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By **Doug Pierce**

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**Cracking the**

# **GRE<sup>®</sup>**

**2016 Edition**

Doug Pierce

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# Part I

## Orientation

- 1 Introduction
- 2 General Strategy



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

What is the GRE? Who makes the test? What's a good score? The answer to these questions and many others lie within this chapter. In the next few pages, we'll give you the lowdown on the things you need to know about the GRE.



### Strategies Galore

In this book you'll find The Princeton Review's trusted test-taking strategies to help you crack the GRE.

## CRACKING THE GRE

For a lot of people, taking a standardized test such as the GRE usually engenders a number of emotions—none of them positive. But here's the good news: The Princeton Review is going to make this whole ordeal a lot easier for you. We'll give you the information you will need to do well on the GRE, including our time-tested strategies and techniques.

A few years back, the GRE was rather significantly revised. This “new” version of the test supposedly allows graduate schools to get a better sense of an applicant's ability to work in a post-graduate setting—a goal that is unrealistic indeed, considering that the people who take the GRE are applying to programs as diverse as physics and anthropology.

However, it's safe to say that neither GRE—new or old—is a realistic measure of how well you'll do in grad school, or even how intelligent you are. In fact, the GRE provides a valid assessment of only one thing:

The GRE assesses how well you take the GRE.

Got it? Even so, you still want to do well on the GRE, because you still want grad schools to take you seriously when they consider your application. With this in mind, you should cultivate several very important skills when you're preparing for the test, and each of them is attainable with the right guidance (which we'll give you), a strong work ethic (which you must provide), and a healthy dose of optimism. Who knows? Maybe after working through this book and learning how to crack the test, you'll actually look forward to taking the GRE.

So what exactly *is* this test you've heard so much about?



## WHAT IS THE GRE?

The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is a 3-hour, 40-minute exam that's used to rank applicants for graduate schools. The scored portion of the new GRE consists of the following sections:

- One 30-minute Analysis of an Issue essay
- One 30-minute Analysis of an Argument essay
- Two 30-minute Verbal Reasoning sections
- Two 35-minute Quantitative Reasoning sections

The Verbal Reasoning sections test your skills on three different types of questions:

- Text Completion
- Sentence Equivalence
- Reading Comprehension

The Quantitative Reasoning sections measure your prowess in four areas:

- Arithmetic and Number Properties
- Algebra
- Geometry
- Data Analysis

## WHY DO SCHOOLS REQUIRE IT?

Even though you will pay ETS \$195 to take the GRE, it is important to note that you are not their primary customer. Their primary customers are the admissions offices at graduate programs across the United States. ETS provides admissions professionals with two important services. The first is a number, your GRE score. Everyone who takes the test gets a number.

Applicants could come from all over the world and will certainly have an enormous range in academic and professional experience. How does one compare a senior in college with a 32-year-old professional who has been out of college working in a different industry for the past 10 years? A GRE score is the only part of the application that allows for an apples-to-apples comparison among all applicants.

The second service that ETS provides is mailing lists. That's right; they will sell your name. You can opt out, but when you sit down to take the test, ETS will ask you a whole bunch of questions about your educational experience, family background, race, and gender, as well as other biographical data. All of this information goes into their database. In fact, ETS is one of the most important sources of potential applicants that many graduate programs have.

Another reason for the GRE is that it ensures that most applicants to graduate school are qualified. It helps to weed out the people who might be considering grad school, but who can't get their act together enough to fill out applications. It is difficult for admissions committees to make a decision between a candidate with a 3.0 and a 3.2 GPA from drastically different schools and in two different majors. A GRE score, on the other hand, provides a quick and easy way for busy admissions offices to whittle a large applicant pool down to size. When you ask a program how important the GRE score is to the application, they may say, "it depends" or "not very" and that may be true as long as your score is in the top half. If your score is in the bottom half, however, it may mean that your application never gets seen.

So the GRE may have little relevance to any particular field of study you might be pursuing, but as long as it helps graduate programs uncover potential candidates, and as long as it is the only tool available to compare a diverse candidate pool, the GRE is here to stay.

## WHO IS ETS?

Like most standardized tests in this country, the GRE is created and administered by Educational Testing Service (ETS), a big, tax-exempt, private company located in New Jersey. ETS publishes the GRE under the sponsorship of the Graduate Record Examinations Board, which is an organization affiliated with the Association of Graduate Schools and the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States.

ETS is also the organization that brings you the SAT, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the National Teacher Examination (NTE), and licensing and certification exams in dozens of fields, including hair styling, plumbing, and golf.

## TEST DAY

The GRE is administered at Prometric testing centers. This company specializes in administering tests on computer. They administer citizenship exams, professional health certifications, dental exams, accounting exams, and hundreds of other exams on computer. As professional proctors, they are a particularly humorless lot. When you arrive at the center, they will check your ID, give you a clipboard with a form to fill out, and hand you a locker key. Despite the fact that they already have your information, you will be asked to fill out a long form on paper. This form includes an entire paragraph that you have to copy over—in cursive (they specify this)—that states that you are who you say you are and that you are taking the test for admissions purposes. This process will take you about 10 minutes, and you can complete it while you wait for them to call you into the testing room. The locker is for all of your personal belongings, including books, bags, phones, bulky sweaters,



### What to Take to the Test Center:

1. Your registration ticket
2. A photo ID and one other form of ID
3. A snack

and even watches. You are not allowed to take anything with you into the testing room.

