

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

Planning to appear for GRE soon? May be you wish to leave the country in a couple of years and achieve your goals.

What is GRE?

Students planning to pursue Masters of Science, commonly known as MS, take the GRE - **Graduate Record Examination**. Earlier it used to be a standardized computer adaptive test which means the difficulty of your next question will depend on the answer of your current question.

Example: Suppose the first question is of moderate level. You answer it correctly; the next question will be a little difficult as compared to the previous one and so on. As soon as you get an answer wrong, the next question will be relatively simpler.

Post July 2011, the GRE pattern has changed and the exam is no longer a computer adaptive test.

Note: If you answer a difficult question correctly, your score shoots up by a good margin and if a simple question is answered incorrectly, you lose out by an equal margin.

Myth: You should solve the first few questions (the first 8-9 questions) taking as much time as required and get them right. This is not true. It depends on the level of questions. You should not blindly follow this logic and lose too much time so that you do not have enough time in the end to solve the remaining questions which may turn out to be easier. It's "suicide".

Must do: You SHOULD attempt all the questions even though you might have to mark an answer without spending enough time on it because an incomplete paper can cost you a loss of significant points.

How many types of GRE's are there?

GRE may be of two types:

- General test:

The General Test takes into account verbal reasoning, quantitative ability, and analytical writing skills. Almost all the universities accept the General test score and usually everyone opts for this test. It takes place round the year and you can choose your date according to your convenience.

- Subject test:

The Subject Test measures the achievement in a particular subject area or extensive background in that discipline. These tests are in the following areas: Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature (English), Physics and Psychology. It is conducted on a fixed date for everyone, more on the terms of an entrance exam. Mostly none of the engineers go for this.

Structure of the GRE :

The computer-based General Test is composed of 3 sections:

- Verbal Reasoning (English)
- Quantitative Reasoning (Math)
- Analytical Writing sections (Essays)

Test Pattern :

Section	Revised Content	Pattern & Changes from Previous Pattern
Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Data Sufficiency- Data Interpretation & Statistics- Problem Solving- 2 Sections (20 Q's/35 Minutes per section)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Calculator Allowed- No Choice for Problem Solving- Statistics part of new pattern- 2 Sections instead of 1 but less time
Verbal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reading Comprehension- Sentence Correction- 2 Sections (20 Q's/30 Minutes per section)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Stress on Comprehension and Less on Etymology- 2 Sections instead of 1- Less Questions but more time as it involves RC
AWA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Issue essay: 30 minutes*- Argument Essay: 30 Minutes**	Time reduced for Issue essay by 15 minutes
Test Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- No Computer Adaptive Test- Skipping Questions Permitted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Skipping questions are NOW ALLOWED- Scores not based on solving the first few questions correctly
Scoring Scale	130 -170 with 1 point Increment.	Earlier it was 200-800 with 10 point increment
Score reporting to University	5 Years Validity	No change

* For the Issue task, two essay topics will be presented and you will choose one. In this type of essay, you usually agree and disagree with the author. There is no need to take a stand. You can state the pros and cons of the topic.

** The Argument task does not present a choice of topics; instead, one topic will be presented. In this type of essay, you should disagree with the author. As the name suggests, you should argue with the author's views.

After all the verbal and quant sections, a research section follows. This section is like essay writing on a topic presented to you. However, it is NOT evaluated towards the final score. Hence, a lot of people skip this section and proceed to the last part of checking their score.

Note: The AWA section is always first, followed by two Verbal sections and two Quantitative sections, in any order. Basically, you will have two verbal sections and two quantitative sections and will contribute towards your final score. You will not be informed prior to or during the exam about which section will be taken into account and hence you must give cent percent effort in all the sections.

Eventhough the exam pattern has changed, most part of the preparation remains the same. Since Antonyms and Analogy aren't a part of the new syllabus, learning/memorising the word is NO MORE important. Still, it is always advised to have strong vocabulary as sections like Sentence Completion demand you to be extremely quick with the words and its meaning/connotation.

When should I take the GRE?

GRE takes place round the year. It is not like any other exam where the dates will be announced in the newspaper or any official website. So, anytime you feel you are in a position to go and take your best shot, GO FOR IT.

