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Disclaimer: At the time of initial publication, the information presented in this book was up-to-date. The Educational Testing Service has announced that as of September 22, 2023, changes are coming to the GRE exam that include reducing the number of questions in each section. These changes are discussed in Chapter 1. The concepts tested on the exam, other than the essay, are otherwise exactly the same.

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GRE[®] Prep 2024

with Online Practice

by Ron Woldoff, MBA

for
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GRE® Prep 2024 For Dummies® with Online Practice

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2023935172

ISBN 978-1-394-18337-1 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-394-18341-8 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-394-18339-5 (ebk)

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Introduction

Years ago, during an early gig as a consultant, I sat at a desk that had a *For Dummies* book on the shelf. The book was something office-related, like *SQL For Dummies*. I took a sticky note and wrote the word *Ron* with a black marker, then placed the sticky note over the word *Dummies* on the side of the book, so it read, *SQL For Ron*. It fit nicely.

Since starting my test-prep company, I've had students who would be my boss in the business world, and many have gone on to have amazingly successful careers. You, too, are in this group of future success stories. How do I know? Because you're on your way to an advanced degree, which will open lots of doors, and you're oh-so-close to getting started. You just need to get past this one hurdle called the GRE.

The GRE challenges your ability to conjure up everything you've forgotten since high school — things you haven't thought about in years. Really, all you need is a refresher, some strategies, and practice. This book has all that and more: It goes beyond rehashing what you've learned (and forgotten) by providing exam-specific strategies and tips for answering questions quickly and getting through the exam. There are examples, practice questions, and practice exams to help you hone your skills, identify areas you need to work on, and build your confidence for test day.

I've never met someone who couldn't do well on this exam. I *have* met people who haven't been coached properly, or who haven't practiced enough. With this take, I aim for 100 percent with each student. You're a little rusty here, haven't seen that there, could use a few tips, but you'll pick it up and do just fine. Succeeding on the GRE is like any other skill: If you know what to do, you have some coaching, and you practice, you'll be fine. I get you started with some review and guidance, and you take it from there.

About This Book

In *GRE Prep 2024 For Dummies*, I pretend you forgot everything. You start at the very beginning, covering all the basic math and verbal concepts, and then try some challenging GRE-level questions. You also discover how to approach these questions, avoid common mistakes, and practice the intuitive tricks that help you knock it out of the park.

There are three parts to achieving a top GRE score:

1. Knowing what's on the exam.

Read through this whole book. No matter how well you know a topic, you can discover strategies and common traps specific to the GRE, which has a way of asking a question that's different from what you're used to — or what you learned in the classroom.

2. Strengthening your weak subject areas.

While you're working through the book, mark any sections (and fold the corner of the page, if you have the physical book) that have unfamiliar or unclear topics so you can revisit them during your review. This book is organized to make it easy to find strategies and practice for specific question types that you have trouble with.

3. Preparing for the test-taking experience.

Answering the exam questions is one thing, but taking the exam is another. Start with the online practice exams to prep for the experience. ETS offers two excellent online practice exams, free of charge, but you'll need more than two. Packaged with this book, also free (after you buy the book), are *six* online practice exams: three in the book itself and all six online. When your exam is just around the corner, take one or two practice exams in real-life, dress-rehearsal settings. Flip to Part 6, "The Part of Tens," for ten ways to get the most benefit from the online practice exams.

Basically, this book does it all: It prepares you for the exam by taking your skills from the basic level to the GRE level and fixing any gaps. What else is there?

There's vocab.

To help you with vocab, as you work through this book, you'll notice that some words have a style all their own. Each GRE vocabulary word in this text appears in *this font*, followed directly by its *connotation* (meaning). Besides that, when you encounter a GRE vocab word in a question, look up its meaning and write it down. This is an effective complement to studying from a list or flash cards.

Icons Used in This Book

Look for these icons to spot highlights throughout this book:



TIP

This indicates a key strategy or point to remember. There are lots of these, which is good, because they're essential to your success on the exam.



REMEMBER

This indicates overall knowledge about the exam that's useful for planning your approach, such as managing your time or knowing what to expect.



