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Cracking the

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PREMIUM

2020 Edition

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Ellen Reed, Production Manager

Suzanne Lee, Designer

The Princeton Review

110 East 42nd St, 7th Floor

New York, NY 10017

E-mail: editorialsupport@review.com

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The material in this book is up-to-date at the time of publication. However, changes may have been instituted by the testing body in the test after this book was published.

If there are any important late-breaking developments, changes, or corrections to the materials in this book, we will post that information online in the Student Tools. Register your book and check your Student Tools to see if there are any updates posted there.

Editor: Aaron Riccio

Production Editors: Liz Dacey and Emily Epstein White

Production Artist: Deborah Weber

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CRITICAL CONNECTION



TIME-SAVING TIP

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.

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.



Strategies Galore

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

The GRE 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 the GRE is not 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 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; 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?



Fun fact: It's possible your GRE score could come in handy if you are interested in law school. Check a school's admissions page for more info, as some schools are (or are considering) accepting GRE scores in lieu of LSAT scores. Your grad school options may have opened up even further!

WHAT IS THE GRE?

The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is a 3-hour, 45-minute exam that's used to rank applicants for graduate schools. The scored portion of the 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 \$205 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. 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.



A few countries outside of the United States, such as Australia and China, charge slightly more than \$205 for the administration of the GRE. You can find the most recent pricing at www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees.

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 schools require the GRE is that it ensures that most graduate school applicants 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. 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 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 Praxis, 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. 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, 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.



What to Take to the Test Center:

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

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.

Once all of that is done, you will begin your first scored section, the essays. The 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:



More Online

For tons of information about the GRE, check out
PrincetonReview.com/grad/gre-information

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
Section 2	30 or 35 minutes	20
Break	10 minutes	—
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 will either be mixed in with the other sections as an unidentified “experimental” section or as a final, identified “research” section.
- 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.
- For the computer-delivered test, the optional 10-minute break comes after the second multiple-choice section. For the paper-

based test, the 10-minute break comes after the second Analytical Writing section.

- 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.

A Note on the Paper-Based GRE

The computer-delivered GRE is the standard format for test takers. The paper-based GRE is far more rare and offered up to only three times a year. But if you want to learn more about the paper-and-pencil test, visit [ETS.org](https://www.ets.org).

The Experimental Section

ETS administers the experimental section to gather data on questions before they appear on real GREs. Because there are only two scored math sections and two scored verbal sections, you'll know by that last section whether the experimental section is math or verbal. However, you will have no way of knowing in advance which multiple-choice section is experimental, so you need to do your best on all of them. Don't waste time worrying about which sections count and which section does not.

Research Section

Instead of an experimental section, you may find that the last section of your test is marked as an unscored research section. This section is used only to help develop and test questions for the GRE.

and you have the option to skip it if you want. 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, you must choose your own ending: decline, get your scores, and go home, or forge ahead with the research section in the name of science, or something.



Practice Like You Play

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

The 10-Minute Break

You are given 1 minute between sections except for the second multiple-choice section, 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 the third multiple-choice section, you want to feel 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 them. There are very few reasons to do so. First, if you cancel your scores, you will never see them and you will have to go through the whole experience again, including paying an additional \$205 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.

ScoreSelect®

ScoreSelect® allows you to select which scores get sent to which schools. Options for sending scores depend on whether you are sending scores on the day of your test or after your test day. On test day, you have the following options for sending scores:

- **Most recent.** This option sends the results of the test you just took.
- **All.** This option sends all your scores from the last five years.

If you send your scores to schools after test day, you have even more options. After test day, your options are:

- **Most recent.** This option sends the scores from the test you took most recently.
- **All.** As above, this option sends all your GRE scores from the last five years.
- **Any.** Send just the scores you want to send. You can send one score or multiple scores. For example, if you have taken the GRE three times and your second score is your best, you can send just that score.

When you use *ScoreSelect®* after your test day, the score report that is sent to schools shows only the scores that you choose to send. The report does not indicate how many times you have taken the GRE, nor does it indicate that you have sent, for example, your scores from the second time you took the test and you took the test a total of three times.

ScoreSelect® is another reason to think twice before cancelling your scores. Provided that you send your scores after your test date, your

schools will never know that you didn't do as well as you would have liked or even that you took the test more than once if you don't want them to know.

Sending Additional Score Reports

On the day of your test, you can send your scores to up to four schools using the *ScoreSelect®* test day options. These score reports are included as part of the \$205 fee that you pay to take the GRE. If you wish to send reports to additional schools, you'll need to request that these additional reports be sent after your test day. Each additional report costs \$27. The fastest way to send additional score reports is to order them online using your *My GRE®* account that you create when you register to take the test.

WHAT DOES A GRE SCORE LOOK LIKE?

Every GRE score has two components: a scaled score and a percentile rank. GRE scores fall on a 130–170 point scale. However, your percentile rank is more important than your scaled score. Your percentile rank indicates how your GRE scores compare to those of other test takers. For example, a scaled score of 150 on the GRE translates to roughly the 43rd percentile, meaning that you scored better than 43 out of every 100 test takers—and worse than the other 57 percent of test takers. A score of 152 is about average, while scores of 163 and above are very competitive. Get the latest reported scores and percentiles at PrincetonReview.com and at www.ets.org/gre, the official ETS website for the GRE.



Plenty o' Practice Tests

Head over to your Student Tools to gain access to online practice tests that include detailed score reports. These score reports can help guide and focus your test preparation time.

The Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning sections are each reported on a scale of 130–170 in 1-point increments. For each section, a raw score is computed; this raw score is the number of questions you answered correctly. Each raw score is then converted to a scaled score through a process known as equating, which accounts for minor variations in difficulty between different test administrations as well as for differences in difficulty that occur as a result of the adaptivity of the test. These scaled scores are what are listed on your score report and lead to the percentile ranks referred to above.

The essays are scored a little differently than the Verbal and Quantitative sections. Each essay receives a scaled score of 0–6, in half-point increments, that is the average of two scores for that essay. The scores of the two essays are then averaged to produce a single score that is reported for the Analytical Writing section. The corresponding percentiles for this section are as follows:

Score	Analytical Writing Percentile
6.0	99
5.5	97
5.0	93
4.5	78
4.0	54
3.5	35

3.0	14
2.5	6
2.0	2
1.5	1
1.0	<1

In other words, a score of 5 on the essay portion of the GRE means you performed better than 93 percent of test takers.

Do Your Research

GRE scores are used in a number of different ways. The first step in figuring out how to prepare for the GRE is figuring out how your scores will be used. The only way to do that is to contact the programs to which you plan to apply. Larger programs may have many of these questions already spelled out on their websites. Smaller programs, on the other hand, may not want to be pinned down to specific answers, and the answers may change from year to year. If you are applying to a smaller program, you will have to dig a bit deeper to get answers to some of these questions. Here are some things you should be asking.

- 1. What scores do I need to be accepted?** The answer to this question is always “It depends.” The GRE is not the only part of the application, and the quality of the applicant pool varies from year to year. Nevertheless, you need to have a target score so you can figure out how much work you need to put in between now and test day. If the school doesn’t have or won’t quote you a cutoff score, see if you can at least find out the average scores for last year’s incoming class.
- 2. Will you look at all parts of my score?** Some programs may care about your math score, but not your verbal score, and vice versa. Many programs don’t use the essay scores at all. If a program doesn’t care about your math or your essay score, then you know exactly where to put your prep time.

3. Are scores used for anything else? If your scores are to be used for placement or for scholarship, it would be good to know that now, while you still have time to prepare.

4. How important are my scores? In many ways, the importance of scores is a function of how competitive the program is. The scores may not matter much, but if it is a competitive program, every number will count. You might be confident that a master's program in English literature won't evaluate the GRE the same way as a PhD program in physics. But in a situation where most applicants may have high verbal scores, a strong math score might help you stand out.

5. What do you do with multiple scores? Depending upon your first scores, you may have to take the test a second time. It would be good to know, however, the importance of that first score. If a school is going to take the highest score, then you can relax a bit on test one, knowing that you can take it again if you need to.



Grad School Info

Our Princeton Review homepage has tons of informational articles about graduate school. Head over to PrincetonReview.com/grad-school-advice and check them out! Also check out the GRE Insider at the end of this book for even more admissions guidance and need-to-know info.

If you plan your testing schedule well, you can send only your highest scores to the school using *ScoreSelect®*. Remember, however, that you must send your scores after your test day to use the *select any* option for *ScoreSelect®*.

In any case, remember that the GRE is only one part of an application to grad school. Admissions officers also consider many other factors, including:

- undergraduate transcripts (that is, your GPA, relevant courses, and the quality of the school you attended)
- work experience
- any research or work you've done in that academic field
- subject GREs (for certain programs)
- essays (Personal Statements or other essays)
- recommendations
- interviews



Premium Content

Head over to your Student Tools for tons of pre-graduate school information and guidance.

The GRE can be a significant part of your graduate school application (which is why you bought this book), but it certainly isn't the only part.

SCHEDULING A TEST

You can schedule a test session for the GRE by calling 800-GRE-CALL or by registering online at www.ets.org/gre. Registering online is the easiest way to register. As part of the registration process, you'll create a MyGRE® account. The account will also allow you to see your scores online and make use of the GRE Diagnostic Service, which will give you some insight into your

performance. You can also register through a local testing center (the list of centers is available online). After you get the list of local testing centers from ETS, you can call the one nearest you and set up an appointment. You can also call ETS at 609-771-7670 or email them directly at their website to ask any general questions you have about the GRE.