GENERALLY, engineering students prefer to take GRE in their third year either in March or August. No superstitious connections but some logical reason behind it. GRE is an exam which requires you to be tension-free and relaxed. Most engineers remain free during these two months as they aren't occupied with any work like exams, submissions, etc. There are a few advantages of choosing March over August as enumerated below :

Reasons to choose March as the GRE month:

1. March is the ideal time to take GRE because you get one more chance to take the exam in August if suppose you don't score well in the March attempt.
2. Giving GRE in March won't clash your deadlines with final year project, placements (some companies do come in August-September) and most importantly you get more time for your Application Process for USA.
3. You can take TOEFL without any pressure, if your GRE is over in March.
4. If you're planning to appear for MBA entrance exams as well, you get sufficient time.
5. You might have to bunk a lot of lectures for the GRE preparation. This can seriously affect recommendations from your teachers as attendance is the prime parameter. Giving the exam in August leaves you with very less time to 'butter' them and make things turn your way.

Problems with choosing a date..

Often, the slots are already full and you don't get your desired date. So, book your date well in advance. Some prefer to wait till the last minute, and once they are confident about their preparation, they start searching for the nearest available date. This can be a problem as you might not get a single date and have to wait for a long time which in turn affects your preparation leading to a BAD day.

Note: Please choose your date wisely and carefully. Although you're allowed to postpone the date, you will only be making the ETS richer by \$50 or an additional \$190 if you reschedule it within 3 days of the exam.

Should I choose end of the month as my GRE day as questions will be repeated?

It's a big misconception amongst a lot of students. Questions don't repeat at all and even if they do, they repeat in the quant section with a maximum of only one or two questions, which anyway are extremely simple to solve or you must have already solved.

PREPARATION for the exam:

Getting started..

It varies with each and every individual on how fast he/she finishes studying for GRE and is set to take it. But in general, you need around 50 days, give or take a few. As per the old pattern - it starts with learning words from what you call 'flash cards' - the popular of the lot - which have around 4000 words. If you're pretty consistent with reading newspapers, you definitely have an edge, considering you've probably come across a handful of words already.

In short, be quick with the meanings and its usage of the words.

A Month or so to the GRE..

Once you are done with a considerable number of words, start solving the BigBook. Get the book from one of your friends who have already taken the GRE. If you still don't get it, download it from the internet. It is advisable to solve the big book on the screen as you have to take the exam on the computer. It makes you familiar with it.

It has got two papers in every test which follows the oldest pattern of GRE (38 questions in 30 mins for verbal; 30 questions in 30 mins for quant). Try solving the paper with the old pattern (rather than adding your own touch-ups and increasing time or other such weird experiments). This will definitely improve your speed. Overall, there are 27 tests (54 papers). Try solving atleast 20 papers before you get bored (can't blame you for that). Give a week to the BigBook and solve minimum 2 papers a day. Of course, more wouldn't hurt.

Along with the BigBook, solve BARRONS. It's a simple book but teaches you a lot. Solve the quant section completely. It's fun to solve and is useful. It has 5 papers with the new pattern. Solve them gradually.

Another fortnight to go..

In the last 20-22 days, start taking the adaptive exams on the computer. There are hundreds of tests if you search on the internet and one can't solve all. Hence, there are some standard tests one needs to solve. Cambridge, Princeton, Kaplan (very important) and PowerPrep (GRE level) are those.

Cambridge is an elementary test and it helps you get acquainted with the adaptive exams on the screen. You need a maximum of two days.

Then comes Kaplan, the most important of all the above mentioned tests. It has 6 practice tests each for Verbal and Quant and 3 full length tests. Kaplan Quant is really important and helpful, so be serious with it. Make sure you evaluate all your tests properly. *Taking a test is not a big deal; learning from it is definitely one.*

Solve Princeton simultaneously along with Kaplan. Finish it off in a week or 10 days.

Last 5 days..

Study for your AWA (essay) 4-5 days prior to "the" day. Read some essays from Barron's, the method to write it and take any topic from these tests and write it down. Exchange the essays amongst your friends so you'll get an idea how well they write. Solve the PowerPrep tests completely along with the essays to get an idea of your patience level. Take our word, full test is quite long!

Oh! Almost forgot about Quant..

Quant at the first glance might seem simple but it isn't so simple as to be neglected. Engineers can give less time for math as they'll be familiar with many of the topics, but remember that the split score matters a lot, so a minimum of 750 (old pattern) or 160 (new pattern) is like a 'must' for engineers. The rest are advised to solve as many questions as they can. Solve some renowned professors notes, Kaplan book (not the adaptive computer exam) and any other notes as and when you get time during your preparation.

It definitely varies with every student on how they got about Quant, but the one mentioned above is how it is generally followed.

Expert advice..

- Flash cards (GRE words) need to be revised thoroughly.
- Revising the Quant formulae.
- Read Newspapers for an hour every day to stay in touch with long Reading Comprehensions (RC).
- Keep your cool. It's a test of nerves more than anything.