Understand the GMAT

Good Scores are not Random

Prepwise

UNOFFICIAL GMAT® SCORE REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scaled Score</th>
<th>Percentile</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Reasoning</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total*</td>
<td>750</td>
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The total score is derived from your Verbal and Quantitative scores.

ANT: You will receive an email notification to access your Official Score Report. You will need the email as well as this Unofficial Score Report to access your scores.
Preface

It all started with a blog post in response to a common complaint, “I can’t go to Business School without a 700 on my GMAT.”

Well, where there’s smoke there’s fire, but it isn’t the fire many students expect. 700 is a benchmark. Some 700s would be very welcome in most business school programs while others might be cause for concern. Indeed the student with a 640, while not well suited for a top tier program based on score, might be in a much better position with respect to his score than a student with a 700. It’s all about the composition.

Composition of a 700

A frequently misinterpreted part of the GMAT is the scoring. Not all 700s are created equal.

The percentiles in quant and verbal can be distracting. The story is in the scaled score. Some students have very balanced scores, (Quant)42/(Verbal)43. While others have wildly diverging scores, Q35/V50. What do these scaled scores mean? And does anyone notice or care?

The student with the Q42/V43 has a lower than desired quantitative score for a competitive program. That doesn’t mean she will be rejected, but a Q42 equates to a mid-60s percentile while the V43 is a low-90s. If you are aiming for a top tier school, it is wise to study properly in order to increase your quant score. Top tier schools prefer at least 80th percentile
in each. So our Q42/V43 student needs to crack the quant code, but her verbal is good to go.

The bschool applicant with a Q35/V50 is in a rare space. The scaled scores are out of a total of 51 so verbal is close to perfect and any verbal over 46 is in 99th percentile - super spectacular on verbal.

But with Q35, he has failed the quant. I’ve said that there are no “failing” scores on the GMAT, but here’s the skinny: a Q35 would puts you in the low 40th percentile for quant. Almost 60% of all test takers have done better on quant than you did. An application reviewer should have serious misgivings about a student with a 35 for quant. If I were reviewing the candidate, I would be concerned that he will struggle with the program’s quantitative courses. At the heart of every high quality business school is a core of quantitative courses that are essential to the curriculum. The 50 on verbal is off the charts spectacular top 1%, but that doesn’t buy you the safety net to make up for the terrible quant score.

If instead the score is Q50/V35, you have rocked the quant and done okay on the verbal. You are 94th percentile on Quant and 74th percentile on the verbal. This is fine, but not great. Your GMAT score will not keep you out of most business schools. Your verbal may be weak, but a business school will be much less concerned about a 35 in verbal than having the Q35 student.

Those are extremes based on 700. How does your score stack up?

My rule of thumb for GMAT test takers applying to top 5 programs is to aim for a quantitative score 48+. This satisfies the approximate 80th percentile most state as recommended on their application websites. If your quant score is 48+, your total GMAT (670, etc.) may not hold you back. Your weaker scaled score will determine the top combined score you can obtain, 200-800.
Haven’t taken the GMAT yet but want to see where you might land?

**Take the Quiz!**

In 5 questions you can estimate how much work you need to do to prepare for the test.

*(Can’t click the link?)*
https://www.prepwise.com/gmat-quiz
## What is the GMAT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Timing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analytical Writing:</strong></td>
<td>30 min.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Analysis of an Argument</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Integrated Reasoning:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Multi-Source Reasoning</td>
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<td>- Table Analysis</td>
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<td>- Graphics Interpretation</td>
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<td>- Two-Part Analysis</td>
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<td><strong>Optional break</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GMAT Quantitative:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Problem Solving</td>
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<td>- Data Sufficiency</td>
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<td><strong>GMAT Verbal:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reading Comprehension</td>
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<td>- Critical Reasoning</td>
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<td>- Sentence Correction</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Time:</strong></td>
<td>226 min.</td>
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Three Tests in One

You Should Know

When you sit for the GMAT you are actually sitting for 3 tests: AWA, IR, and the GMAT. No, you can’t skip one, but the good news is, you can keep you eye on the Prize (GMAT) and just don’t mess up the other two. The test includes the types of questions found by downloading the free GMATPrep software from mba.com. You can also find sample questions in the GMAT Review Official Guides. The Official Guides and GMATPrep software include actual retired test questions and are my preferred sources for students. Spend time with the computer software as it builds familiarity with the actual test environment. When you take the test:

- Only one question or question prompt at a time is presented on the computer screen.
- Different question types appear in random order in the multiple-choice and Integrated Reasoning sections of the test.
- You must select your answer using the computer.
- You must choose an answer and confirm your choice before moving on to the next question.
- You may not go back to previous screens to change answers to previous questions.
- You may not take notes or scratch paper with you into the testing room, but a notepad and marker will be provided for you to use during the test.