When they call you into the testing room, they will first take a photo of you and, in some cases, fingerprint you before you go in. They will give you six sheets of scratch paper, stapled together to form a booklet, and two sharpened pencils with erasers. Then they lead you into the room where someone will start your test for you. The room itself will hold three or four rows of standard corporate cubicles, each with a monitor and keyboard. There will be other people in the room taking tests other than the GRE. Because people will be entering and exiting the room at different times, you will be provided with optional headphones.

## Test Day Tips

- Dress in layers, so that you'll be comfortable regardless of whether the room is cool or warm.
- Don't bother to take a calculator; you're not allowed to use your own—just the one on the screen.
- Be sure to have breakfast, or lunch, depending on when your test is scheduled (but don't eat anything weird). Take it easy on the liquids and the caffeine.
- Do a few GRE practice problems beforehand to warm up your brain. Don't try to tackle difficult new questions, but go through a few questions that you've done before to help you review the problem-solving strategies for each section of the GRE. This will also help you put on your "game-face" and get you into test mode.
- Make sure to take photo identification to the test center. Acceptable forms of identification include your driver's license, photo-bearing employee ID cards, and valid passports.
- If you registered by mail, you must also take the authorization voucher sent to you by ETS.
- Stretch, drink some water, go to the bathroom, and do whatever you need to do in order to be prepared to sit for this four-hour test.

## TEST STRUCTURE

While your test structure may vary, you should expect to see something like this when you sit down to take the exam:

The first section of the test collects all of your biographical information. If you fill this out, you will start getting mail from programs that have bought your name from ETS. In general, this is not a bad thing. If you don't want them to sell your name, or you don't want to spend the time answering their questions, you can click on a box that tells ETS not to share your information.



### More Online

For gobs of information about the GRE, check out [PrincetonReview.com/gre](http://PrincetonReview.com/gre)

Once all of that is done, you will begin your first scored section, the essays. Your two essays will be back to back. You have 30 minutes for each essay. Immediately after your second essay, you will get your first multiple-choice section. It may be math or verbal. You will have a 1-minute break between sections. Here is the structure of the test:

Section	Time	# of Questions
Biographical Information	+/- 10 minutes	—
Issue Essay	30 minutes	1
Argument Essay	30 minutes	1
Section 1	30 or 35 minutes	20
Break	10 minutes	—
Section 2	30 or 35 minutes	20
Section 3	30 or 35 minutes	20
Section 4	30 or 35 minutes	20
Section 5	30 or 35 minutes	20
Possible Research Section	Optional	Depends
Select Schools/Programs	5 minutes	Up to 4
Accept Scores	1 minute	—
Receive Scores	1 minute	—

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- You will see five multiple-choice sections, but only four will count. The fifth is an “experimental” section. It can come at any time after the essays. At the end of the exam, you will know, based on the number of math or verbal sections, if the experimental section was math or verbal, but you will not know which section will not count toward your score.
- Math sections are 35 minutes. There are 20 math questions in each section. If your experimental section is math, your test will be five minutes longer than someone whose experimental section is verbal.
- Verbal sections are 30 minutes. There are 20 verbal questions in each section.
- The 10-minute break always comes after the third section. You have a 1-minute break between each of the other sections.
- You may or may not get a research section. If you do, it will come last; it does not count toward your score, and it is optional.



- You must accept your scores and, if you choose, send your scores to selected programs prior to seeing your scores.
- If you choose not to accept your scores, neither you nor any program will ever see them.
- You may choose to send your scores to up to four graduate programs on the day of the test. This service is included in your testing fee.

## The Experimental Section

When most companies want to test a new product, they provide free samples, test it on animals, or pay for some user testing. Not ETS. ETS uses you as a guinea pig to test out new questions that they will later inflict on other test takers. You pay them to do their research and development, and you do it when you are at your most stressed. Thanks, ETS!

## Research Section

At the end of the test, you may also have an unscored research section. At the beginning of this section, you will be told that it is an unscored research section, and that it will be used only to help develop and test questions for the GRE. If you want to skip it, you have the option of skipping it. You may be offered some sort of prize to induce you to take it, but by that point in the test you will probably be exhausted. If you're offered a research section, just go ahead and decline, get your scores, and go home.

## The 10 Minute Break

You are given 1 minute between sections except after section three, when you get a 10-minute break. Go to the bathroom, splash water on your face, wave your arms around. You want to re-oxygenate your brain. The goal, as much as it is possible, is to hit your brain's reset button. When you sit back down for section four, you want it to be as if you are just sitting down at that computer for the first time that day. Your GRE test day is going to be a long and intense day, so be sure to take full advantage of break time.

## Accepting Your Scores

Before you see your scores, you will be given the opportunity to cancel your scores. There are very few reasons to do so. First, if you cancel your scores, you will never see your scores and you will have to go through the whole experience again, including paying an additional \$195 to take the test again. Second, GRE scores are curved. Most people believe that they are doing worse while taking the test than they actually are. Third, you can make use of the GRE *ScoreSelect*® service.



### Practice Like You Play

When you are tackling practice tests during your test preparation, be sure to mimic the real GRE and give yourself these timed breaks just like the real thing.