WARNING

This marks a GRE trap or common student mistake so you can spot it and dodge it on test day.



PLAY

This indicates a practice question for you to try.

Beyond the Book

Besides this book, there are more online resources, including these:

» **Cheat Sheet:** Go to www.dummies.com and type "GRE Prep 2024 For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the Search box for this book's Cheat Sheet, which gives you last-minute details, including a rundown of what to expect when you take the GRE, a list of what to bring versus what to leave at home, tips for taking the computer-based exam, and more pointers for answering exam questions.

- » **Over 400 GRE vocabulary flash cards:** Stock your mental word bank and boost your verbal score by accessing the meanings of over 400 words that frequently appear on the GRE.
- » **Six full-length practice exams:** You can take the three practice exams in this book along with three more online to help you build your competence and confidence. You can select the level of difficulty and answer the questions through untimed and timed quizzes, so you can practice at your own speed and then try it out under pressure.

To get access to the online flash cards and practice exams, all you have to do is register. Just follow these simple steps:

1. Register your book or ebook at Dummies.com to get your PIN. Go to www.dummies.com/go/getaccess.
2. Select your product from the drop-down list on that page.
3. Follow the prompts to validate your product, and then check your email for a confirmation message that includes your PIN and instructions for logging in.

If you do not receive this email within two hours, please check your spam folder before contacting us through our Technical Support website at <http://support.wiley.com> or by phone at 877-762-2974.

Now you're ready to go! You can come back to the practice material as often as you want — simply log on with the username and password you created during your initial login. No need to enter the access code a second time.

Your registration is good for one year from the day you activate your PIN.

Where to Go from Here

You can approach this book in three ways:

- » **Work through it from beginning to end.** This approach is best for most test-takers. Although prepping to take the GRE isn't a linear process, I present topics from easy to challenging, so they build on each other as you progress through the chapters. I provide a feel for the test-taking experience along with guidance for each section of the exam — verbal, math, and essays — followed by practice exams, and I wrap things up with some Part of Tens chapters that provide some good, sound strategies to help you get through the exam.
- » **Skip around.** Each chapter is a stand-alone lesson on a specific GRE topic. If your study time is limited, skip around to focus on areas where you need the most guidance. For example, you can skip to Chapter 7 to hone your skills at answering Argument Analysis questions, or visit Chapter 12 to brush up on geometry. Another strategy is to take one of the sample tests to evaluate your skills and identify areas of weakness, and then use that information to develop your plan of attack. (More on this approach in Chapter 2.)
- » **Use it as a reference book.** Whenever you need information and advice on a specific GRE topic or skill, simply flip to the chapter or section that contains the information and guidance you need. *GRE Prep 2024 For Dummies* offers a refresher on the topics and skills you need to get the score you need on the GRE.

As you go through the book, write up some flash cards to note key concepts and strategies. These cards will serve as a handy reference while you review your notes.

I've been helping GRE students beat the test for years, so I know not only students' common questions and mistakes, but also how to make the math and verbal questions easier to answer. This book distills my tricks and secrets, which I'm pleased to share with you. Your success, after all, is why we're both here.

1

Getting Started with the GRE

IN THIS PART . . .

Get the details about scheduling your GRE, what's on the exam, and how your score is calculated.

Figure out your long-term, short-term, and last-minute study plans, and get some pointers if you need to retake the exam.

Know what else you need to do to prepare (beyond studying) along with what to expect on test day.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Knowing the layouts of the current and upcoming GRE
- » Understanding how your scores are calculated
- » Bringing the GRE into your comfort zone

Chapter 1

Knowing the GRE

The GRE isn't an IQ test, nor is it a measure of your worth as a human being or a predictor of your ultimate success in life. The GRE is designed to assess your ability to excel in grad school by sizing you up in three areas.

