

## GMAT Preparation Tips

Think you're ready for business school? Not until you've mastered the GMAT. Here are 6 tips to help. The Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) is the standardized test most used by business schools across the country and it's an integral part in the business school admissions process. Though it seems a business-focused exam would be heavy on math, the GMAT is designed to test your overall academic aptitude—verbal and written communication are just as important in the business world as your ability to put in long hours crunching numbers.

Like the SAT and GRE, the GMAT consists of sections that will test your verbal, mathematical, and writing proficiency. Test takers are allotted three-and-a-half hours to complete the three-section test. The analytical writing section allots 30 minutes apiece for the completion of two separate essays: an analysis of an issue and an analysis of an argument. The quantitative section, which is comprised of 37 multiple-choice questions that concern data sufficiency and problem solving, follows. Students have up to 75 minutes to finish the questions. The test concludes with the verbal section. Again, students have 75 minutes to complete the 41 questions in the section, which focus on critical reasoning, sentence correction, and reading comprehension. Unlike the SAT and GRE, the score you receive is cumulative and not broken down by section. The analytical writing section does not factor into the final score, which is on a 200-to-800 point scale.

1. Take it early, take it often. You saw most of the math covered in the GMAT in high school. Rather than waiting to take the GMAT after you've graduated college or even well into your working life, it's best to take the test in your sophomore or junior year of college, says Shadna Wise, executive director of graduate programs for the Princeton Review. By taking it earlier, the concepts you learned in high school, which may or may not have been revisited in an intro math class in college, are fresher in your mind and should lead you to a better score than if you are forced to relearn the material. Taking it during your years as an undergraduate is not detrimental, even though many B-schools require applicants to have a few years of work experience before applying. Your GMAT scores remain active for five years, so even if you take the test as a junior, you have a three-year window after graduating to garner the work experience that schools value before your GMAT score expires. "It's smart for someone, knowing the GMAT is going to cover those basic math principles—algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and statistics—to actually take the GMAT while you're still in school," says Wise.
2. Take economics and statistics in college. Some questions on the GMAT will test your knowledge of statistics, which isn't required in some high schools. It's best to take an intro statistics class early in college so that the content is fresh in your mind before taking the GMAT, testing experts say. Also, the GMAT doesn't directly test economics content, but a working familiarity of the subject's basic principles will help you better understand and interpret the business-focused content of the test. "[Taking an] economics [class] is good because it gives you real-life scenarios that you might see in a reading passage," says Wise. "Economics helps you take a business perspective when reading a problem, so it helps for [the] verbal [section]."

3. The verbal section matters more than you think. While there may be an emphasis on mathematics in many business school classes, precise communication skills are a necessity if you want to be a success in the business world. Not only that, they're much needed if you wish to score high marks on the GMAT. Because the quantitative and verbal scores are lumped together to create the final score, a poor showing on the verbal section can harm your overall score whether you're a math whiz or not. "If the student has suffered abysmally in English, they're not going to be able to communicate well in the form of E-mails, letters, press releases," says Wise. "If you're low in the verbal, your score is going to be lower, period. So, you want to nail it all."
4. Data sufficiency questions require sufficient practice. While much of the content covered on the GMAT is similar to that covered on the SAT, ACT, and GRE, and many of the questions are formatted in a similar manner, there is one exception: data sufficiency questions. Testing experts say these questions don't exist on other standardized tests and require a significant amount of practice in order to acclimate to their unconventional format. The questions present you with a question and two statements and ask you to determine if either statement answers the question, neither statement answers the question, one statement provides an answer, they answer the question in concert, or they both answer the question independently. At first glance, and without practice, these questions require more time than most and for your mind to work in ways it may not be accustomed. "For someone preparing for the GMAT, data sufficiency questions are usually the first enemy that they have," says Andrew Mitchell, director of graduate programs at Kaplan Test Prep and Admissions. "They're foreign, and they're tricky, and there are certain traps that people fall into again and again before they're familiar with the question type and before they practice it."
5. Adapt to the computer. Like the GRE, the GMAT is a computer adaptive test, meaning that the test is performed entirely on a computer and the questions posed to you changed based on your answers to the previous questions. The better you perform, the harder the questions get. With every correct response, the lowest possible score you can receive increases. Oftentimes, there are also cameras placed on you to ensure that you're not cheating, and there's a timer in front of you, reminding you of how long you have before the section is complete. These factors can make taking the GMAT a harrowing experience, especially the first time. "The computer adaptive test is very intimidating," says Ryan Johnston, who scored 700 on the test and will be attending the University Of Southern California Marshall School Of Business in the fall. "They've got cameras all over you. They're watching to make sure you're not cheating or even chewing gum. You're sitting there looking at the computer screen, and it's very high pressure, very difficult to keep your head focused."

If you think you might be intimidated by the test environment, the best way to prepare for it is to simulate it. As part of some Kaplan courses, for instance, the test prep firm offers a practice test in an actual testing center, where the student takes a full, timed practice test in the same environment they will use for the real thing. "It's realistic," says Mitchell. "If someone has nerves or anxiety about the testing center, they can get that out of their system."

6. The first 10 questions are very important ... but so is every other question. The greatest fluctuations in your score depend on how you fare on the first 10 questions of a given section because of the GMAT's computer adaptive format. It's important to make sure that you take your time on these questions, because they carry the most weight on the test. That doesn't mean, however, that you should spend nearly all of your time perfecting these questions. Just because performing well on them raises your low-score floor that doesn't necessarily mean you want to be sitting on that floor when the test is over. Leaving questions blank near the end of the test because you didn't have enough time to answer them can cost you valuable points that will drastically lower your percentile rank. It's best to pace yourself, ensuring that you have time to give each question a thorough look. "You're harshly penalized for having questions unanswered," says Mitchell. "Oftentimes, people will devote tons of time to the first questions, but then they really fall behind. You've got to finish strong as well."