Computer Testing Facts

- You can take the GRE almost any day—morning or afternoon, weekday or weekend. Appointments are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. You may take the test only once every 21 days. In addition, you cannot take the test more than five times in a continuous rolling 12-month period. Make sure to take your test early enough to book a second test date, if needed, before your applications are due.
- There's no real deadline for registering for the test (technically, you can register the day before). But there's a limited number of seats available on any given day and centers do fill up, sometimes weeks in advance. It's a good idea to register in advance, to give yourself at least a couple of weeks of lead time.
- The GRE is technically simple. Selecting an answer and moving to the next question involves three easy steps. All you need to do is point the mouse arrow at the answer and click, then click the “Next” button, and then click the “Answer Confirm” button to confirm your choice.
- Because the test is administered on a computer, it is impossible to write directly on the problems themselves (to underline text, cross out answer choices, and so on). Thus, all of your work must be done on scratch paper. Although the amount of scratch paper you may use is unlimited, requesting additional paper takes time. You should be efficient and organized in how you use it; learning to use your scratch paper effectively is one of the keys to scoring well on the GRE.

- When you've finished taking the test, you will be given the option to accept or cancel your scores. Of course, you have to make this decision before you learn what the scores are. If you choose to cancel your scores, they cannot be reinstated, and you will never learn what they were. No refunds are given for canceled scores, and your GRE report will reflect that you took the test on that day and canceled (though this shouldn't be held against you). If you choose to accept your scores, they cannot be canceled afterward. We suggest that unless you are absolutely certain you did poorly, you accept your score.
- You will receive your Verbal and Math scores the instant you finish the exam (provided that you choose not to cancel your score), but your Analytical Writing scores and "official" percentile scores for all three sections won't get to you until a few weeks later. If you registered for your test online, you'll be able to access your official scores through your *My GRE*® account.
- ETS offers the GRE® Diagnostic Service (grediagnostic.ets.org) as a free option for test takers to have a limited review of their tests. This service allows you to see the number of questions you missed and where they fell on the test, but you cannot review the actual questions. The diagnostic service also claims to let you know the difficulty of the questions you missed, but the scale used—a simple scale of 1 to 5—is not particularly useful.

Accommodated Testing

If you require accommodated testing, please see the Appendix at the end of this book. It contains information on the forms you must fill out and procedures you must follow to apply for accommodated testing. Be sure to start that application process well in advance of when you want to take your test, as it can take many weeks to complete.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is chock full of our tried-and-true GRE test-taking techniques, some of which, at first, might seem to go against your gut instincts. In order to take full advantage of our methods, however, you'll have to trust them and use them consistently and faithfully.

Make sure to use the techniques on all of the practice problems you do and to thoroughly review the explanations for all of the questions—even the ones you get right. That way, the techniques will become second nature to you, and you'll have no problem using them on test day.

Practice for Technique

There is a finite amount of GRE material available in the world. Once you have used it all up, that's it. You don't get any more. Many people will work through the books, doing problems, looking for answers. When they get a problem right, they are happy. When they get a problem wrong, they are frustrated, and then they go on to the next problem. The problem with this approach is that you can churn through lots and lots of questions without ever actually getting better at taking the GRE. The techniques you use and the way you solve a problem are what matters. The results just tell you how you did. When you are practicing, always focus on your approach. When you get good at the techniques, your score will take care of itself. If you focus on just the results, you do nothing more than reinforce the way you are taking the test right now.



Trust in the Techniques

One thing that makes The Princeton Review's test prep so unique is our collection of powerful test-taking strategies. Trust them and use them faithfully, and you won't be disappointed!

Additional Resources

In addition to the material in the book, we offer a number of other resources to aid you during your GRE preparation.

With your purchase of this book, you gain access to many helpful tools in your Student Tools, which is the companion website that goes with this book. There you will find four full-length practice GRE exams, assorted videos in which Princeton Review teachers discuss GRE question types and strategies, plus tons of useful articles, essays, and information. Go to

PrincetonReview.com/cracking to register.

PrincetonReview.com/gre also contains a ton of useful information on graduate programs, financial aid, and everything else related to graduate school.



Extra Prep in Your Student Tools

Follow the steps on the Get More (Free) Content! page ([this page](#)) to access the Student Tools and find a bunch of great content designed to boost your test prep.

Real GREs

The practice problems in this book are designed to simulate the questions that appear on the real GRE. Part of your preparation, however, should involve working with real GRE problems. Working with real questions from past GRE exams is the best way to practice our techniques and prepare for the test. However, the only source of real GREs is the publisher of the test, ETS, which so far has refused to let anyone (including us) license actual questions from old tests.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that you obtain *POWERPREP® II* software for the computer-based GRE revised General Test. You can download the *POWERPREP® II* software directly from ETS's website. It contains two full-length adaptive General Tests. In addition, you can download the PDF *Practice Book for the Paper-delivered GRE® General Test*. While the format of the paper-based test is different from the computer-based test, the practice questions contained in the PDF are relevant and useful.

ETS also publishes *The Official Guide to the GRE® General Test*. This book can be found online or at most major book stores. Some of the practice questions in that book, however, are identical to the questions in the PDF, which is a free download.

Whatever you're using, always practice with scratch paper. As you prepare for the GRE, work through every question you do as if the question is being presented on a computer screen. This means not writing anything on the problems themselves. No crossing off answers, no circling, no underlining. Copy everything to scratch paper and do your work there. You shouldn't give yourself a crutch in your preparation that you won't have on the actual test.

About the Practice Tests in This Book

At the end of this book, you'll find two full-length practice tests. Please note that these paper-and-pencil tests do not adapt to your performance like the real GRE. The actual GRE and the online

practice tests in your Student Tools are computer-adaptive; that is, the number of questions you answer correctly on your first scored Math or Verbal section determines whether you'll get an easy, medium, or hard second section of that topic later in the test. A paper-and-pencil test, of course, is not adaptive by section. Scoring a paper-based test like the computer-adaptive GRE would require you to stop and score each section during the test in order to determine the difficulty level of your second section. But even this would not truly get you closer to the computer-adaptive test experience, as you would be stopping to calculate scores—which, of course, is not something that happens during the real test. Much like the real exam, you won't know the difficulty level of the practice test questions. But you can still use the paper-and-pencil practice tests in this book as opportunities to practice with the question types and strategies, as well as work on your test-taking stamina.



Go Online!

Remember to check out your Student Tools to gain access to our computer-based practice tests for the GRE. Follow the steps on the Get More (Free) Content! ([this page](#)).

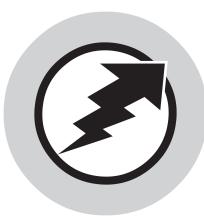
MAKING A SCHEDULE

The GRE, like other standardized tests, is not a test for which you can cram. While you may have fond memories from your college days of spending the night before the midterm with a pot of coffee and a 500-page economics textbook, that strategy won't be as effective on the GRE. Why? Because, by and large, the GRE is a test of patterns, not of facts. This book does its best to reveal those patterns to you, but without sufficient time to practice and absorb the information in this book, your GRE score is not likely to

improve. Thus, you should allow an adequate amount of time to fully prepare for the GRE.

You should allow yourself somewhere between 4 and 12 weeks to prepare for the GRE. Obviously we can't know exactly where you are in terms of your starting score, your target score, and the amount of time you can devote to studying, but in our experience, 4 weeks is about the minimum amount of time you should spend, while 12 weeks is about the maximum. There are a number of reasons for these suggested preparation times. Attempting to prepare in fewer than 4 weeks typically does not allow sufficient time to master the techniques presented in this book. As you'll see, some of our approaches are counterintuitive and take some getting used to. Without adequate practice time, you may not have full confidence in the techniques. Additionally, vocabulary is part of the Verbal section of the GRE, and it's difficult to substantially increase your vocabulary in a short period of time. Finally, as mentioned before, the GRE contains a number of patterns, and the more time you spend studying the test, the better you will be at recognizing these patterns.

On the other hand, spending an inordinate amount of time preparing for the GRE can have its downside as well. The first concern is a purely practical one: there is a finite amount of GRE practice material available. Budgeting six months of preparation time is unproductive because you'll run out of materials in less than half that time. Finally, spreading the material out over a long period of time may result in your forgetting some of the lessons from the beginning of your studies. It's better to work assiduously and consistently over a shorter time period than to dilute your efforts over a long time frame.



Premium Content

You're in luck! Since you purchased the Premium Edition, we have created a few schedules for you already! Go online to find our 4-, 8-, and 12-week GRE preparation schedules and select the one that is right for you.

STAY UP TO DATE

We at The Princeton Review will continue to learn all about the GRE as it evolves. As you prepare for your GRE, make sure you periodically check both our website at PrincetonReview.com and the GRE website at www.ets.org/gre for the latest updates and information about the test.

WANT EVEN MORE PREP?

The Princeton Review offers an assortment of test preparation options: classroom and online courses plus private and small group tutoring. We also have a bunch of other helpful GRE preparation books, including *Math Workout for the GRE*, *Verbal Workout for the GRE*, *1,027 GRE Practice Questions*, and *Crash Course for the GRE*. When it comes to test preparation for the GRE, we've got you covered.

Now that we have that introduction out of the way, let's dive in and talk strategy.



Even More GRE Titles!

For extra practice, check out other GRE titles from
The Princeton Review.

Summary

- The GRE is a 3-hour, 45-minute exam broken down into six sections and used by graduate schools to rank applicants.
- The GRE tests your mathematical, verbal, and writing abilities.
- The importance of your GRE score varies from program to program. Schools also consider your undergraduate record, your personal essays, and your relevant experience.
- GRE tests can be scheduled online at www.ets.org/gre.

Chapter 2

General Strategy

This chapter contains some basic advice to get you into The Princeton Review mindset. You'll learn some core test-taking strategies to help you maximize your score. In addition, you'll see some of the different question formats you will probably encounter on test day.

CRACKING THE SYSTEM

Although ETS claims that the GRE measures “critical thinking, analytical writing, verbal reasoning, and quantitative reasoning skills that have been acquired over a long period of time,” that isn’t quite true. Again, what the GRE really measures is how well you take the GRE. The first step to bettering your GRE score is realizing that you can improve your score, in many cases substantially, by familiarizing yourself with the test and by practicing the techniques in this book.

I Thought the GRE Was Coach-Proof

ETS would have you believe that its tests are coach-proof, but that is simply untrue. In many ways, taking a standardized test is a skill and, as with any skill, you can become more proficient at it by both practicing and following the advice of a good teacher. Think of your GRE preparation as if you were practicing for a piano recital or a track meet; you wouldn’t show up at the concert hall or track field without having put in hours of practice beforehand (at least we hope you wouldn’t!). If you want to get a good score on the GRE, you’ll have to put in the necessary preparation time.