What the test measures

“The GMAT exam measures higher-order analytical skills encompassing several types of reasoning.”

-GMAC, makers of the test

From evaluating arguments to synthesizing data, the GMAT is focused on testing your ability to use sound logic with basic analytical skills. While it helps to have a broad set of knowledge, the GMAT is NOT a test of vocabulary, brute computation, or business knowledge. The difficulty of the GMAT is in solid application of very simple reading, writing, and analytical skills.
Analytical Writing Assessment

aka Avoid Shame

You start the examination process with one 30-minute writing task: The Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA), Analysis of an Argument. You will type your essay on a computer keyboard. As of this writing, the text editor you use to type your essay in does not include the hot keys you recognize such as CTRL C,V nor spellcheck so expect to spend a few minutes editing after you have crafted the essay. They do have hot keys, but they are lame gmat-only hot keys so just give yourself time to edit and stick to the basics. Consider using 5-paragraph form and avoiding elaborate styles.

Most students - of any language background - do well on AWA. As long as you score above 5, you’re fine.

“"The AWA measures your ability to think critically, communicate your ideas, and formulate an appropriate and constructive critique.""  
-GMAC

Kate says, the AWA is not a place to WIN, just don’t lose. The points here are trivial. The only time someone will care about your AWA score is if you flub it. Don’t flub it. Practice (only) if you need.

Need to practice essays or not sure about five paragraph form? I’m a fan of the resources available from Purdue at Owl, Online Writing Lab. They have a broad spectrum of writing aides. You can even get set up with 1-1 help. Pay particular attention to their resources on Mechanics, Grammar, and Punctuation.
Integrated Reasoning

aka Be Competent

This section was added in 2012 to address concerns from business schools that students were arriving at their MBA programs unprepared for basic analysis tasks despite strong GMAT scores. You will evaluate and manipulate multiple sources and types of information—graphic, numeric, and verbal to answer four question types.

Four question types:
- Multi-source Reasoning
- Table Analysis
- Graphics Interpretation
- Two-Part Analysis

This section is tricky for students who have not made themselves familiar with the question styles. Difficult IR questions are surprisingly difficult compared to difficult GMAT Quantitative questions. So make sure you familiarize yourself with the four question types. It is worth noting that unlike the GMAT, IR is not an adaptive test. You will have 12 questions to answer in 30-minutes. Through March 2017, data indicates that getting 9 or more correct leads to a top score. It is not clear that any of the top 20 programs are using IR as a way to sift students. Make sure you prepare enough to avoid embarrassment.

Advanced statistical skills are not necessary, but spend time brushing up on graphical interpretation and quickly sorting information, data and text. You will have access to an onscreen calculator with basic functions for IR. IR is a combination of Critical Reasoning and Arithmetic skills.

Practice these questions through GMATprep software freely available at mba.com. You can even add an extra 24 IR questions by buying Question Pack 1. That should be sufficient. You don’t need to master these, but you need to be competent.
Quantitative Section

The GMAT Quantitative section measures your ability to reason quantitatively, solve quantitative problems, and interpret graphic data. This section out of all three tests and four total sections gives students the most stress - reasonably so in many cases. You must do well enough on Quant to get into a top MBA program. Period. Not negotiable. (At least among the places I send students each year - mostly HBS and GSB) 2014 was really the last days of free passes because you are former military, saved dolphins, cured cancer, etc. You have to get this section together even if you’re basically a rockstar. Applying to US schools from overseas . . . doubly important for you. !!

Two types of multiple-choice questions are used in the Quantitative section:

Problem Solving
Data Sufficiency

Both are intermingled throughout the Quantitative section and both require basic knowledge of arithmetic, elementary algebra, and commonly known concepts of geometry. Noticed that I used “basic” and “elementary” - yeah, I mean it. This is NOT sophisticated. So anyone who tells you that you need special quant skills is either ignorant or trying to scare you. Everything you need to crush GMAT quant you coulda/shoulda learned in middle school (ages 11-13). You know how well you did in math back then. Use that as your gauge for prep now.

