

GRE 101

College graduation doesn't necessarily mean the end of tests. Whether you're starting your career or enrolling in graduate school, you can be relatively certain that one way or the other, some sort of assessment will be required. It may be a personality test, a skill assessment, or a physical exam, but if you decide to apply to grad school, we can almost guarantee that you'll be taking an entrance exam!

The most commonly required admission test for grad school is the GRE, or Graduate Record Exam. Much like the SAT and ACT, the GRE is a broad assessment of your critical thinking, analytical writing, verbal reasoning, and quantitative reasoning skills — all skills developed over the course of many years. Some schools may also require you to take one or more GRE Subject Tests. The purpose of all of these, of course, is to help graduate schools decide if you've got the right stuff for their program.

Overview

The GRE is divided into three main sections. The first is the Analytical Writing section, which is always presented first. The other two sections are the Verbal and Quantitative sections and they may appear in any order and may include pretest and research sections with questions that are being considered for use in future tests. (Your answers on these won't count towards your score, but since you won't know which questions are legitimate and which aren't, you should treat every portion of the test as if it counts.) If additional areas are added in, the total time you spend testing may vary, but plan to set aside at least two and a half hours.

If you end up taking the paper-based version of the GRE, you should plan on spending a bit more time in the test center. The paper version has two verbal and two quantitative sections, both totaling an hour. Similar to the computer version of the test, the paper-based GRE may also include a pretest section, which adds another thirty minutes or so to your total test time

Most students take the computer-adaptive version of the test, meaning that for the verbal and quantitative portions, the test adapts the difficulty level of its questions each time you submit an answer. Each student starts out with questions of average difficulty. Each time you enter an answer, the computer scores it immediately, compares it with your preceding responses, and then presents a question suited to your level. If you answer correctly, the questions become more difficult. Incorrect answers result in the next question being slightly less difficult.

Analytical Writing

For the first part of the Analytical Writing section, you must read an paragraph on a general issue and then address that topic as you deem fit for the next 45 minutes. Your ability to support your views with sound reasoning and examples are key elements to completing this section well. You won't need to worry about bad handwriting either unless you're sitting for the paper test — this portion is completed on a computer via simple word processing software. In areas where computer-based testing is not available, this segment is handwritten, so make sure you bring plenty of sharpened pencils! (You can check availability of computer-based test centers at <http://etsis4.ets.org/tcenter/>.)

Similar to the first essay question, the second essay of the writing section asks you to read and then critique an argument. You'll need to consider the reasoning presented in the argument and then discuss whether you believe the argument is a good one or not. You don't need to agree or disagree with the statement — you just have to analyze it and convey your reasoning clearly through your written response.

Since this is a writing component, it's not computer-adaptive like the rest of the exam. You'll use a computer to complete it, but it won't "react" to your writing or attempt to score your essays. For this section, your scores are determined by real people, not computers.

Verbal section

Similar to portions of other exams you've probably taken, the Verbal section of the GRE includes things like sentence completions, analogies, antonyms, and reading comprehension questions. Its purpose is to test your ability to form conclusions from written materials, recognize relationships between concepts and words, and to determine relationships between different parts of sentences. Expect to answer 30 questions within 30 minutes on the computer version. On the paper version, there are two segments, each 30 minutes long and each with 38 questions.

Quantitative section

Refresh your math basics! The Quantitative section of the GRE tests high-school-level math. If you're a bit rusty, start honing your skills in arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis. This portion of the exam aims to test your skill at solving a variety of different math problems, as well as to analyze your ability to use quantitative reasoning. For the computer version, you'll need to answer 28 questions in 45 minutes, but on the paper version you'll have two 45-minute segments, each with 30 questions.

You'll probably notice similarities between the GRE and other tests you may have taken before you started college. You should prepare for this test much like you did the others, but don't feel daunted or intimidated just because it's a test for graduate school — you'll be fine! Additionally, if you don't expect to take the test until October 2006 or later, make sure you check out the changes that are coming to the exam format.

Taken from Petersons.com:

<http://www.petersons.com/common/article.asp?id=1875&path=gr.pft.advice&sponsor=1>

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