Practice Your Way to Perfection

The GRE is not a test of intelligence. With practice, you can conquer the GRE.

Why Should I Listen to The Princeton Review?

Quite simply, because we monitor the GRE. Our teaching methods were developed through exhaustive analysis of all of the available GREs and careful research into the methods by which standardized

tests are constructed. Our focus is on the basic concepts that will enable you to attack any problem, strip it down to its essential components, and solve it in as little time as possible.

Think like the Test Writers

You might be surprised to learn that the GRE isn't written by distinguished professors, renowned scholars, or graduate school admissions officers. For the most part, it's written by ordinary ETS employees, sometimes with freelance help from local graduate students. You have no reason to be intimidated.

As you become more familiar with the test, you will also develop a sense of "the ETS mentality." This is a predictable kind of thinking that influences nearly every part of nearly every ETS exam. By learning to recognize the ETS mentality, you'll earn points even when you aren't sure why an answer is correct. You'll inevitably do better on the test by learning to think like the people who wrote it.

Cracking the System

"Cracking the system" is our phrase for getting inside the minds of the people who write these tests. This emphasis on earning points rather than pinpointing the correct answer may strike you as somewhat cynical, but it is crucial to doing well on the GRE. After all, the GRE leaves you no room to make explanations or justifications for your responses.

You'll do better on the GRE by putting aside your feelings about real education and surrendering yourself to the strange logic of the standardized test.

COMPUTER-ADAPTIVE TEST

As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, the GRE is a computer-adaptive test, or CAT for short. During the test, you will see two scored Math and Verbal sections, and the difficulty of the second scored section of either subject is determined by your performance on the first

scored section. Depending on your performance in the first scored section of a subject, you will receive an easy, medium, or hard second section. Obviously enough, to achieve a high score on the GRE you need to get as many questions correct as you can, which means that the highest scores will result from performing well on the first scored section and the hardest of the second sections. However, the difficulty of an individual question plays no role in determining your score; that is, your score is calculated by your performance on the entirety of the scored sections, not just a handful of the hardest questions on a given section.

GENERAL STRATEGIES

Step 1

1. Take the Easy Test First

Within a section, each question counts equally toward your score. There will inevitably be questions you are great at and questions you don't like. The beauty of the GRE is that there is no need to bow to Phoenician numerical hegemony; you can answer questions in any order you like. The question you can nail in 25 seconds is worth just as much as the question that will torture you for minutes on end. To maximize your score, leave the questions you don't like for last. If you are going to run out of time anywhere—and unless you are shooting for a 160 or higher, you should be running out of time—make sure that the questions that get chopped off are the ones you didn't want to answer anyway.

This strategy is called Take the Easy Test First. Skip early and skip often. Doing so will result in two passes through an individual section. On the first pass, cherry pick. Answer the questions you

like. Get all of those easy points in the bank before time starts running short. You know that the hard questions—or the ones that you don't like—are going to take more time. Also, although you should never rush, everyone starts to feel the pressure of the clock as time starts running low. This is often when mistakes happen. Leave those difficult, time-consuming questions for the end of the test. If you run out of time or make some mistakes at that point, it won't matter because these are low percentage questions for you anyway.

Step 2

2. Mark and Move

On your first pass through the questions, if you see a question you don't like, a question that looks hard, or a question that looks time consuming, you're going to walk on by and leave it for the end. Sometimes, however, a question that looks easy turns out to be more troublesome than you thought. The question may be trickier than it first appeared, or you may have simply misread it, and it seems hard only because you're working with the wrong information. From start to finish, the GRE is nearly a four-hour test. Over four hours your brain is going to get tired. When that happens, misreading a question is virtually inevitable. Once you read a question wrong, however, it is almost impossible to un-read that and see it right. As long as you are still immersed in the question, you could read it 10 times in a row and you will read it the same wrong way each time.

Whether a question is harder than it first appeared, or made harder by the fact that you missed a key phrase or piece of information, the approach you've taken is not working. This is where the Mark button comes in.

Reset your brain by walking away from the problem, but Mark the question before you do. Do two or three other questions, and then return to the marked problem. When you walk away, your brain doesn't just forget the problem, it keeps on processing in the background. The distraction of the other questions helps your brain to consider the question from other angles. When you return to the problem, you may find that the part that gave you so much trouble the first time is now magically clear. If the problem continues to give you trouble, walk away again.

Staying with a problem when you're stuck burns time but yields no points. You might spend two, three, five, or even six minutes on a problem but still be no closer to the answer. Spending five minutes to get one point will not get you enough points on a 30- or 35-minute section. In the five minutes you spend on a problem that you've misread, you could nail three or four easier questions. When you return to the question that gave you trouble, there is a good chance that you will spot your error, and the path to the correct answer will become clear. If it doesn't become clear, walk away again. Any time you encounter resistance on the test, do not keep pushing; bend like a reed and walk away. Use the Mark button to facilitate this key skill. Skip early and often so that you always have questions to distract your brain when you get stuck.

Step 3

3. Use the Review Screen to Navigate

Within a single section, you can mark an answered or unanswered question and return to it later. In fact you can skip any question you like and return to any question at any time you like. Navigating around a section is easy with the new Review Screen, which looks like this:

Question Number	Status	Marked
1	Not Answered	
2	Not Answered	✓
3	Not Answered	
4	Not Answered	
5	Not Answered	
6	Not Answered	
7	Answered	
8	Answered	
9	Answered	✓
10	Answered	✓
11	Answered	
12	Not Answered	

Simply click on a question and hit the button marked “Go To Question,” and you will return directly to that question. This opens up a whole new realm of strategic opportunities for the savvy test taker.

Step 4

4. There's No Penalty for Guessing

You should take the easy test first and you should spend most of your time on questions that you know how to answer, or are reasonably certain you can answer.

When you return for your second pass, you will be able to answer some of the questions that you marked during your first pass. A fresh set of eyes on a problem you've already seen is sometimes all it takes for a solution to present itself. But there may also be some questions that you do not know how to answer no matter how many times you look at them.

When you confront a question like this, try to eliminate any answer choice you can, but make sure to guess. There is no penalty for incorrect answers on the GRE. As a result, it's better to guess than it is to leave a question blank. At least by guessing, you stand a chance at getting lucky and guessing correctly.

Step 5

5. Use Process of Elimination

Because there are many more wrong answers on the GRE than there are credited answers, on some of the more difficult questions (those you do on your second pass) you'll actually be better served not by trying to find the *correct* answer, but instead by finding the wrong answers and using POE, Process of Elimination.

ETS Doesn't Care How You Get the Correct Answer

Remember when you were in high school, and even if you got a question wrong on a test, your teacher gave you partial credit? For example, maybe you used the right formula on a math question, but miscalculated and got the wrong result, so your teacher gave you some credit because you understood the concept.

Well, those days are over. There is no partial credit on the GRE. On the other hand, ETS doesn't know or care how you get the right

answer. A lucky guess is worth just as many points as a question that you solve completely and correctly.

There is one thing for which we must thank ETS. They have actually given us the answers! For most problems, there are five answer choices, and one of them is correct. It is important to remember that the answer choices are part of the problem. Many of them will be clearly wrong and can, therefore, be eliminated. In fact, sometimes it is easier to identify the wrong answers and eliminate them than it is to find the right ones, as we discussed on the previous page. As you know, this approach is called Process of Elimination, or POE.

POE will be crucial on the verbal side of the test. Vocabulary-based questions will include plenty of words you don't know. For such questions, you may not be able to identify the correct answer, but you will certainly be able to identify some wrong ones. Get rid of the wrong ones so that when you guess, you have a fifty-fifty shot and not a 20 percent chance. The same holds true for the reading comp questions, which will include plenty of answer choices that are clearly wrong.

On the math side of the test, ETS loves to sucker you into doing more math than is really necessary. You can often eliminate answer choices that are clearly too large or too small. Sometimes it is even more efficient to eliminate wrong answers than it is to do the math required to come up with the right one. We will discuss POE and its close cousin, Ballparking, in Part III.

The Importance of Distractors

On questions you find difficult, you should be able to improve your score on the GRE by using POE. Why? Because, once you've eliminated the wrong answers, picking the right one(s) can be a piece of cake.

Wrong answers on standardized multiple-choice tests are known in the testing industry as “distractors,” or “trap answers.” They are called distractors because their purpose is to distract test takers away from correct choices. Trap answers are specifically designed to appeal to test takers. Oftentimes, they’re the answers that seem to scream out “pick me!” as you work through a question. However, these attractive answers are often incorrect.

Remembering this simple fact can be an enormous help to you as you sit down to take the test. By learning to recognize distractors, you will greatly improve your score.

Improve Your Odds Indirectly

Every time you’re able to eliminate an incorrect choice on a GRE question, you improve your odds of finding the correct answer; the more incorrect choices you eliminate, the better your odds.

For this reason, some of our test-taking strategies are aimed at helping you arrive at ETS’s answer indirectly. Doing this will make you much more successful at avoiding the traps laid in your path by the test writers. This is because most of the traps are designed to catch unwary test takers who try to approach the problems directly.

POE and Guessing

If you guessed blindly on a five-choice GRE problem, you would have a one-in-five chance of picking ETS’s answer. Eliminate one incorrect choice, and your chances improve to one in four. Eliminate three, and you have a fifty-fifty chance of earning points by guessing. Get the picture?

Guess, but guess intelligently.

Step 6

6. Use Your Scratch Paper

ETS doesn't give you many useful tools on this test, so you have to make good use of the ones they do give you. You will get six sheets of scratch paper stapled into a booklet. You can get more by raising your hand during a section, but that takes time, so you will need an efficient system for using scratch paper.

Mistakes happen in your head, but good technique happens on scratch paper. When you do work in your head, you are really doing two things at once. The first is figuring out the answer at hand, and the second is keeping track of where you've been. Mistakes happen when you try to do two things in your head at once. It's better to park your thinking on your scratch paper. Get it out of your head and onto the page. Good things happen when you do.



