconds, but do know when to give up and come back to a question later. A good rule of thumb is about a minute per question. As long as you haven't exited the section, you can return to any question in that section. Simply call up the Review Screen by clicking Review, click the question you want to return to, and then click Go to Question. You can mark a question for review so it's flagged on the Review Screen, or you can write the question number down on your scratch paper. Just keep in mind that while you're on the Review Screen, the clock still ticks.

Eliminating wrong answers

If a question has you stumped for the right answer, you may still be able to identify answers that are obviously wrong. After you eliminate any wrong answers, you have a better chance of choosing or guessing the correct answer.

For pointers about choosing the right answer on the Verbal section, see Block 2. For help answering Math questions correctly, see Block 3.

Throwing a mental dart

A wrong answer and no answer count exactly the same towards your score, so you may as well pick an answer. If you're not sure how to answer a question, *don't get stuck on it*. Instead, throw a mental dart and take a guess:

- » Rule out as many obviously incorrect choices as possible, and guess from the remaining choices.
- » Write down the question number or mark it for review, so you can return to it before time runs out on that section.

- » Finish the section, even if it means throwing more mental darts (in other words, taking more guesses) near the end. Because a wrong answer counts the same as no answer, you may as well guess and take the chance of getting it right.

Note that this is not really your main strategy. You should be prepared and able to answer most, if not all, of the questions correctly. But you may see a question or two that you're not sure how to answer. If that happens, just guess.

Flagging and reviewing questions

To gain experience with the computerized GRE, take it for a test drive using the free practice exams from ETS. At the time of this writing, the practice exam package is web-based and features two actual GRE computer-based practice exams for you to become accustomed to the format of the real thing. Access the POWERPREP Online at www.ets.org/gre/test-takers/general-test/prepare/powerprep.html.



TIP

The ETS practice exams look and feel exactly like the real thing, except that they don't hold your life in the balance. Most buttons are self-explanatory, but the following Mark and Review buttons deserve special attention.

- » **Mark:** Mark enables you to flag the question for review, and when you click it, a small checkmark appears on the button. Click it again to remove the checkmark. That's all it does.

When you mark a question for review, if you haven't answered the question, be sure to guess an answer! That way, if you run out of time, you at least have a shot at guessing it correctly. (See the section "Throwing a mental dart" for more on this.)

- » **Review:** Review takes you to the Review Screen, which shows a list of questions in the section, along with which have been answered and which are flagged for review using the Mark button. Select any question from the list, click the Go To button (which is only on that screen), and you're back at that question. You can then review the question and change your answer if desired.

A common trap is marking every question that you have the slightest doubt on, intending to go back to it later. Problem is, when you've reached the end of the section, you have 16 questions marked and only four minutes to work on them! Be sure to prioritize what you truly want to go back to.

Take the computerized practice test from ETS not only to get a feel for the content and format of the questions but also to become accustomed to selecting answers and using the buttons to navigate.

AVOIDING THE EXIT OR QUIT OPTIONS

When you take the GRE, understand what these two buttons do and know you likely want to avoid them:

- **Exit Section:** This button ends the section and saves your essay or answers so you can proceed to the next section. After you click this button, you can't go back to change answers or return to unanswered questions in the section. Unless you're really sure you've proofread your essay as much as you can or correctly answered and reviewed all the questions, don't click Exit Section.
- **Quit Test:** This button ends the exam and cancels your scores. Don't use this one. If you feel like you're not doing well on the test, keep going anyway to get the practice. You've already paid to take the test, so it's only to your benefit. "Seeing or canceling your scores" later in this chapter explains a better way to cancel your scores.

Understanding Your GRE Scores

With the GRE, you receive three separate scores: Verbal, Math, and Analytical Writing. You drive home knowing your unofficial Verbal and Math scores (as explained in the following section), but you get your Analytical Writing score about two weeks later.

On the GRE, you can score a maximum of 340 points on the multiple-choice and 6 points on the essay. Here's the scoring range for each of the three sections.

- » **Verbal:** The Verbal score ranges from 130 to 170 in 1-point increments. You get 130 points if you answer just one question, but that won't help you much: You need to score as well as or better than most of the other test-takers to improve your chances of being admitted to your target school. Block 2 gives you the lowdown on the Verbal sections.
- » **Math:** The Math score also ranges from 130 to 170 in 1-point increments. Block 3 has more on the Math sections.
- » **Analytical Writing:** The Analytical Writing score ranges from 0 to 6, in half-point increments, with 6 being the highest. For more details about the essay, see Block 2.