- » **Work ethic:** How hard you're willing and able to work to achieve an elusive academic goal — in this case, performing well on the GRE — reflects your work ethic. Graduate schools consider this to be a measure of how hard you'll work in their programs.
- » **Study skills:** How well you can master some basic study skills and be able to process and retain new information.
- » **Test-taking ability:** How well you can perform on a test, under pressure, which is a separate ability from being able to answer the questions. Exams are *ubiquitous* (appearing everywhere) to grad school, so you need to prove that you can take one without folding under pressure.

This book can guide you in the first area, but it's mostly up to you. As a study guide, however, this book shows you how to achieve the second and third areas, enabling you to study more effectively and efficiently and improve your overall test-taking skills. By knowing the material and taking the practice tests, you establish a foundation for doing well on the GRE. And usually, if you know what to do and how to do it, you might find yourself working a little bit harder. In this way, this book helps you further in that first area.

In this chapter, I discuss the GRE's structure and scoring system so you can build your strategies around them. With this guidance, you're better equipped to avoid surprises that may throw you off your game.

Knowing the GRE Sections

Standardized tests tend to bring on the chills. Telling someone you have to take the SAT, ACT, or GRE usually gets the same response as saying that you need to have your wisdom teeth pulled. However, with this book, the GRE isn't such a chilling experience, and breaking it down to its component parts makes it more manageable and less threatening.

On September 22, 2023, the long-running GRE is being replaced by a revised, shorter GRE. The types of questions, scope of topics, and overall exam difficulty are exactly the same, but the *number* of questions and the amount of time that you spend grappling with them go down by about half.

If you can, bump your test date to *after* the format change, so on exam day you only have to focus at full throttle for two hours instead of four. You may have to pay a rescheduling fee.

However, if you cannot extend the date of your exam, say because your application deadline is on or before September 2023 (so check with your target schools *before* changing the exam date), this book includes guidance and strategies for *both* exam formats. The most notable change among the *halving* (cutting in half) of the test is the removal of the Analyze an Argument essay task, but other than that, the strategies and practice are *exactly* the same.

Tables 1-1 and 1-2 provide a quick overview of what's on the current and upcoming exams. Note that only the previous format has a break.

TABLE 1-1 Outgoing GRE Breakdown by Section

Section	Number of Questions	Time Allotted
Analyze an Issue	1 essay	30 minutes
Analyze an Argument	1 essay	30 minutes
Verbal Section 1	20 questions	30 minutes
Verbal Section 2	20 questions	30 minutes
Break - 10 minutes		
Math (Quantitative) Section 1	20 questions	35 minutes
Math (Quantitative) Section 2	20 questions	35 minutes
Discreetly Unscored Math or Verbal Section (may be earlier in the exam)	20 questions	30 or 35 minutes
		Total - close to 4 hours

TABLE 1-2 Upcoming GRE Breakdown by Section

Section	Number of Questions	Time Allotted
Analyze an Issue	1 essay	30 minutes
Math (Quantitative) Section 1	12 questions	21 minutes
Math (Quantitative) Section 2	15 questions	26 minutes
Verbal Section 1	12 questions	18 minutes
Verbal Section 2	15 questions	23 minutes
		Total - almost 2 hours



TIP

The GRE allows you to skip questions and return to them later, within that section. When you reach the end of a section, the GRE displays a review screen that indicates any unanswered questions. If you have time remaining in the section, return to these questions and answer them as

well as you can. This feature is nice because you can knock out the easy questions first before spending time on the hard ones. (See Chapter 2 for more on planning your time.)

So what types of questions are there on the GRE? Table 1-3 has the details. Note that the question types are mixed throughout their sections, so you may encounter them in any order. Sometimes the software groups similar questions at the beginning or the end. For example, if you're halfway through a Verbal section and haven't seen a Text Completion question, you will.

TABLE 1-3 GRE Breakdown by Question Type

Per Math section:	Per Verbal section:
Multiple-choice with exactly one correct answer	Text Completion
Multiple-choice with one or more correct answers	Sentence Equivalence
Fill-in-the-blank with the correct answer	Argument Analysis
Data Interpretation (based on graphs)	Reading Comprehension
Quantitative Comparisons	

Knowing the GRE Scores

With the GRE, you receive three separate scores: Verbal, Math, and Analytical Writing. You drive home knowing your unofficial Verbal and Math scores (as explained in the following section), but you get your Analytical Writing score about two weeks later.