Remember

By crossing out a clearly incorrect choice, you permanently eliminate it from consideration.

On the math side, scratch paper is crucial. Not only is it important for performing complicated calculations, but when used properly, it can actually help to direct your thinking as you work through multistep problems. In the math sections of this book, we will give you graphic set-ups for each math concept that you will encounter. Use them consistently, and they will become good habits that will pay big dividends in accuracy, even over a four-hour exam.

On the verbal side, scratch paper is every bit as essential. It will help you to track your progress, to focus on only one answer choice at a time, and to work through a series of answer choices efficiently. In the verbal section of this book, we will give you a process for using scratch paper efficiently and effectively.

Step 7

7. Double-Check

Get into the habit of double-checking all of your answers before you click on your answer choice—or answer choices. Make sure that you reread the directions and have done everything they asked you to—don’t get the answer wrong just because you chose only one answer for a question that required you to choose two or more.

The only way to reliably avoid careless errors is to adopt habits that make them less likely to occur. Always check to see that you’ve transcribed information correctly to your scratch paper. Always read the problem at least twice and note any important parts that you might forget later. Always check your calculations. And always read the question one last time before selecting your answer.

By training yourself to avoid careless errors, you will increase your score.

Step 8

8. Let It Go

Every time you begin a new section, focus on that section and put the last section you completed behind you. Don’t think about that pesky synonym from an earlier section while a geometry question is on your screen. You can’t go back, and besides, your impression of how you did on a section is probably much worse than reality.

A graphic consisting of a circle divided horizontally. The top half contains the word "Step" and the bottom half contains the number "9", all in a serif font.

Step
9

9. Don’t Make Any Last-Minute Lifestyle Changes

The week before the test is not the time for any major life changes. This is NOT the week to quit smoking, start smoking, quit drinking coffee, start drinking coffee, start a relationship, end a relationship, or quit a job. Business as usual, okay?

YOUR STARTING POINT

Before you dive in, you might wish to take one of the practice tests in this book or online to get a sense of where you are starting from. It can be a good exercise to tackle a practice test before you know any strategies or have reviewed any content—while you have relatively fresh eyes to the test-taking experience. This will be a good initial impression and these first scores will show you what content areas need your focus. Of course, you’ll review all necessary content for the GRE (won’t you?), but this first test can serve as a helpful guide. Then, as you learn strategies and review math and verbal content, you’ll have a genuine sense of accomplishment.

Now let’s get cracking!

Summary

- You can increase your score on the GRE through practice and successful application of test-taking strategies.
- The GRE uses a variety of question formats throughout the test.
- Accuracy is better than speed. Slow down and focus on accumulating as many points as possible. Forcing yourself to work faster results in careless errors and lower scores.
- Process of Elimination is an extremely useful tool on the test. Use it to eliminate wrong answers and increase your odds of guessing correctly.

Part II

How to Crack the Verbal Section

3 The Geography of the Verbal Section

4 Text Completions

5 Sentence Equivalence

6 Reading Comprehension

7 Critical Reasoning

8 Vocabulary for the GRE

Chapter 3

The Geography of the Verbal Section

The Verbal section of the GRE is designed to test your verbal reasoning abilities. This chapter will review the types of questions you will see, how to pace yourself, and the basic strategies that will best guide you through the Verbal section. Additionally, this chapter will cover the importance of vocabulary on the test, along with some useful tips on how to approach learning GRE vocabulary.

WHAT'S ON THE VERBAL SECTION

ETS claims that the Verbal section of the GRE accomplishes the following:

- places a greater emphasis on analytical skills and on understanding vocabulary in context rather than in isolation
- uses more text-based materials
- contains a broader range of reading selections
- tests skills that are more closely aligned with those used in graduate school
- expands the range of computer-enabled tasks

What does this mean for you?

- There won't be questions that involve analogies or antonyms on this test, as there were on the old version of the GRE.
- You'll see some wacky-looking question formats that you've probably never seen before.
- Though they say the new version of the test de-emphasizes vocabulary, there's no getting around the fact that the more vocabulary you know when you sit down to take the test, the better off you'll be. So vocabulary remains as important as it ever was. If you're especially eager to build your vocabulary, check out Chapter 8: Vocabulary for the GRE.

There are three types of questions on the Verbal section of the test:

- Text Completions
- Sentence Equivalence
- Reading Comprehension

Let's take a brief look at each question type.



Text Completions

Text Completion questions consist of short sections of text with one or more blanks; you are asked to choose the best word to place in each blank. You may see one blank in the text, in which case you will be offered five answer choices, or you may see two or three blanks, each of which will have three answer choices. No partial credit is given for getting some but not all blanks correct on a question, so be sure to read carefully.

Here is an example of a two-blank question:

Though Adam was incredulous upon hearing Madam Sofia's psychic reading, after a few weeks had passed, he was (i) _____ by how remarkably (ii) _____ she had turned out to be.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
dubious	prescient
stupefied	exhaustive
blasé	mundane

Sentence Equivalence

This is another vocabulary-oriented question type. Each question will consist of one sentence with six answer choices. Your job is to choose the two answer choices that logically complete the sentence. As with Text Completions, there is no partial credit, so you must select both correct answer choices to receive points.

Here's an example:

When Selena brought home the irascible puppy, her more quiescent dogs were rattled by their new _____ housemate.

- pugnacious
- languid
- bellicose
- juvenile
- diminutive
- phlegmatic

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension accounts for about half of the Verbal questions you will see. Passages range from one to five paragraphs, and each passage can consist of one to five questions. No matter the length, the passages offer some type of argument that the author is trying defend, even if it's just the author's opinion. Therefore, some of the questions in this section will ask you to identify an author's point of view or the assumptions and premises upon which that point of view rests. Other Reading Comprehension questions will ask about details of specific information in the passage or provable from the passage, the structure or tone of the text, how a word is used in context, or the main idea. Fortunately, these questions rarely test you on your prior vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, Reading Comprehension questions are like an open-book test—everything you need is right there in the passage!

You will encounter three Reading Comprehension question formats:

Multiple Choice

Question 20 is based on this passage.

After examining the bodies of a dozen beached whales and finding evidence of bleeding around the animals' eyes and brains as well as lesions on their kidneys and livers, environmental groups fear that the Navy's use of sonar is causing serious harm to marine animals. A leading marine biologist reports that sonar induces whales to panic and surface too quickly, which causes nitrogen bubbles to form in their blood.

The argument above relies on which of the following assumptions?

- Marine biologists have documented that other marine animals, including dolphins and sea turtles, have exhibited kidney and liver lesions.
- No studies have been conducted on the possible detrimental effects of sonar on marine animals.
- Whales in captivity panic only when exposed to man-made, rather than natural, sound waves.
- The presence of nitrogen bubbles in the blood has been demonstrated to cause damage to various internal organs.
- It is unlikely that the symptoms found in the beached whales could be caused by any known disease.

Select All That Apply

Questions 10 and 11 are based on this passage.

What was it about Oscar Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, that caused it to create such an uproar when it was published in 1891? While critics attacked the quality of Wilde's formal elements, their denunciation merely masked the true concerns of many nineteenth-century critics. What these critics were actually railing against was the thematic content of Wilde's work, specifically his illustration of a lifestyle devoted to useless beauty. For many a nineteenth-century moralist, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was nothing more than a primer for spiritual depravity. Wilde's ultimate sin was his leniency toward his protagonist, an unabashed hedonist. To the critics, allowing an evil character to escape his just desserts was an unforgivable sin. In their minds, Wilde's work was corrupting the genteel reading public by failing to show the proper consequences of immoral behavior.

Consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

The author of the passage would probably agree with which of the following statements?

- Most critics of Oscar Wilde's novel objected primarily to the lifestyle of its author.
- If *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were written in the twentieth century, the critical reaction would be less severe.
- Some critics of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* believed that an author of a book had a moral responsibility to the book's audience.

Select a Sentence

Question 16 is based on this passage.

Called by some the “island that time forgot,” Madagascar is home to a vast array of unique, exotic creatures. One such animal is the aye-aye. First described by western science in 1782, it was initially categorized as a member of the order Rodentia. Further research then revealed that it was more closely related to the lemur, a member of the primate order. Since the aye-aye is so different from its fellow primates, however, it was given its own family: *Daubentonidae*. The aye-aye has been listed as an endangered species and, as a result, the government of Madagascar has designated an island off the northeastern coast of Madagascar as a protected reserve for aye-ayes and other wildlife.

Select the sentence in the passage that most seriously weakens the author’s claim that “this practice may result in the loss of a superb example of life’s variety.”

When you see a Select-a-Sentence question like the one above, you need to click on the sentence in the passage that you think answers the question.

HOW IS THE GRE VERBAL SECTION STRUCTURED?

The GRE has two scored multiple-choice verbal sections. Each will be 30 minutes long with 20 questions per section. The way you perform on one Verbal section will affect the difficulty of the next Verbal section you are given. Verbal sections tend to follow the same order. Roughly the first six questions will be Text Completion, the next five or six will be Reading Comprehension, followed by about four Sentence Equivalence questions, and then another four or five Reading Comprehension questions. In profile, the two verbal sections will look something like this:

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Section 3							Text Completion		Reading Comprehension		Sentence Equivalence		Reading Comprehension							
Section 5							Text Completion		Reading Comprehension		Sentence Equivalence		Reading Comprehension							

A better performance on the first scored Verbal section will yield more difficult questions on the second one!

BEST STRATEGIES FOR THE GRE VERBAL SECTION

The basic test-taking strategies covered in Chapter 2 are effective for the entire test. They can be critical to your level of success on the GRE. They are time-tested and proven to be effective. You should always be mindful of them and take a few minutes to review them before working through the Verbal section.

Here are some strategies that will help you on the Verbal section, specifically. We'll show you how to use them as we go through specific question types in the chapters ahead, but for now read

through the strategies and get a sense of what they are before moving on.

