

How Is the GRE Scored?

The GRE scale may seem pretty arbitrary. After all, who has ever seen a test graded on a 130–170 scale? A range of 0–100, yes, but 130–170? Weird! Well, according to ETS, when they revised the GRE scoring back in 2011, they wanted to stick to three digits so that schools wouldn’t have to overhaul all the textbox entries that call for that specific number of digits. Fair enough. Also, to avoid confusion, ETS made sure the current scoring system didn’t overlap numbers with the old GRE scoring system.

The GRE scoring system makes up for the limited range (just 40 points!) by giving more significance to the extreme ends of the scale. For example, on the GRE, the difference between a score of 165 and a score of 170 will be the difference between being in the 96th percentile and being in the 99th percentile.

At the end of the day, you’re not going to be tested on these statistical nuances. The important thing to remember is that many admissions offices base their evaluations on a percentile score, which you’ll also receive as part of your score report.

Questions are static, but the GRE is adaptive

The GRE is adaptive, but not in the way some other tests are. Many tests (such as the GMAT, for instance) will adapt to your proficiency level. The more questions you get right, the harder they’ll get; if you get more questions wrong, they’ll get easier and easier. The GRE isn’t adaptive in this way. Question difficulty within a section doesn’t change depending on whether you answer questions correctly. However, your performance on the first GRE Verbal and Quantitative sections will determine whether the next sections of the same type are easier or more difficult than the first.

Questions have random levels of difficulty

Questions might be static, but that doesn’t mean a section can’t become progressively harder or easier, theoretically. There is no order of difficulty on the GRE. The first question can be the hardest and the last question the easiest.

Each question is weighted the same

Each question is basically weighted the same. So the question that seems like it will take fifteen minutes to answer is worth the same as the question you can answer in fifteen seconds.

How Difficult Is the GRE?

Simply put, the GRE can be a very difficult test, especially if you’ve been out of school for a while. Typically, this tends to hold truer for the GRE Quantitative than for the GRE Verbal or AWA. So let’s break it down by category.

How hard is GRE Quantitative?

The truth is, as soon as you leave college, the likelihood of using math diminishes drastically. Compounding the “rusty math-brain syndrome” is the fact that GRE math is different from the math you probably did in college; it’s much closer to the math you did in your junior year of high school. That’s not to say it’s easy. It’s generally much