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- Take a practice test
- Know what to expect on test day

Ron Woldoff, MBA

Founder of National Test Prep

GRE[®] 5-Hour Quick Prep

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GRE[®] 5-Hour Quick Prep

by Ron Woldoff, MBA

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GRE® 5-Hour Quick Prep For Dummies®

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Start Here

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.

About This Book

GRE 5-Hour Quick Prep For Dummies helps you prepare for the exam in 5 hours by breaking the basic things you need to know into five blocks that add up to five hours:

- » **Block 1 (20 minutes)** provides an overview of the GRE basics — what you need to know before you sign up, what to bring to the testing center, what to expect on the test, some general strategies, and how to interpret your score.
- » **Block 2 (1 hour)** helps you prepare for the essay and Verbal section. Learn what the GRE essay evaluators are looking for and how to provide the writing sample they want. You also explore the different types of questions you'll see in the Verbal section and find tips for how to answer them.
- » **Block 3 (2 hours)** reviews math — a lot of math. The good news is that most of this math isn't difficult if you understand the concepts and strategies explained in this block.
- » **Block 4 (1 hour, 30 minutes)** is a shortened practice exam that helps you simulate testing-like conditions while still keeping your preparation time within 5 hours. The answers and explanations help you check your work and dig a little deeper into the concepts you need to understand to succeed on the test.
- » **Block 5 (10 minutes)** is quick list of things to do the night before. This is the block where I tell you to relax because you completed the other blocks and are ready for exam day.

Basically, this book 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.

Foolish Assumptions

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.

That said, I assume you forgot almost everything the GRE asks you to do. This book covers the basic math and verbal concepts and offers 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.

Even if you're a little rusty here and there and could use a few tips, I also assume you'll pick it up and do just fine. Succeeding on the GRE is like any other skill: If you know what to do, have some coaching, and practice, you'll likely achieve the score you need.

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.

Where to Go from Here

You can approach this book in two 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 each block.
- » **Skip around.** If you're especially nervous about a specific part of the GRE, jump right to that block, and you can start preparing for the test in the way that will help you become most confident on test day.

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.

Block **1**

GRE Overview in 20 minutes

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 in 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 what you need to know about signing up for the GRE, the GRE's structure, some test-taking strategies, and the GRE's scoring system. With this guidance, you're better equipped to avoid surprises that may throw you off your game.

Signing Up for the GRE

When you sign up for the GRE, you have to decide whether to take the test in a testing center or at home. If you need accommodations or financial assistance, the GRE has a process you need to understand and follow. After walking you through some tips for both of these options, this section explains how to sign up for the test.

Choosing when and where to take the test

You can take the GRE at a testing center or at home. Because the computerized GRE is administered to individual test-takers, testing centers tend to have few seats, and those seats fill up quickly during peak admission deadline months (April and November). If you're planning to take the GRE in a testing center (as opposed to at home) around these months to get your test scores in on time, schedule your test early and secure your ideal time slot. You can always reschedule, but the last thing you need is an inconvenient time or location. Before at-home testing was available, I had a student wait until the last minute to schedule his exam, and he had to drive from Phoenix to Tucson (about 120 miles) to take his GRE and get his scores in on time. He called me during his drive, and we reviewed math formulas, but this wasn't an ideal way to ramp up for the test.

At the time of this writing, the at-home GRE test is an option. You will have to submit proof that you're not set up to cheat. ETS provides detailed requirements when you sign up, but anti-cheat measures include taking a video of your room and using software that ensures no other app is open on your computer. This may be invasive, but ETS has to make sure you're not stealing an advantage with your at-home setup. You also have to use a small whiteboard or laminated sheet for your scratch work, along with a dry-erase marker for your scratch notes, instead of the traditional pencil and paper that you get at the testing center.

Some students prefer the testing center so there are no home-based distractions (such as family, dog, or phone notifications). On the other hand, at-home testing ensures you can grab a time that works best for you, rather than selecting from the remaining open time slots at the testing center. Give it some thought and go with what works best for you.

Applying for accommodations

If you need an accommodation or financial support, the folks at ETS are usually accommodating as long as you give them a heads-up. Following is a brief list of special circumstances and how to obtain assistance for each.