Accuracy vs. Speed

Any timed test will cause at least some level of stress. While it is important to mark an answer to every question on the Verbal section, nobody has ever won a medal for getting the most questions wrong in the shortest amount of time. The key is not speed, but rather efficiency. Answering correctly is not a matter of speed as much as it is a matter of applying the techniques that we will cover in the upcoming chapters. Don't let the clock force you to ignore good techniques and make silly mistakes.

Process of Elimination (POE) for Verbal

Determining correct answers on the Verbal section of the GRE can be tricky. For example, answer choices on Reading Comprehension questions are constructed with “clever” wordings that make correct answers seem wrong and incorrect answers seem right. This method of answer choice creation makes it difficult to find the correct answers.

So, reverse your approach. Instead of looking for the correct answer, look for the incorrect answers and eliminate them.

Using Process of Elimination (POE) is the most effective way to detect and avoid trap answer choices. Proper POE on the Verbal section abides by the following rules:

- Consider every answer choice, even if you think you know the answer.
- Eliminate any choice that contains something that you can point to and say, “Well, I *know* that’s wrong.” This is important and should be distinguished from “Well, I *think* that’s wrong” or “Well, I’m *pretty sure* that’s wrong.” If you do not know for certain that an answer choice is wrong, do not eliminate it.

- If a choice seems weird or confusing, or just doesn't make sense the first time you read it, this is not cause to eliminate the answer. Instead, leave it as an option to come back to and evaluate later.
- Cycle through the answer choices until you're left with only the correct answer(s).

While your approach to POE may change slightly from one question type to another, the basic POE strategy is very effective. As Sherlock Holmes said, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.” So, for questions that test your vocabulary, you might eliminate all answers you know cannot possibly be correct and be left with a word you have never seen before as the correct answer. For questions that require you to understand the premises, conclusions, and underlying assumptions of an argument, you might have to eliminate answers that obviously fall outside the scope of the question. POE techniques for each of the specific question types are addressed in later chapters.

Your first impression of POE might be that it is way too time consuming, but don't knock it until you try it. Then try it again, and again. Most of the incorrect answer choices on the GRE Verbal sections can be quickly identified by spotting some minor detail that can't be supported by the question stem or passage. We'll discuss some of the ways to categorize these details in later chapters. For now, just realize that POE can actually be *faster* than trying to find the “correct” answer. And, before you pull out a stopwatch and time each method, remember that speed matters a lot less than accuracy.

Down to Two?

Let's say you've eliminated enough of the answer choices on a given question so that only two choices remain. You marked it and have come back to it. If you guess now, your chance of being correct is at fifty percent, which is pretty good! However, there is only one way to correctly answer every question on the GRE, so if you can't see

why one of the remaining answer choices is wrong, you are missing something. Take a fresh look at the question and remind yourself what the answer should look like. Find it! If you are still stuck, Mark and Move.

Here's a GRE example:

Seven years ago, the state of Danrovia, in an attempt to promote the production of renewable energy, offered a flat tax credit to consumers who installed solar panels for the first time. In the years following the implementation of this tax credit, the annual government expenditures related to this tax credit have reduced steadily.

If the statements in this passage are true, then which of the following is most likely true based on the information in the passage?

- The number of consumers who have installed solar panels for the first time on their property has gone down steadily.
- The total amount of energy produced in Danrovia has increased annually.
- The amount of non-renewable energy produced in Danrovia has decreased annually.
- Consumers typically install solar panels after they take steps to introduce methods of creating renewable energy.
- The amount of energy produced from renewable sources in Danrovia increased more relative to the amount of energy produced from unrenewable sources in Danrovia.

Here's How to Crack It

You know this is an inference question because of the phrase *which of the following is most likely true based on the information in the*

passage. The premises are that Danrovia passed a tax credit for all consumers who installed solar panels for the first time, and that government expenditures based on the tax credit have steadily decreased. You have to decide which of the answers is a reasonable conclusion based on the premises.

Choice (A) is a possibility because if the number of consumers who have installed solar panels for the first time has decreased, it's reasonable to conclude that government expenditures based on the tax credit have also decreased, so keep (A). The total amount of energy produced in Danrovia is beyond the scope of the question, so eliminate (B). The amount of non-renewable energy produced is also beyond the scope of the question, so eliminate (C). Choice (D) refers to consumers installing solar panels and could be a decent answer, so keep (D) as well. The amount of energy produced from renewable sources in Danrovia relative to the amount of energy produced from unrenewable sources in Danrovia is also beyond the scope of the question, so eliminate (E). You're down to (A) and (D). Reread the question. It asks what is most likely true based on the information in the passage. The passage states that Danrovia passed the tax credit for the installation of solar panels in an attempt to promote the production of renewable energy. While it may be true that consumers only install solar panels after they take other steps towards the production of renewable energy, (D) does not directly explain why the amount spent on the tax credit has decreased since the credit's implementation. Choice (D) is out of scope, so eliminate it. The correct answer is (A).

It's also worth noting that (D) uses recycled language—*renewable energy*. This is a sign of a trap answer and frequently a good reason to be skeptical of an answer choice.

Stacking the Odds

There may be cases on the GRE when you are running out of time and you are going to have to guess on a question. POE can turn these questions into potential points. Before you guess on a question, quickly consider if some of the answer choices are clearly wrong. If you can eliminate a couple of choices, you've increased your chances of getting a free point!

Consider the following question:

When studying human history, one must be aware that the _____ between historical periods are arbitrary; certainly none of the people alive at the time were aware of a shift from one era to another.

judgments
ideologies
innovations
demarcations
episodes

Here's How to Crack It

If you encountered this question on the GRE, you might not know what the best answer is (you'll learn how to approach questions like this in Chapter 4). However, you might see that some of the answer choices simply don't make sense. Choices (A), (B), and (C) don't seem to fit the sentence at all. By eliminating these wrong answers, you've suddenly given yourself a great chance of choosing the correct answer just by guessing, since only (D) and (E) are left. And if you realize that (E) doesn't make sense either, then you know the correct answer is (D).

POOD

Your Personal Order of Difficulty (POOD) should guide your approach on the Verbal section. Do you have a lot of success with Reading Comprehension and not much on Text Completion questions? Skip those six Text Completions for now and work your strengths. You do not want to be put in a situation in which you have to rush through the types of questions you would normally get correct simply because they show up later in the section.

With this in mind, think of the Verbal section as two tests—one easy and one difficult. Take the easy test first! Move briskly (without rushing) through the test, answering the questions that give you little trouble and skipping the questions that will bog you down. Do this all the way through question 20. Then go back and work those harder questions knowing that you will not have missed any easy points due to a lack of effective planning.



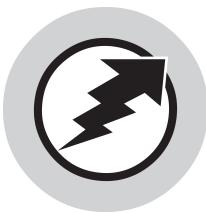
It's Your Test

You know what question types are a breeze and which are more challenging for you, so feel free to approach the test in the order that works for YOU.

A Word on Vocabulary

While the GRE has scaled back on the sheer difficulty of vocabulary over the years, you still need to have a grasp on the words that are commonly used on the test if you want to see significant score improvements. In the coming chapters, we will go over strategies for answering Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence questions. However, there is no substitute for having a good understanding of the vocabulary that ETS tends to test. In Chapter

8, we offer the Key Terms List—a list of the most commonly used words tested on the GRE.



Remember, there is no penalty for incorrect answers on the GRE. So, if time is running low, guess!

Effective ways to study vocabulary for the GRE may include the following:

- Prioritize words from the Key Terms List into three categories: Words I Know, Words I Sort of Know, and Words I Do Not Know. Spend most of your time studying the second group, followed by the final group.
- Read. You will absorb many of the words that will show up on the GRE by reading respected publications such as academic journals or some of the more highbrow newspapers and magazines.
- Keep a vocabulary list. When you come across new words on the practice tests or practice problems, add them to your list. They have been used before on the GRE and they may very well be used again.

Stressed About Vocab?

Check out The Princeton Review's flashcards, *Essential GRE Vocabulary*, which includes 500 essential vocabulary words plus 50 customizable cards!

Summary

- The GRE Verbal section consists of two 30-minute sections, each containing 20 questions.
- The Verbal section is made up of Text Completion, Sentence Equivalence, and Reading Comprehension questions.
- Remember to utilize Process of Elimination (POE) to attack the wrong answers.
- Use your Personal Order of Difficulty (POOD) to ensure that you take the easy test first. Skip questions that seem difficult, and Mark and Move when questions get tough.
- Vocabulary is important. Prioritize the words from the Key Terms List into Words I Know, Words I Sort of Know, and Words I Do Not Know.

Chapter 4

Text Completions

If you took the SAT, you probably remember sentence completion questions. Well, they're back, retooled and renamed for the GRE. Text Completion questions test your ability to figure out which word or words best complete a given sentence or group of sentences. On the GRE, the sentence can have one, two, or even three blanks that you must fill. This chapter will show you The Princeton Review approach to Text Completions, a tried-and-true approach that will help you focus on exactly the parts of the sentences that you'll need to figure out the answer. Along the way, we'll provide you with some valuable tips on using Process of Elimination to help you when you don't know all the vocabulary on a question.

PART 1: TEXT COMPLETION BASICS

WHAT'S A TEXT COMPLETION?

On each Verbal section of the GRE you can expect to see about six Text Completion questions, or approximately 30% of the total questions. Each question is made up of a passage consisting of one or more sentences—sometimes up to five! The passage has blanks in place of key words. There can be one, two, or three blanks. One-blank questions have five answer choices per blank, while two- and three-blank questions have three answer choices per blank. Your job is to select the combination of answer choices—one choice per blank—that best completes the text. The completed sentence(s) must make sense as a whole. In multiple-blank questions, credit is given only if all blanks are answered correctly.

Therefore, the correct choice for each blank depends on the meaning of the sentence as a whole. While at first glance, Text Completions may seem to focus on vocabulary, these questions are not just a glorified vocab quiz. Even more important is a critical understanding of context and the ability to recognize the internal logic of the passage. You cannot rely on word power alone.