REMEMBER

If a multiple-choice question requires two or more answers, you have to get all the answers correct: There is no partial credit. However, you don't lose points for a wrong answer, so if you're not sure, take a guess and return to the question later.

Understanding how Math and Verbal scores are calculated

Within each section, each question counts exactly the same toward your score: The more questions you get right, the higher your score for that section. An easy question is worth the same as a hard question. Because you can move back and forth among the questions within a section, one strategy is to skip around and answer all the easy questions first, then go back and work the hard questions. If you like this idea, *try it out on a practice test* before exam day.

The *second* Math or Verbal section becomes easier or harder based on your performance. For example, if you do extremely well on the first Math section, the GRE makes the second Math section harder. Even if you don't get as many right answers in the second Math section, your score will be good, and it'll definitely be higher than the score of someone who bombs the first Math section but gets them all right in the second one. GRE scoring accommodates for the difficulty level of the questions in the second section.



WARNING

The strategy of bombing the first Math and Verbal sections in order to answer more questions correctly on the respective second sections is *not* a good one, and you'll end up with a low score. The exam doesn't score you based solely on the number of correct answers: It scores you based on how hard it thinks you worked and how well you studied to understand complicated material. So if you do *great* on the first Math section, the exam thinks you've worked hard and studied well to prepare for the test and *ups* the difficulty level for the second Math section. If you don't answer all those questions correctly, that's okay: The questions are harder, and the exam has evaluated your skills. Conversely, if you *bomb* the first Math section, the exam thinks either you're not good at math or you haven't worked hard and studied well for that section, so it *drops* the level for the second Math section. If you answer most of those questions correctly, it doesn't help your score much because those questions are easier.

Checking your score

If you score close to 340, you did great! If you score closer to 260, not so much. But wait — your score is right in between! Did you pass? Did you fail? What does it mean? Well, you can't really tell much about your score out of context. What does 320 mean? It all goes by a percentile ranking. To download the complete percentile table, visit www.ets.org, click GRE Tests, and search for “percentile ranking.” As of this writing, here are some highlights:

- » A raw score of 165 is typically a 96th percentile ranking in the Verbal and an 84th percentile ranking in the Math.
- » A raw score of 160 is typically an 85th percentile ranking in the Verbal and a 70th percentile ranking in the Math.

Basically, with a range of only 40 points per section among 500,000 GRE-takers per year, give or take, each point counts for a lot. How well you do is based on how well the other test-takers did. You need to ask your target school's admissions office what score you need to get in to that school — or, even better, what score you need for a scholarship! Once you're in your program (or you've landed your scholarship), your GRE score doesn't matter. Plus, I've had students who were already accepted to their schools but were retaking the exam for the scholarship.

Also, your exam score is only one part of the total application package. If you have a good GPA, a strong résumé, and relevant work experience, you may not need as high of a GRE score. On the other hand, a stellar GRE score can compensate for other weak areas.

Seeing or canceling your scores

Immediately after finishing the GRE, you have the option of either seeing or canceling your Verbal and Math scores. Unfortunately, you don't get to see your scores first. If you *think* you had a bad day, you can cancel, and your scores are neither reported to the schools nor shown to you. However, the schools are notified that you canceled your test. If you choose to see your score, you see it — minus the essay score — right away, but you can't cancel it after that.



How much do the schools care about canceled scores? Probably not much, especially if a strong GRE score (from when you retake the test 21 days later) follows the notice of cancellation. If you really want to know the impact of a canceled score, check with the admissions office of your target school. Each school weighs canceled scores differently. See the section “Using old scores” for more about what to do after canceling your GRE score.

Taking advantage of the ScoreSelect option

At the end of the test, you have the option of choosing which test scores to send to your target schools, assuming that you've taken the GRE more than once. You can send the most recent scores, scores from the past (within five years), or all your test scores. However, you can't pick and choose sections from different testing dates. For example, if today you did better in Verbal but last time you did better in Math, you can't select only those sections — you have to send the entire test. Select whether to send the scores of today's test, any previous test, or all your tests.

Your GRE score is good for five years after your testing date, so if you use ScoreSelect, you're limited to exams within the past five years.

Using old scores

What if you took the GRE a long time ago when you thought you were going to grad school and then opted to take a job or start a family instead? Well, if it was within the past five years, you're in luck (assuming you scored well). GRE scores are reportable for up to five years. That means that if you're pleased with your old score, you can send it right along to the school of your choice and say *adios* to this book right here and now. However, if you took the test more than five years ago, you have to take it again, so hold on to this book.