

GRE Preparation FAQs for International Graduate Applicants

Website-ready content based on the current GRE General Test.

1. What is the GRE?

The Graduate Record Examinations General Test, commonly called the GRE, is an admissions examination accepted by many master's, doctoral, MBA and selected law programmes worldwide.

It evaluates skills relevant to graduate-level study:

- Verbal Reasoning
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Analytical Writing

The GRE is administered by Educational Testing Service (ETS).

2. Do all international graduate applicants need the GRE?

No. GRE requirements vary considerably by university, department and programme. A programme may classify the GRE as:

- compulsory;
- optional;
- recommended;
- not required; or
- required only for applicants with certain academic backgrounds.

Check the official requirements for each intended programme. "GRE optional" does not necessarily mean that a strong score has no value; it may still strengthen an application, particularly when the applicant's undergraduate grades or quantitative preparation are less competitive.

3. What is the difference between the GRE General Test and a GRE Subject Test?

The **GRE General Test** measures broad verbal, quantitative and analytical-writing abilities.

A **GRE Subject Test** measures knowledge in a particular academic field. Subject Tests are currently offered in selected disciplines and are required by relatively few programmes.

Applicants should not take a Subject Test unless their intended department requires or recommends it.

4. What is the current GRE General Test format?

The test takes approximately **1 hour and 58 minutes** and contains five sections.

Measure	Structure	Time
Analytical Writing	One “Analyze an Issue” task	30 minutes
Verbal Reasoning – Section 1	12 questions	18 minutes
Verbal Reasoning – Section 2	15 questions	23 minutes
Quantitative Reasoning – Section 1	12 questions	21 minutes
Quantitative Reasoning – Section 2	15 questions	26 minutes

Analytical Writing always appears first. The Verbal and Quantitative sections may then appear in either order. Review the official [GRE test structure](#).

5. What does the Verbal Reasoning section assess?

Verbal Reasoning evaluates your ability to:

- understand written material;
- analyse relationships between words and ideas;
- interpret meaning from context;
- identify an author’s assumptions or conclusions; and
- complete passages and sentences logically.

Common question types include Reading Comprehension, Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence.

6. What does the Quantitative Reasoning section assess?

Quantitative Reasoning tests mathematical understanding and problem-solving in areas such as:

- arithmetic;
- algebra;
- geometry;
- data analysis;
- ratios and percentages;
- probability and statistics; and
- quantitative comparisons.

The mathematics is generally based on secondary-school concepts, but questions require careful reasoning and efficient time management. An on-screen calculator is available.

7. What does the Analytical Writing section require?

Candidates complete one 30-minute **Analyze an Issue** task. You must develop a clear position, support it with relevant reasons or examples and organise your argument logically.

Successful essays normally demonstrate:

- a clear response to the given issue;
- logical development of ideas;
- relevant supporting examples;
- effective paragraph structure;
- appropriate vocabulary and sentence control; and
- accurate written English.

8. How is the GRE scored?

Measure	Score range
Verbal Reasoning	130–170
Quantitative Reasoning	130–170
Analytical Writing	0–6
Combined Verbal and Quantitative range	260–340

Verbal and Quantitative scores are reported in one-point increments. Analytical Writing is reported in half-point increments. Score reports also include percentile rankings. [Official GRE scoring information](#)

9. What is a good GRE score?

There is no universal passing score. A suitable score depends on:

- the university's competitiveness;
- the selected programme;
- the applicant pool;
- whether the discipline is quantitative or language-intensive; and
- the strength of the applicant's academic record.

Applicants should examine each programme's published expectations and, where available, the score profile of previously admitted students. Engineering, economics, finance and data-related courses may emphasise Quantitative Reasoning, while humanities and social-science programmes may place greater weight on Verbal Reasoning and Analytical Writing.

10. How long should I prepare for the GRE?

Most applicants should plan approximately **eight to twelve weeks** of structured preparation. A longer period may be necessary if the applicant:

- has limited academic English;
- needs substantial vocabulary development;
- has not studied mathematics recently;
- requires a major score improvement; or
- can study only a few hours each week.

The study period should be based on the difference between the applicant's diagnostic score and target score—not on a standard timetable for every student.

11. How should I begin preparing?

Start by taking a diagnostic test under realistic conditions. Then:

1. Confirm the target scores for your intended programmes.
2. Analyse your performance by topic and question type.
3. Create weekly Verbal, Quantitative and Writing targets.
4. Review concepts before beginning intensive timed practice.
5. Maintain an error log showing why each mistake occurred.
6. Complete full-length mock tests during the final preparation stage.
7. Adjust your university list after receiving your official result.

12. What is an effective weekly GRE study plan?

A balanced weekly plan could include:

- **Two sessions:** Quantitative concepts and problem-solving
- **Two sessions:** Verbal Reasoning and vocabulary in context
- **One session:** Reading Comprehension
- **One session:** Analytical Writing
- **One session:** Timed mixed practice and error analysis

Applicants should spend more time analysing mistakes than merely counting completed questions.