But you *will* need a strategy for approaching Text Completion questions. This strategy is where we will begin our discussion of how to successfully navigate Text Completions.

THE BASIC APPROACH FOR TEXT COMPLETION QUESTIONS

Using the basic approach for Text Completion questions, you will examine the sentence or sentences in the passage, which will include clues and transition words that indicate the intended meaning of the sentence. Examining these clues and transitions,

you will aim to come up with your own word for each blank to compare against the answer choices.



STEPS FOR TEXT COMPLETION QUESTIONS

Follow these steps for each blank in turn. For now, we'll be working with only one-blank questions. Later, we'll tell you how to handle questions with two and three blanks.

- 1. Find the clues and transition words.** Ask yourself these questions:
 - *Who or what* is the blank describing?
 - *What else* in the passage provides *insight* into that person or thing?
- 2. Come up with your own word or phrase for the blank.**
Write that word or phrase down on your scratch paper.
- 3. Check each answer choice.**
 - ✓ an answer that sort of matches your word
 - ✗ an answer that does not at all match your word
 - ? any word you don't know

Before tackling the nuts and bolts of these steps, let's try an example to get started:

Robert Ingersoll, although virtually unknown today, was _____ orator of the nineteenth century; people

traveled hundreds of miles to hear his eloquent speeches.

a domineering
an eminent
an unobjectionable
a conventional
an execrable

Here's How to Crack It

- 1. Find the clues and transition words.** First ask, “Who or what is the blank describing?” Before you try to fill the blank, you must consider what the blank is talking about! In this sentence, the blank describes the kind of *orator* that *Robert Ingersoll* was.

Next ask, “What else in the passage provides *insight* into that person or thing?” Find information in the surrounding text that provides insight into the kind of orator that Ingwersoll was. The sentence tells us that *people traveled hundreds of miles to hear his...speeches*. So he was obviously a good orator. The sentence also tells us that Ingwersoll is *virtually unknown today*. The transition word *although* puts this insight into opposition to the word in the blank describing the kind of orator Ingwersoll was. Now you know that he wasn’t just a good orator but a well-known one.

- 2. Come up with your own word or phrase for the blank.** Use the insights you’ve gained to come up with your own word for the blank. You don’t have to come up with the perfect word, and it doesn’t have to be a single word. It’s better to be as literal as possible in order to capture your insights. Feel free to recycle language in the sentence when coming up with your own word. From Step 1, you know that Ingwersoll was a well-

known orator—recycled from the word *unknown*—and also a good one. To capture all that, you could just call him “famously good.”

3. **Check each answer choice.** Only now that you’ve come up with your own word (or phrase in this case) compare that word or phrase to the answer choices. Compare each of the answer choices in turn to your own phrase, “famously good.”

Choice (A), *domineering*, which means bossy, is not a match for “famously good.” Eliminate (A). Choice (B), *eminent*, is a famous or respected person, so keep (B). The word *unobjectionable*, (C), means something that can’t be objected to, so eliminate (C). Choice (D), *conventional*, is practically the opposite of “famously good,” so eliminate it. Choice (E), *execrable*, might stump you, in which case you’d give it a question mark. *Execrable* means downright detestable. If you knew that, you’d eliminate the word. Either way, you’d go with the answer choice that you’ve assigned a checkmark, (B).

Ingersoll was an *eminent* orator of the nineteenth century.

Congratulations on completing your first Text Completion question!

GET A CLUE!

Here’s the good news about Text Completion questions: there is only ever one answer choice that is correct. We know that seems obvious enough, but it’s worth mentioning. It gives you a touch of insight into the reality of the creation of Text Completion questions. Somewhere in the question, the information to determine the correct answer is present. There are no alternative interpretations or Mad-Lib style games for Text Completion questions. The information to justify the answer is always right in front of you.

The trick, as always, is to determine where and what that information is. Step 1 in approaching Text Completions is to find clues in the passage about the word for the blank. The *text* of the passage provides the *context* for the correct answer. Your mission is to determine the intended meaning of the passage, based on the information in the passage. That's why it's very important to do Step 1 first. *Do not move on to Step 2 or look at the answer choices until you've identified the clues in the sentence!*

The clue is the information in the sentence that provides insight into the word or phrase that goes in the blank. But before you can even look for clues, you want a concrete idea of what exactly is missing. That's why, when you start on each Text Completion question, you need to find the clue. And, you begin finding the clue by first asking yourself this question:

- *Who or what* is the blank describing?

Take a moment to make sure you understand what's being talked about by the blank. If it's not crystal-clear, then determine what part of speech the blank should be. An adjective will be easiest to work with, because then the blank merely describes the noun next to the blank. If it's a verb that's missing, the blank describes some action or process. If it's noun that's missing, the blank represents a person, thing, or idea—or often some aspect of another noun in the passage. Once you know what the blank is describing, ask yourself this question:

- *What else* in the passage provides *insight* into that person or thing?

The next order of business is to find the information in the passage that tells you something about the person or thing described by the blank. ETS *never* gives you a passage in which the word that belongs in the blank is subject to opinion, debate, or poetic license. They always give you one or more pieces of information that offer insight

into the topic of the blank. This information is the clue, and it's all there in the text.

To illustrate the importance of the clue, let's look at the following example:

Sophocles, who wrote the play *Oedipus Rex*, was one of the most _____ playwrights of ancient Greece.

famous
bombastic
critical
prolific
eclectic

Who or what does the blank describe? It's an adjective describing the kind of playwright Sophocles was. What else in the sentence gives you insight into what kind of playwright Sophocles was? If you've come up empty-handed, that's because the sentence does not contain a clue. Based on what you may know about Sophocles, a few of the answer choices may work. To answer this question correctly, ETS would have to expect you to rely on outside knowledge about Sophocles. For fear of an army of angry lawyers knocking down their door, ETS will never produce a question that has a correct answer they cannot defend. The clue has to be there in the text. Let's try with another version of the same question:

Sophocles, who wrote the play *Oedipus Rex*, was one of the most _____ playwrights of ancient Greece, completing 123 plays in his lifetime—double that of any of his contemporaries.

famous

bombastic
critical
prolific
eclectic

Just as before, the blank should describe what kind of playwright Sophocles was. This time, however, you’re given additional information: he completed *123 plays*, which was *double that of...his contemporaries*. Now you have something to work with in coming up with your own word. Sophocles wrote a lot of plays, so “productive” could be your word. You could even put down “adjective—wrote lots” on your scratch paper if you weren’t able to come up with a single word that means “wrote lots.” Remember that your job is to simply come up with a word or phrase that leads you to the correct answer. So, it’s okay if your word is actually a phrase.

Now you’re ready to take on the answer choices. The adjective *famous* is certainly tempting. Sophocles was unquestionably one of the most famous *playwrights of ancient Greece*. But this has no connection to the clue, which is all about the number of plays he wrote. This is a trap laid by ETS writers. ETS writers may not be able to use outside knowledge to create their correct answer choices, but they certainly can add in an incorrect answer choice relying on outside knowledge and hope the student does the rest. Assumptions and extrapolations are dangerous. One and only one of the answer choices matches the clue—(D), *prolific*. The other four words may indeed describe Sophocles and sound fine if inserted into the sentence. But only one answer choice will ever match the clue, and that’s what counts.

A WORD ABOUT YOUR WORDS

Once you’ve found the clue in the passage, you’ve done most of the heavy lifting. Now it’s time to come up with your own word to go in

the blank. This is Step 2 of the basic approach.

This isn't about predicting the answer. You're just trying to come up with something that reflects the clues and will help you to identify the correct answer from among the choices. So don't waste time brainstorming the perfect GRE word to put in the blank. Think of your job as supplying the definition of what should go in the blank. To make your life easier, recycle! Just use a word or phrase recycled from the clues. What better way to capture the information you gleaned from the passage?

Practice: Finding the Clue

[Click here](#) to download a PDF of *Practice: Finding the Clue*.

Underline the clue in each of the following sentences. Then, think of your own word for the blank and write it down. Answers can be found in Part V.

Be systematic! Ask yourself these questions. Who or what is the blank describing? What in the sentence gives insight into that?

1 of 8

The _____ relationships in his life haunted Eugene O'Neill and are often reflected in the harrowing nature of many of his plays.

2 of 8

Mount Godwin-Austen, more commonly known as K2, is the second highest mountain in the world, with its _____ peaks reaching more than 28,000 feet high.

3 of 8

A wind-chill warning is issued when the temperature is projected to reach minus 25 degrees Fahrenheit or lower, the point at which the cold has _____ effects on living creatures.

4 of 8

Divers still stumble across unexploded shells, 70-year-old _____ from World War II, in the waters outside Tokyo.

5 of 8

Although some people use the terms interchangeably, mastodons and mammoths were quite _____ ; mammoths were hairy with long tusks, while mastodons had low-slung bodies and flatter skulls.

6 of 8

The mayor was definitely _____ ; he crafted his policies not with an eye toward their political consequences but instead toward their practical effects.

7 of 8

The first-year law student was amazed at the sheer _____ of the material he had to read for his classes; he imagined that he would have to read for hours and hours each day to finish it all.

8 of 8

Our word “ghoul” is _____ from the Arabic word “Algol,” the name for the Demon Star, a star in the constellation Perseus.

NEXT, TRANSITIONS

Let’s take another look at the mastodon/mammoth question from the preceding Finding the Clue practice exercise:

Although some people use the terms interchangeably, mastodons and mammoths were quite _____ ; mammoths were hairy with long tusks, while mastodons had low-slung bodies and flatter skulls.

The first phrase of the sentence says that some people use the terms *mastodon* and *mammoth* interchangeably. However, the clause after the semicolon describes each animal, making it plain that they are very different in appearance. The clue to the word that goes in the blank is the word *interchangeably*, but context indicates that the

word for the blank is the opposite of the clue. The reason you know this is because the phrase containing the clue begins with the transition word *[al]though*.

Transition words tell the reader how a clue relates to the blank—whether the clue has the same meaning as the blank or the opposite meaning. Consider the following two scenarios:

I won the lottery, *and*...

I won the lottery, *but*...