On the GRE, you can score a maximum of 340 points on the multiple-choice and 6 points on the essays. Here's the scoring range for each of the three sections.

- » **Verbal:** The Verbal score ranges from 130 to 170 in 1-point increments. You get 130 points if you answer just one question, but that won't help you much: You need to score as well as or better than most of the other test-takers to improve your chances of being admitted to your target school. The chapters in Part 2 give you the lowdown on the Verbal sections.
- » **Math:** The Math score also ranges from 130 to 170 in 1-point increments. The chapters in Part 3 have more on the Math sections.
- » **Analytical Writing:** The Analytical Writing score ranges from 0 to 6, in half-point increments, with 6 being the highest. Each essay is graded separately, and your final score is the average of the two. There is more on the essays in the Part 4 chapters.



REMEMBER

If a multiple-choice question requires two or more answers, you have to get all the answers correct: There is no partial credit. However, you don't lose points for a wrong answer, so if you're not sure, take a guess and return to the question later. More on this strategy in Chapter 2.

Calculating your score

Within each section, each question counts exactly the same toward your score: The more questions you get right, the higher your score for that section. An easy question is worth the same as a hard question. Because you can move back and forth within each section, one strategy is to skip around and answer all the easy questions first, then go back and work the hard questions. If you like this idea, try it out on a practice test before exam day.

On the computer version of the exam, the *second* Math or Verbal section (not counting the unscored section) becomes easier or harder based on your performance. For example, if you do extremely well on the first Math section, the GRE makes the second Math section harder. Even if you don't get as many right answers in the second Math section, your score will be good, and it'll definitely be higher than the score of someone who bombs the first Math section but gets them all right in the second one. GRE scoring accommodates for the difficulty level of the questions in the second section.



WARNING

The strategy of bombing the first Math and Verbal sections in order to answer more questions correctly on the respective second sections is not a good one, and you'll end up with a low score. The exam doesn't score you based solely on the number of correct answers: It scores you based on how smart it thinks you are. So if you do *great* on the first Math section, the exam thinks you're smart and *ups* the difficulty level for the second Math section. If you don't answer all those questions correctly, that's okay: The questions are harder, and the exam has evaluated your skills. Conversely, if you *bomb* the first Math section, the exam thinks you're not good at math, so it *drops* the level for the second Math section. If you answer most of those questions correctly, it doesn't help your score much because those questions are easier.

When you complete a practice test from Part 5, you can easily estimate your Math and Verbal scores. For the Math score, count the math questions you answered correctly and then add 130 to that number. Because the GRE has 40 math questions (two sections with 20 questions each), this method gives you an approximate score from 130 to 170. You can find your Verbal score the exact same way, because the GRE also has 40 Verbal questions. Note this method doesn't account for the changing difficulty of the second Math and Verbal sections, but it's still an excellent way for you to track your progress as you improve.

Checking your score

If you score close to 340, you did great! If you score closer to 260, not so much. But wait — your score is right in between! Did you pass? Did you fail? What does it mean? Well, you can't really tell much about your score out of context. What does 320 mean? It all goes by a percentile ranking. To download the complete percentile table, visit www.ets.org, click GRE Tests, and search for “percentile ranking.” As of this writing, here are some highlights:

- » A raw score of 165 is typically a 96th percentile ranking in the Verbal and an 84th percentile ranking in the Math.
- » A raw score of 160 is typically an 85th percentile ranking in the Verbal and a 70th percentile ranking in the Math.

Basically, with a range of only 40 points per section among 500,000 GRE-takers per year, give or take, each point counts for a lot. How well you do is based on how well the other test-takers did. You need to ask your target school's admissions office what score you need to get in to that school — or, even better, what score you need for a scholarship! Once you're in your program (or you've landed your scholarship), your GRE score doesn't matter. Plus, I've had students who were already accepted to their schools but were retaking the exam for the scholarship.