- » **Learning disabilities:** These disabilities refer to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and other related or similar conditions. To find out whether you qualify for accommodations or a disabilities waiver of any sort, contact ETS Disability Services, Educational Testing Service, P.O. Box 6054, Princeton, NJ 08541-6054; phone 866-387-8602 (toll free) or 609-771-7780 (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time), fax 609-771-7165, www.ets.org/gre, or stassd@ets.org.

Qualifying for accommodations is an involved process that takes time, and gathering the required documentation may require significant effort on your part. If you have a qualifying disability, act sooner rather than later to find out what's required and when you need to submit your request and documentation.

- » **Physical disabilities:** ETS tries to accommodate everyone. Folks who need special arrangements can get Braille or large-print exams, have test-readers or recorders, work with interpreters, and so on. You can get the scoop about what ETS considers to be disabilities and how the disabilities can change the way you take the GRE in the *Supplement for Test Takers with*



REMEMBER

Disabilities. This publication contains information, registration procedures, and other useful forms for individuals with physical disabilities. To get this publication, send a request to ETS Disability Services, P.O. Box 6054, Princeton, NJ 08541-6054. Or better yet, head to www.ets.org/gre and click the Test Takers with Disabilities or Health-Related Needs link for all the info you need to know, along with contact information if you have questions or concerns.

» **Financial difficulties:** Until you ace the GRE, get into a top-notch graduate school, and come out ready to make your first million, you may have a rough time paying for the exam. However, fee waivers are available. Note that the waiver applies only to the actual GRE fee, not to miscellaneous fees such as the test-disclosure service, hand-grading service, and so on. Your college counselor can help you obtain and fill out the appropriate request forms. (If you're not currently in college, a counselor or financial aid specialist at a nearby college or university may still be able to help you. Just call for an appointment.)

Registering for the test



REMEMBER

If you plan to take the GRE at a testing center, sign up early so you can choose the day, time, and place that work best for you. The time-slot availability varies per testing center, so if one testing center doesn't have a time slot that works for you, you may be able to try another nearby testing center, or you can schedule the test for home.

To sign up for the GRE, see the current *GRE Information and Registration Bulletin* (available through most college admissions offices), register online at www.ets.org, or register via phone by calling 800-473-2255. You can also check the GRE testing center locations and available time slots at www.ets.org.



TIP

To get into the right mindset, take at least one practice test at the same time of day that you plan to take the real thing. (Check out the practice test in Block 4.) If you're used to eating or relaxing at a certain time each day, make sure these tendencies don't sneak up on you during the exam. A recurring theme of this book is to make the exam and testing experience as familiar as possible, so that you're used to it and it's almost no big deal. (See Block 5 for more on gearing up for exam day.)

Knowing What to Expect on the GRE

On the morning of the exam, there's no such thing as a pleasant surprise. This section helps you avoid these surprises so you know exactly what to expect on exam day. This way, you can focus on the GRE in a more relaxed and confident frame of mind. Confidence comes from being prepared, and the last thing you want is to show up rushed and stressed *before* starting the exam.

Following the exam-room rules

If you take the GRE at a testing center, you must bring certain things and leave other things behind in order to be allowed into the testing room. Here's what you need to get together the night before the exam.

» **Photo ID:** Your identification needs three key elements.

- A recognizable photo
- The name you used to register for the test
- Your signature

Usually, a driver's license, passport, employee ID, or military ID does the trick. A student ID alone isn't enough (although it works as a second form of ID in case something's unclear on your first one). Note that a Social Security card or a credit card isn't acceptable identification.

- » **Water and a snack:** You may want a refreshment before you start the exam, so bring a bottle of water and a light snack, such as an energy bar or a granola bar. If you're like me, you'll have a to-go cup of coffee. Avoid snacks high in sugar, simple carbohydrates, or fats.
- » **Map or directions:** Know in advance where you're going. Map your directions, and it doesn't hurt to check the satellite view so you can see where to park. You could drive to the testing center a few days before to check out the drive time, parking, fees, and so on. If you're taking public transportation, find out where and when you need to board the bus or train, how long the ride is, how much it costs, and where you get off.

One student had to take the test at a center in the middle of a downtown area. She had checked out the area on a Saturday, when the streets were empty and parking was clear. But her exam was Monday morning, when the streets were jammed and the parking was taken. Naturally, she wasn't expecting this, and it was an extra stressor that morning.