The first sentence is going to have a happy ending. The second one, not so much. Changing a single word sets up dramatically different outcomes. The same scenarios could also have been written with different transition words placed at the beginning:

Because I won the lottery,...

Although I won the lottery,...

Some transition words simply reinforce the clue. For these, you'd pick a word that agrees with the clue. Other transition words indicate that the word for the blank is the opposite of the clue. It's particularly important to take note of these contrast transitions.

Here are some of the most important transition words you'll encounter in Text Completion questions:

Same Meaning or Direction / Agreement	Opposite Meaning or Direction / Contrast
accordingly	next
also	similarly
and	since
because	so
consequently	therefore
for example	thus
furthermore	too
hence	; (semicolon)
in addition	: (colon)
moreover	

Two of the same-direction transition “words” are just punctuation marks. The semicolon is the equivalent of *and*, implying that the second clause follows logically from the first. The colon implies that the second clause is an explanation or illustration of the first. In either case, the clue for a blank in one part of the sentence will be found in the other part. Notice nuances in some of these transition words. Several of the same-direction words imply a cause-effect relationship: *accordingly*, *because*, *consequently*, *hence*, *so*, *therefore*, and *thus*. The word *previously* implies a change or contrast over time, and the word *unfortunately* implies a situation contrary to what was hoped for or expected.

Practice: Clues and Transitions

[Click here](#) to download a PDF of *Practice: Clues and Transitions*.

Underline the clues and circle the transition words in the following sentences; then come up with your own word for the blanks. Recycle the clues if possible. Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 8

The star receiver is widely regarded as one of the top talents in the game, but his _____ performance as a rookie almost ended his career.

2 of 8

The prime minister received international _____ for her work; she brokered a diplomatic solution to a potential crisis.

3 of 8

While it is often assumed that drinking alcohol is detrimental to one's health, many studies have shown the _____ effects of having a glass or two of wine daily.

4 of 8

Despite the increasing technological connectivity of the modern world, many cultures still remain _____ from the global society.

5 of 8

Although many cultures view the toad as a symbol of ugliness and clumsiness, the Chinese revere the toad as a _____ symbol.

6 of 8

Stock analysts often use holiday sales to gauge future stock prices; thus, retail performance can be an important _____ of market trends.

[7](#) of 8

It is somewhat ironic that while the population at large tends to have a negative view of the legal profession, individuals rarely display such _____ to their lawyers.

[8](#) of 8

Methyl bromide is a pesticide that has devastating effects on insects; however, some believe it has the same _____ to humans.



PROCESS OF ELIMINATION STRATEGIES

After deciphering the clues in the passage and coming up with your own word for the blank, you arrive at the third and final step in Text Completion. In Step 3, you simply check each answer choice against the word you came up with. Use your scratch paper to mark any choice that's a match for your word with a ✓, any choice that's not a match with an ✗, and any word you don't know with a ?.

Ideally, your scratch paper will show one ✓, five ✗s, and no ?s. But life's not always that simple, and neither is the GRE. For those less-than-ideal situations, you'll need some POE skills and strategies to fall back on.

Here are some general points to keep in mind as you work through the answer choices.

- **Focus on the words you know.** Any answer choice that you know, you should be able to compare to your word and decisively mark with a ✓ or an ✗.
- **Never talk yourself into picking a word that you've eliminated.** Just because you know what it means does not mean the word is a better answer. If you are between choosing a word you've eliminated and choosing a word you don't know, pick the word you don't know.
- **Never eliminate a word you don't know.** If you have no good idea what an answer choice means, you can't rule it out as a match for your word.
- **Don't trust your ears.** If an answer choice matches your own word but doesn't sound quite right when inserted into the blank, it may still be correct. The question may be relying on a less common definition or usage of the word. Sometimes, too, the GRE will create a correct answer choice that's somewhat awkward while planting a trap answer that sounds better to the ear but has nothing to do with the clues.
- **Don't forget to Mark and Move.** There are certain situations in which Mark and Move makes sense on Text Completion questions. You might be having difficulty finding the clues. You might be daunted by a multi-blank question. The definition of a familiar word may have momentarily slipped your mind. You might have gone through POE and have two answer choices with checkmarks. In such cases, step away from the question, answer a few other questions and return to the one you've skipped. It's the best way to reset your brain and get a fresh start on a difficult question.

Take a look at the following example:

Years of confinement in a sunless cell had left the prisoner wan and weakened, with a shockingly _____ appearance.

sidereal
boisterous
etiolated
singular
circumscribed

Here's How to Crack It

Begin by asking “Who or what is the blank describing?” The blank is describing *the prisoner’s...appearance*. Now ask “What else in the passage provides insight into the prisoner’s appearance? The sentence describes this as *wan and weakened*. Therefore, recycle the words “wan and weakened” as the word for the blank. Now evaluate the answer choices one at a time.

Upon evaluating the answer choices, many will find that they are a total nightmare. Resolutely work through the answer choices one by one, comparing them to “wan and weakened.” Choice (A) is tough. If you don’t know this word, you can’t eliminate it, so mark with a question mark and leave it for now. You may know that (B), *boisterous*, means noisy and rowdy. If so, you can eliminate (B). The next choice, (C), is *etiolated*—another difficult word, so mark it with a question mark and move on. Choice (D) is *singular*, which we usually think of as the opposite of *plural*. It can also mean one-of-a-kind or unique. In either sense, it’s not a match for “wan and weakened,” so eliminate (D). The final choice, (E), is *circumscribed*, which means to restrict something, or draw around, so eliminate (E).

At this point, you have three eliminated choices and two with question marks, so pick one of the two unknowns. The bottom line is that by using careful POE, you have increased your odds to one-in-two. By the way, the answer is (C), *etiolated*, which describes the pale appearance of plants grown with insufficient sunlight but by extension applies to anything feeble or sickly in appearance.

Positive and Negative Words

In some cases, your search for the clues will be less than conclusive. You might find the clues vague. You might be uncertain about the precise meaning of the word to go in the blank. Or, you may be faced with an intimidating lineup of answer choices. In situations such as these, try to simplify your POE. If you can determine whether the general sense of the word to go in the blank is positive or negative, you can separate the answer choices accordingly.

Look again at question 3 from the Finding the Clue practice exercise:

A wind-chill warning is issued when the temperature is projected to reach minus 25 degrees Fahrenheit or lower, the point at which the cold has _____ effects on living creatures.

You might not be able to think of a good word to fit in the blank, but common sense (plus the clue that a *warning is issued*) tells you that *temperatures of minus 25 degrees...or lower* are bad for *living creatures*. So you can eliminate any answer choice that implies positive or beneficial—or even neutral!—effects on living creatures. This approach may not eliminate every answer choice (it may not eliminate any!), but every little bit helps. With a little thought, you might be able to take this positive/negative aspect of the passage a step further and eliminate any answer choice that doesn't reflect negative influences on *health* specifically.

It's important to remember that this strategy must not be your main approach to Text Completion questions. Your surest path to success remains the basic approach of finding clues and coming up with your own word to check the answer choices against. Positive/negative word associations can help you to leverage your vocabulary up to a point but should remain a tool of last resort.

THE FINAL WORD ON VOCABULARY

The strategies that we've been discussing emphasize critical assessment of the passage and smart POE. They're designed to make Text Completion questions as easy as possible and will get you far. Learning these strategies will also make you a better test taker overall.

But there's no getting around it. At the end of the day, Text Completions are about knowing words and their definitions. These questions are about vocabulary. You'll see this most clearly (and painfully) on the questions for which you successfully come up with a great word for the blank only to hit a slate of unfamiliar answer choices. Or the passage itself may be a minefield of verbiage, making it all but impossible to decipher the clues. The only solution for this predicament is to improve your vocabulary as much as possible, little by little, from now until test day.

Memorizing the Key Terms List of words in Chapter 8 is a good start. Try out the suggestions for Learning New Words at the beginning of that chapter ([this page](#)). Deepen your vocabulary by exploring word roots as highlighted on [this page](#) of the Sentence Equivalence chapter. Bottom line: As you prepare for the GRE, keep learning new words every day, in whatever way works best for you. Make it fun!

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The following drill is your opportunity to apply all the skills and strategies you've learned so far. These are all one-blank Text

Completion questions, each with five answer choices.

Remember how to go about it! Start by assessing the text to come up with your own word for the blank. Ignore the answer choices. Ask *who* or *what* the blank is describing—identifying the part of speech can clarify this. Then ask *what else* in the sentence gives insight into this person or thing. These are your clues, and you’ll use transition words to determine whether the clues have the same or opposite meaning relative to the blank. Now, come up with a word or phrase for the blank. Use plain, descriptive, and literal language, recycling words from the clues if possible.

Compare each answer choice to your own word—eliminating words that don’t match (✗), keeping the word that does (✓), and leaving any words you don’t know (?). If it’s not that straightforward, use your POE tools. Bear in mind that some words have figurative or uncommon usages that may sound awkward even if they are close to your own word and match the clues. If guessing, never choose a word you’ve eliminated over one you don’t know.

Use the positive-and-negative approach to POE *only* if your understanding of the clues is vague or you’re stumped by the majority of answer choices. If you wind up with two answer choices that work or find yourself paralyzed by a question for any other reason, use Mark and Move.

Good luck!

Text Completions Drill

[Click here](#) to download a PDF of *Text Completions Drill*.

Answers can be found in Part V.