Also, your exam score is only one part of the total application package. If you have a good GPA, a strong résumé, and relevant work experience, you may not need as high of a GRE score. On the other hand, a stellar GRE score can compensate for other weak areas.

Seeing or canceling your scores

Immediately after finishing the GRE, you have the option of either seeing or canceling your Verbal and Math scores. Unfortunately, you don't get to see your scores first. If you *think* you had a bad day, you can cancel, and your scores are neither reported to the schools nor shown to you. However, the schools are notified that you canceled your test. If you choose to see your score, you see it — minus the essay scores — right away, but you can't cancel it after that.



REMEMBER

How much do the schools care about canceled scores? Probably not much, especially if a strong GRE score (from when you retake the test 21 days later) follows the notice of cancellation. If you really want to know the impact of a canceled score, check with the admissions office of your target school. Each school weighs canceled scores differently. See the section “Using Old Scores” for more about what to do after canceling your GRE score.

Taking advantage of the ScoreSelect option

At the end of the test, you have the option of choosing which test scores to send to your target schools, assuming that you've taken the GRE more than once. You can send the most recent scores, scores from the past (within five years), or all your test scores. However, you can't pick and choose sections from different testing dates. For example, if today you did better in Verbal but last time you did better in Math, you can't select only those sections — you have to send the entire test. Select whether to send the scores of today's test, any previous test, or all your tests.

Your GRE score is good for five years after your testing date, so if you use ScoreSelect, you're limited to exams within the past five years.

Bringing the GRE into Your Comfort Zone

No need to panic about taking the GRE. You want to be confident and relaxed, which means bringing the GRE into your comfort zone. Working through this book and taking the practice tests can bring you very close to that goal, but having the right mindset is also useful. The following sections help put the GRE in the proper perspective and serve to remind you of just how prepared you really are.

Getting familiar with what's on the exam

The GRE focuses on a specific range of core concepts and presents questions in a fairly predictable format. Surprises are unlikely, especially if you're prepared and know what to expect. After you've successfully completed this book, you'll have the knowledge and experience needed to get the score you need on the exam. You will gain even more familiarity with the test questions and format by taking the computerized GRE sample tests.



REMEMBER

A little self-affirmation goes a long way. In the days leading up to the test and on test day, remind yourself just how fully prepared you are. The GRE is designed to be challenging, and everyone who takes it is nervous, but you're better prepared than they are. At least you will be.

Understanding the other admissions requirements

Although your performance on the GRE is important for admission, it's not the only thing that admissions departments look at. Your work experience, GPA, extracurricular activities (including volunteer work), and other factors that define you are also important parts of your application. Of course, you should still do your very best on the exam, but this isn't a do-or-die situation. Worst case: Retake the exam. Some of my best success stories are from students who retook the exam after forgetting key points or making mistakes on their first go-round. This also means you should schedule your exam with time to retake it if needed, but more on this in Chapter 2.

Using Old Scores

What if you took the GRE a long time ago when you thought you were going to grad school and then opted to take a job or start a family instead? Well, if it was within the past five years, you're in luck (assuming you scored well). GRE scores are reportable for up to five years. That means that if you're pleased with your old score, you can send it right along to the school of your choice and say *adios* to this book right here and now. However, if you took the test more than five years ago, you have to take it again, so hold on to this book.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEST PREP

Stories abound about how someone's friend's cousin's roommate took the GRE cold (with no preparation) and aced it. This story may be true on a rare occasion, but you hear only the success stories. Those test-takers who went in cold and bombed don't brag about the outcome. As an instructor, however, I hear those other stories all the time.

The GRE doesn't test your intelligence: It tests how well you've prepared for the test. I'd put my money on a prepared dunce over an unprepared genius every single time. Dramatically raising a test-taker's score, say from the 30th to the 90th percentile ranking, is something I do every day before breakfast, and it's what I do for you in this book. Being prepared means knowing what to expect and how to answer each question, which means that the first time you calculate a fraction of a circle had better not be on the actual GRE. Make your mistakes *here*, in practice where it doesn't count, *not* on the test, where it could cost you a scholarship.