13. What preparation materials should I use?

Begin with official ETS resources because they most accurately represent the examination. ETS provides sample questions, mathematics reviews, preparation videos and POWERPREP practice tests.

Useful official resources include:

- [GRE preparation resources](#)
- [POWERPREP practice tests](#)
- Official GRE Mathematics Review
- Official verbal and quantitative practice questions
- Published Analytical Writing topics and sample responses

Third-party materials can provide additional practice, but their questions may not precisely reproduce GRE style or difficulty.

14. How can international applicants improve GRE vocabulary?

Do not rely only on memorising long word lists. A more effective strategy is to:

- learn words in sentences and passages;
- record definitions, synonyms and contrasts;
- identify prefixes, suffixes and word roots;

- read academic and analytical articles regularly;
- practise Text Completion and Sentence Equivalence questions; and
- review vocabulary through spaced repetition.

Understanding how a word functions in context is more valuable than memorising an isolated definition.

15. Can I take the GRE outside the United States?

Yes. The GRE is available at authorised test centres in many countries. An at-home version may also be available in eligible locations, subject to ETS equipment, environment and identification requirements.

Applicants should confirm current availability through their ETS account before planning their test date.

16. What identification will I need?

Identification requirements depend on your citizenship and the country where you take the test. The first and last names entered in your ETS account must match the identification document exactly.

Identification normally needs to be:

- original and physical;
- government-issued;
- valid and unexpired;
- accompanied by a recent photograph; and
- consistent with the registered name.

International applicants should check the country-specific [ETS identification requirements](#) before registering.

17. How much does the GRE cost?

ETS fees depend on the applicant's testing location and may change. Fees effective from **1 August 2026** are:

- **US\$249** in most parts of the world
- **US\$231.30** in China
- separate arrangements for candidates in India

Additional charges may apply for rescheduling, changing a test centre or ordering extra score reports. Confirm the applicable amount on the official [GRE fees page](#).

18. When should I take the GRE?

Ideally, take the GRE at least **two to three months before the earliest university deadline**. This provides time to:

- receive and review the official result;
- retake the test if necessary;
- send scores to universities;
- finalise the university shortlist; and
- avoid application delays.

Do not select a date based only on test-centre availability. Allow enough time to achieve the required preparation level.

19. When will I receive my scores?

Unofficial Verbal and Quantitative scores are normally displayed after completing the test. The official score report, including Analytical Writing, is issued later through the applicant's ETS account.

Applicants should check the current ETS processing timeframe and allow extra time for scores to reach universities before their application deadlines.

20. How long are GRE scores valid?

GRE scores are reportable for **five years following the test date**. However, applicants should confirm whether an individual university applies a more restrictive policy. [Official GRE score validity guidance](#)

21. Can I choose which GRE scores universities receive?

Yes. ETS offers the **ScoreSelect** service, which allows applicants to select scores from particular test dates. On test day, candidates may nominate up to four approved institutions or fellowship sponsors to receive scores as part of the test fee.

Additional score reports currently cost **US\$40 per recipient**. Some programmes require applicants to disclose all attempts, so applicants must also follow each university's own reporting policy. [Sending GRE scores](#)

22. Can I retake the GRE?

Yes. The GRE General Test may be taken once every **21 days**, up to five times within any continuous 12-month period. This restriction also applies when a previous score was cancelled.

Before retaking, identify why the first result was below target and complete focused preparation. Repeating the test without changing the preparation strategy may produce a similar outcome.

23. Does a high GRE score guarantee admission?

No. Universities generally consider the complete application, including:

- undergraduate grades;

- academic background;
- statement of purpose;
- recommendations;
- research or professional experience;
- English-language proficiency;
- portfolio or writing samples, where applicable; and
- GRE results.

A strong GRE score can support an application but cannot compensate for every academic or programme-eligibility weakness.

24. Is the GRE a substitute for IELTS or TOEFL?

No. The GRE measures academic reasoning and writing, whereas IELTS, TOEFL and similar examinations demonstrate English-language proficiency.

An international applicant may need both the GRE and an approved English-language test unless eligible for an exemption.

25. How can IEC support GRE applicants?

IEC Edu Consultancy can assist with:

- initial GRE diagnostic assessment;
- personalised study planning;
- Verbal, Quantitative and Analytical Writing preparation;
- progress monitoring and mock-test analysis;
- programme and university selection;
- statement of purpose and application guidance;
- scholarship application support; and
- visa and pre-departure guidance.

Call to action:

Planning to apply for a master's, MBA or PhD programme? Book an initial assessment with IEC Edu Consultancy to evaluate your profile, establish your target GRE score and create a personalised preparation and application plan.

Important: Test fees, delivery options and university requirements may change. Applicants should verify current information with ETS and their intended universities before registering.