1 of 6

Despite the smile that spread from ear to ear, her eyes relayed a certain _____.

jubilance
sorrow
mischiefousness
vision
liveliness

2 of 6

While grizzly bears have long, flat, and somewhat blunt claws, black bears have short, curved and _____ claws.

obtuse
abominable
barren
acute
fearful

3 of 6

One of social science's major themes is that of stability versus change; to what extent are individual personalities _____ or different over time?

transient
maladjusted
static
disturbed
discreet

4 of 6

The Erie Canal's completion caused _____ economic ripples; property values and industrial output along its route rose exponentially.

persistent
invaluable
incredulous
severe
prodigious

5 of 6

Voters have become so inured to the fickle nature of politicians that they responded to the levy of a new tax with _____.

amazement
stolidity
exasperation
alarm
perplexity

6 of 6

It is desirable to expand the yield of a harvest only when _____ additions in time, exertion, and other variable factors of production are not also required.

predestined
commensurate
analogous
deliberate
indeterminate

PART 2: TEXT COMPLETION ADVANCED TOPICS

So far, we have been dealing with one-sentence, one-blank Text Completions with five answer choices. But not all Text Completion questions are created equal. Some are designed to be more challenging, but ETS has a specific repertoire of techniques it uses to make hard Text Completion questions. While it's true you will never see the same question twice, ETS does repeatedly pull from the same bag of tricks to make questions harder. No matter how tricky a question looks, however, the ground rules remain the same: the text contains the clues that tell you what goes in the blank(s).

Let's take a quick look at how ETS mixes things up in advanced Text Completion questions:

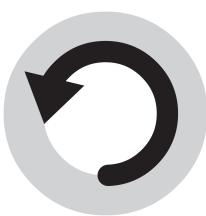
- **More Blanks.** Some passages have questions with two or three blanks. In such questions, each blank has three answer choices, not five as in one-blank questions.
- **More Sentences.** All Text Completion questions don't have just a single sentence. Some are passages of up to five sentences. That means more to read and more to keep track of, but also more information about the blanks.
- **More Complicated Sentences.** ETS will make the structure of the sentence more difficult to read. They will make the language thicker and harder to follow.
- **Difficult Transitions.** Transitions—agreement or contrast between parts of a passage—may not always be marked by obvious words like *and*, *but*, *since*, and *although*. And some sentences contain multiple transitions.
- **Vocabulary.** The words in the answer choices may be more difficult. However, it's more typical for ETS to make harder Text

Completion questions by including more challenging vocabulary in the passage itself.

STEPS FOR TWO- AND THREE- BLANK TEXT COMPLETIONS

For two- and three- blank Text Completion questions, there are only three answer choices per blank. With just three answer choices per blank, multiple-blank questions have a simpler POE per blank than one-blank Text Completions. But that makes it even more important to analyze the text for clues about the word that goes in the blank. The strategies you've already learned in this chapter still apply, no matter how involved the question, but multiple blanks call for some slight modifications to the steps:

- **Start with the easiest blank.** This is not always the first blank. The easiest blank is the one with the most obvious clue. Read through the passage and determine the blank that has the most obvious clue and begin working there.
- **Answer each blank in turn.** Once you identify the blank with the strongest clue, work through the POE process for it first before moving on to another blank.
- **Reread the finished product.** Once you have selected answer choices for all the blanks, reread the entire passage with your choices. Make sure that it tells a consistent, logical story—the only possible story given the context of the passage.



You Can Do It

The Strategies that you learned for one-blank Text Completion questions apply to two- and three-blank questions. Flip back to one if you need a refresher and remember—you got this.

Let's apply this modified approach to the following example:

Federal efforts to regulate standards on educational achievements have been met by (i) _____ from the states; local governments feel that government imposition represents an undue infringement on their (ii) _____.

Blank (i)

Blank (ii)

receptivity	autonomy
intransigence	legislation
compromise	comportment

Here's How to Crack It

Without looking at any answer choices yet, scan the passage and determine which of the blanks has the more obvious clue. Because the second clause makes it clear that something bad is going on—*an undue infringement*, the first blank is easier to work with. The first blank is describing *the states'* reaction to *[f]ederal...standards on education achievements*. The sentence gives further insight into this by stating that *local governments* consider this *an...infringement*. The semicolon is a transition indicating agreement between the

clauses. So, the word in the first blank describing the states' reaction will be something like "resistance." Now check the answer choices against "resistance." Choice (A) is the opposite of this, *receptivity*. Eliminate (A). If you don't know what *intransigence* means, then put a question mark next to (B). Choice (C), however, *compromise*, is not a match for "resistance." Even if you don't know what *intransigence* means, select (B) as it is the only non-eliminated answer. Now, work with the second blank.

The second blank describes something that *local governments* feel is negatively impacted by *government imposition*. The sentence provides insight into this by stating that *[f]ederal efforts to regulate standards on education achievements* have not been well-received by *the states*. A word or phrase for the second blank, then, could be a descriptive phrase like "freedom from intervention by the federal government," which you might simplify to "the right to govern themselves." Now check the answer choices. Choice (D), *autonomy*, means independence or self-government. This is a good match, so keep (D). Choice (E), *legislation*, is close but too neutral and broad given the clue. Eliminate (E). Choice (F), *comportment*, means demeanor or the way one carries oneself, so eliminate it.

The correct answer is *intransigence* and *autonomy*.

Let's try our hand at a three-blank question:

Many popular musicians have (i) _____ new digital technologies that allow them unprecedented control over their music. These musicians use computers to (ii) _____ and modify their songs, resulting in a level of musical precision often unattainable naturally. Of course, though, as is often the case with new technologies, some traditionalists (iii) _____ these developments.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
incorporated	energize	balk at
synthesized	delineate	revel in
alleviated	recast	retaliate at

Here's How to Crack It

The second blank has the strongest clue, so begin there. The second blank is a verb that describes what *musicians* do to their songs using *computers*. The sentence gives further insight into how musicians use computers to impact songs by stating that computers result in a *precision...unattainable naturally*. The transition word *and* indicates that the word for the blank should be similar to the word *modify*, which the passage uses to describe the contents of the blank. So, recycle this language and use a word such as “modify.” Choice (D), *energize*, is not a match for “modify,” so eliminate it. Choice (E), *delineate*, means to outline or to define, which is also not a match for “modify,” so eliminate (E). Although both these words describe something that musicians could do to their songs, neither is as close a match for the word “modify” as (F), *recast*. Keep (F) and move on to the blank with the next strongest clue.

The blank with the next strongest clue is the first blank. The first blank should be a verb describing what *[m]any popular musicians* have done with *new digital technologies*. The passage gives further insight into what musicians have done with new technologies by stating technologies gives them *control over their music* and that *[t]hese musicians use computers*. Therefore, the word for the first blank should be something close to “use,” so let’s reuse that fairly neutral word. The word for (A), *incorporated*, is a good fit, so keep (A). Choice (B), *synthesized*, is a trap answer. It may describe how musicians make their songs using digital technologies, but it doesn’t describe what they do to these technologies. Eliminate (B). Choice (C), *alleviated*, means to make less severe, so also eliminate (C).

Now work with the third blank. The third blank is a verb describing the reaction of *traditionalists* to *these developments*. The passage provides further insight by stating that these are *new technologies* and the transition word *though* indicates that the reaction from *traditionalist* should be expected to be different than those of the musicians described earlier. Therefore, the traditionalists should have a negative reaction to new technologies, so a good phrase for the blank could simply be “don’t like.” Choice (G) is *balk at*, which matches “don’t like,” so keep (G). Choice (H), *revel in*, means celebrate, which is the opposite of “don’t like,” so eliminate (H). Choice (I) is *retaliate at*, certainly negative but this extreme reaction is not suggested by the text, so eliminate (I).

The correct answer is *incorporated, recast*, and *balk at*.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BLANKS

Sometimes, there is no clear clue for the blank. On occasion (maybe once per test), there is no clear clue because the blanks are related to each other. If you’re struggling to find a clear clue for either blank, look for how the transition words connect the two blanks. If you find a transition word that connects the two blanks, come up with a pair of words that work for the blanks. Or, all you may be able to determine is that the two words go in the same or opposite directions.

Once you have a pair of words that work for the blanks, work through the choices for the first blank. When you find a word that works with your word, put a checkmark next to it and begin evaluating the words for the second blank. If you find a word in the answers that works for the second blank that also pairs well with the first blank, put a check next to it. Continue that process until you have gone through all of the potential answer choices for the first blank. If you end up with more than one pair of words that

work for the blanks, re-evaluate the sentence and work those blanks again.

Oftentimes, students will be scared off of their game by questions like this with no clear clue. The good news is these types of questions are relatively rare. Just stick to the process and keep your cool. But because these questions show up on average only once per test, you can always make a guess and devote your time to more customary questions.

TRICKY TRANSITIONS

Transitions indicate that two parts of the sentence are the same or opposite, similar or different, agreeing or contrasting. Not every transition is flagged by the obvious transition words that we highlighted in the earlier section: *and, but, so, however, because, despite, since, although, instead*, etc. Let's take a look at examples of more elusive transitions:

They were twins in _____ only: their personalities could not have been more _____.



Be Careful

Pay attention to tricky transitions.

The word *twins* indicates that similarity is expected. The word *only*, however, suggests that their similarity is limited to one aspect, because (note the transitional colon) another aspect, *their personalities*, was not twin-like. The word in the first blank should match “appearance”; the word in the second blank should match “different.”

Here the similarity was implied by the word *twins*. Similarity or difference could be implied by a mere description of two things:

Among dog breeds, the endearingly diminutive Shih Tzu has _____ close kinship to its lupine ancestors.

The word *close kinship* implies similarity between *the...Shih Tzu* and the wolf (*lupine ancestors*). However, the description of the Shih Tzu as *endearingly diminutive* contradicts our typical image of the wolf. Therefore, the word in the blank describing the *close kinship* between the two would be something like “(an) unexpectedly.”

Suffice it to say there are many ways to set up agreement or contrast between two parts of a sentence. The GRE will often use time transitions to indicate some sort of change or difference. The GRE will also unfurl words such as *unexpected*, *surprising*, *ironic*, or *unfortunate*. These words imply opposition or contrast to what was expected or hoped for. Things really get complicated when a sentence contains more than one transition. Read the following example and its variations:

- 1.** It's ironic that the striking nurses' chief grievance is _____ health care.
- 2.** It's ironic that, while content with their salaries and vacation packages, the striking nurses' chief grievance is _____ health care.
- 3.** It's ironic that, while pressing for better salaries and vacation packages, the striking nurses' chief grievance is _____ health care.
- 4.** It's ironic that, while content with their salaries and vacation packages, the striking nurses' chief objective is _____ health care.