Another option is Uber or Lyft. When Google Mapping the route to plan your trip, be sure to set the ride time to *the morning of the exam* so the trip time reflects the traffic. It doesn't hurt to plan on being there 30 minutes early, so if your driver or friend is late or doesn't know the roads, you have a time cushion.



TIP

- » **Comfortable clothes:** Dress in layers. Testing centers can be warm, or more typically, cold. Shivering for hours won't help your performance. Dress in layers so you can be comfortable regardless of how the testing center runs the A/C.
- » **Authorization voucher from Educational Testing Service (ETS):** If you pay with a method other than a credit/debit card or have a disability or require certain testing accommodations, ETS provides an *authorization voucher*. Not everyone gets this voucher, but if you do, be sure to bring it with you on the day of the test.

Just as important as knowing what to bring to the testing center is knowing what not to bring. Leave these things at home or in your car:

- » **Books and notes:** Forget about last-minute studying. You aren't allowed to take books or notes into the testing center. Besides, if you don't know the material by that time, cramming won't help.
- » **Calculator:** You aren't allowed to use your own calculator, but an on-screen calculator is available during the math sections of the exam. One nice thing about the on-screen calculator is that it features a button that transfers the number from the calculator field to the answer space. Your handheld calculator won't do that.
- » **Friends for support:** Meet them after the exam. However, having a friend drop you off and pick you up isn't a bad idea, especially if parking is likely to be a problem, such as at a downtown testing center.
- » **Phones, tablets, or other electronics:** Any electronic device, including your phone or iPad, is strictly prohibited. You can bring these to the testing center, but they stay in a locker while you're taking the GRE.
- » **Scratch paper (at the testing center):** You aren't allowed to bring in your own scratch paper; the testing center provides it for you. If you run low during the test, request more from the proctor. Although you have plenty of room to do calculations and scribbling, your scratch paper stays at the testing center when you're done.

» **Scratch paper (at home):** Note that if you take the GRE at home, you're not allowed to use paper of any kind, or pens or pencils for that matter. Plan ahead and pick up an ETS-approved small whiteboard or laminated sheet to write on, along with an erasable marker and eraser. At the end of the exam, you'll hold the erased whiteboard or sheet up to the camera to show the proctor that all your notes have been erased.

If the thought of bending these rules to give yourself an extra edge on the test even enters your mind, banish that thought. Cheating on the GRE simply doesn't work, so don't even consider it. They're on to you. When you get to the testing center, and before you begin your test, the proctors separate you from anything that you can possibly use to cheat, including your phone, wristwatch, water bottle, jacket, and hat. On top of that, you're monitored by a camera while taking the test. Any semblance of privacy goes right out the window. How would you cheat anyway? You can't copy all those vocabulary words or write all the math formulas on anything accessible during the test. Besides, the GRE tests your critical-reasoning and problem-solving skills more than your memorization skills.



REMEMBER

If you test at home, the GRE has controls in place to keep you honest. ETS monitors everything from the software on your computer to the electronics in your room. Be careful, and make sure you follow the rules — even a misunderstanding could cost you your score. Refer to the full set of rules on the At Home Testing page at www.ets.org.



WARNING

Someone caught cheating can be banned from taking the test for up to ten years! In the world of college education, that's nearly a lifetime.

Surveying each section of the GRE

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.

Table 1-1 provides a quick overview of what's on the GRE. The essay is always first, but the multiple-choice sections may be in any order.

TABLE 1-1 GRE Breakdown by Section

Section	Number of Questions	Time Allotted
Analyze an Issue	1 essay	30 minutes
Math (2 sections)	27 questions	47 minutes
Verbal (2 sections)	27 questions	41 minutes
Total Time		1 hour, 58 minutes



REMEMBER

At nearly two hours plus time spent checking in, the GRE challenges your stamina as much as your ability to answer the questions. No matter how solid your math and verbal skills are, you have to maintain your focus for the whole stretch, which isn't easy on a challenging task such as this. If you need to build your test-taking stamina, complete the blocks in this book so they add up to two-hour sessions. If you have extra time after completing this *GRE 5-Hour Quick Prep For Dummies*, you can take one or two free, timed practice tests online at www.ets.org/gre/test-takers/general-test/prepare/powerprep.html.