## Preparing for the GRE

When you apply to graduate school, you'll compile materials that help the admission committee learn about you, your goals, and your potential fit in their program. You'll likely submit a personal statement, letters of recommendation, and transcripts. Other application requirements vary widely from one program to anothereven within the same university. As you research the programs that interest you, one requirement you may see is the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test, a standardized test designed to evaluate verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and analytical writing skills.

If the GRE is a program requirement, fear not. It's true that standardized tests rarely win popularity contests. But verbal reasoning skills? You have strengthened those over years of study. Quantitative reasoning? Ditto. Analytical writing? Ditto again. So keep in mind that you're not starting from scratch. As you become familiar with the GRE test design, brush up on some concepts, practice with sample questions, and hone your testtaking strategies, you're building on an already-solid foundation.

## Prioritize ETS Resources

The official source for GRE information is the Educational Testing Service website, packed with information and free resources-and well worth the time to explore. For example, you'll find key information about test content, registration, and scoring. If you prefer a linear format, the Information Bulletin is a good option. If you prefer verbal explanations, you could watch a webinar.

After you gain a general understanding of the test, look for resources on more specific topics. These are among our favorites:

- Test prep video presentations
- Verbal and quantitative sample questions
- Math review and links to relevant Khan Academy videos
- Quantitative problem-solving strategies
- Analytical writing topic pool
- POWERPREP practice tests


## Consider Using Additional Materials

If you're looking for practice opportunities beyond the official ETS materials, you'll find abundant GRE books, websites, and apps. These are typically produced by for-profit companies, but some of their resources are free or low-cost. Here are a few examples:

- Manhattan Prep: 5 lb . Book of GRE Practice Problems ( $\sim 35$ list price, often available for less) This one may be our favorite non-ETS resource: build biceps and GRE confidence at the same time. It contains useful diagnostic tests with references to specific chapters full of practice questions and extensive answer explanations. And we think it weighs a little more than 5 lbs.
- Magoosh: quantitative and verbal diagnostic tests and sample essays (free)
- OpenStax: math textbooks (free)
- PrepScholar: vocabulary list (free)


## Prepare Strategically

So how might you put some of the above resources to use between now and test day? Effective test preparation looks different from one person to the next. But a general checklist may help you track your progress. Add, subtract, or adjust as needed!
$\square \quad$ Research the graduate programs you plan to apply to (Is the GRE required? Optional? Do they specify preferred scores or average scores of previous cohorts?)
$\square \quad$ Learn about the test design (format, length, section content)
$\square \quad$ Take a practice test for a baseline score estimate (Did you get the results your graduate program is looking for? If so, your preparation may be complete!)
$\square$ Take diagnostic quantitative and verbal tests for more specific assessment of topic knowledge
$\square$ Assess the results of the practice and diagnostic tests (Which topics and skills are strong and merit little additional review? Which topics and skills merit more attention? Make some notes!)
$\square$ Register for the actual test so that you have a specific goal and timeline (scores are available 10 days after testing and are typically valid for 5 years)
$\square$ Begin reviewing high-priority topics, including the least familiar topics from the diagnostic test (keep in mind that these priorities will evolve as you study!)
$\square$ Spend most of your study time doing practice problems, with these tips in mind:

- Complete problems all the way through (even when you're unsure!)
- Check your answer and, when wrong, try to understand the misstep on your own
- Check the answer explanation, if available, for concept reminders and reasoning clues

Practice test-taking skills and test-day strategies:

- Solve problems under a time constraint
- Use strategies such as prediction (verbal), estimation (quantitative), and process of elimination (Note: An on-screen calculator is available for the quantitative section, but mental math may be faster.)
- Analyze errors and look for ways to solve problems faster and more accurately

Take and analyze a free POWERPREP test under test-like conditions:

- Find a quiet space and an uninterrupted block of time
- Ensure you have no items available except those allowed during the actual exam, such as a computer and appropriate note-taking materials (refer to procedures for testing at home or at a test center to see what items are required and not allowed)
- Take breaks according to the test timing
- Practice stress-reduction strategies, such as taking deep breaths and remembering that your test results are only one part of your graduate school application, which tells a much bigger story!
- Assess your results for errors and patterns; assess your process to identify possible improvements to your test-taking and stress-reduction strategies

Take the GRE!

## Create a Schedule-Based Study Plan

How much time people spend studying for the GRE varies widely. But one thing varies a lot less: the temptation to procrastinate less-than-joyous tasks! Scheduling and tracking your study time can help.

You can begin designing a schedule by distributing your checklist steps between now and test day. A short preparation timeline may feel stressful, and a long one may lead to burnout. While no "right" timeline exists, taking one to two months to prepare is fairly common.

Once you have an overall timeline, decide how many days per week and minutes/hours per day are feasible to set aside, given your classes and other commitments. Then you can populate specific tasks into your reserved time blocks. Keep in mind that even small blocks of time can help you make progress. Have five minutes? You could answer and review a quantitative reasoning question, make up a sentence with a new vocabulary word, or brainstorm ideas for a writing prompt.

As you complete tasks, consider adding digital confetti or gold star stickers to encourage progress-tracking and motivation. Adjust your plan as needed to suit your evolving strengths and goals.

Creating a personalized schedule means that no two study plans look exactly alike. But to help prompt your brainstorming and planning, we're including a general sample of a four-week study plan:

|  | Sun | M | Tue | W | Thu | Fri | Sat |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| $\begin{gathered} \text { Week } \\ 1 \end{gathered}$ | 1 hr : ETS website orientation |  | 1 hr : quantitative diagnostic test/analysis |  | $1 \mathrm{hr}:$ verbal diagnostic test/analysis |  | 1 hr : writing review, practice essay |
| $\begin{gathered} \text { Week } \\ 2 \end{gathered}$ | 30 min: math review |  |  |  | $30 \mathrm{~min}:$ verbal practice questions | 2 hrs : full-length practice test |  |
| $\begin{gathered} \text { Week } \\ 3 \end{gathered}$ | 30 min : verbal and writing review |  | $30 \mathrm{~min}:$ verbal practice questions |  | $30 \mathrm{~min}:$ quantitative practice questions |  |  |
| $\begin{gathered} \text { Week } \\ 4 \end{gathered}$ | 30 min : math review |  |  |  | 30 min : final review of priority topics | 2 hrs: full-length practice test | $1 \mathrm{hr}:$ practice test review/analysis |

## Consult with a Learning Specialist

Whatever shape your plan takes, as a University of Oregon student, you are welcome to meet with us to discuss your GRE questions, review key concepts, and explore study plan ideas. We offer:

- up to two meetings with our Math and Science Learning Specialist (for general strategies, quantitative reasoning, test anxiety)-Kenyon Plummer, lplummer@uoregon.edu.
- up to two meetings with our Writing Learning Specialist (for general strategies, verbal reasoning, essay feedback)-Maile Speakman, mjsp@uoregon.edu.

To arrange a meeting, please email the learning specialist(s) you'd like to meet with. In your message, indicate that you'd like to discuss GRE preparation and include topics you'd like to cover. You'll receive a reply inviting you to schedule an appointment via Navigate.

We wish you all the best as you prepare!