Not that this will be easy, but it isn’t the raw math that usually Fs people up. Your reasoning skills are more likely to kill you. Memorizing formulae is not even close to useful. You have to improve your reasoning skills. Data Sufficiency is not likely a question type you’ve ever experienced. Here’s the good news - it can totally be gamed! Here’s the bad news, if you think DS is easy, you’ve already been hosed. Toast. Toasted. Crushed.

You MUST get to a point of competency with DS as a question type. AND you must have your math basics on lockdown. It helps to have quick recall of basic multiplication
tables and simple formulae but you really, really do not need to memorize sophisticated geometry formulae. Keep your eye on mastery of the basics and learning DS.

**Verbal Section**

The GMAT Verbal section measures your ability to read and comprehend written material and to reason and evaluate arguments. The Verbal section includes reading sections from several different content areas: sciences, non-fiction literature, history, etc. No detailed knowledge of the topics is required. To be fair, if you hate science passages (this comes up all the time!), read more of them to prepare. You will get one on the test. It’s better to have prepared yourself mentally for that.

**Three types of multiple-choice questions are intermingled throughout the Verbal section:**
- Reading Comprehension
- Critical Reasoning
- Sentence Correction

All three require basic knowledge of the English language, but the Verbal section is not a test of advanced vocabulary. Vocabulary lists are useless for anyone with basic command of English.

**What you will likely need to improve…**

**Grammar and syntax.**

The biggest embarrassment for most students is their performance on Sentence Correction. You think you know how to speak properly and therefore can correct a few sentences . . . hahahahahaha. sigh. So you need to take a mercenary approach to SC. Don’t let the GMAT lure you into traps. If you answer SC based on what you want to hear, you’ve probably lost the battle. You have to take what they’ve given you and choose the best, not find what you want. You need to eliminate 4 wrongs to find the right answer. Focus: eliminate 4 wrong based on solid grammar/usage/syntax reasons.

For RC and CR you should know exactly what the answer is before you scan through the answer choices. Again, don’t let the GMAT lead you down the path they want . . . you need to find the right answer among the wrongs. Focus: find the 1 answer that answers the
question completely, avoid distractions - know what you want to find BEFORE you look at the answer choices.

# How Scores Are Calculated

Verbal and Quantitative sections are scored on a scale of 0 to 60, but scores above 51 are like unicorns - don’t expect to ever see one. The Total GMAT score ranges from 200 to 800 and is determined by:

- The number of questions you answer
- The number of questions you answer correctly or incorrectly
- The level of difficulty and other statistical characteristics of each question

The Quant, Verbal, and Total GMAT scores are determined by an algorithm that takes into account the difficulty of the questions and how you answered them. When you answer easier questions correctly, you get a chance to answer harder questions, making it possible to earn a higher score. When time has expired on the section, the computer calculates your scaled score and after the verbal section calculates both your verbal scaled score and your GMAT total score.

The AWA is scored by human and machine, independently, on a scale of 0 to 6, with 6 being the highest score and 0 the lowest. A score of three or lower indicates an off-topic or a blank response. If the independent scores vary by more than a point, a third (human) reader will score the essay.

The IR score is computed based on the number correct, and as of 2017 the IR section is still not adaptive.

# GMAT scoring confuses most applicants.

Here’s the good news, there’s no “Passing” score on the test. There really isn’t. Instead there are benchmarks you want to reach to avoid being considered a weaker candidate.

What do I like to see when reviewing a candidate for MBA admission?

Quantitative scaled score > 47
-and-
Verbal scaled score > 40

*If you achieve that, your GMAT is fine.*

Business schools accept candidates with a range of scores. Reaching 760 on the GMAT does not necessarily make you a stronger candidate than a student with a 690.

The good news, bad news of business school is that top tier programs are far harder to manipulate with test scores than you may think. Better programs get 5 to 10 times as many applications as they have spots available. They look at each applicant as a whole person.

**Good News:**
You will be judged for the work you have done so far,
The work you intend to do as stated in your essays,
Your undergraduate performance,
Your GMAT score, and
How you fit into the class they are building.

**Bad News?**
All of the above.

Your GMAT will not make up for poorly conceived long-term plans, nor will it make up for sloppy essays. The one area it regularly helps students compensate is in ameliorating a weak undergraduate GPA. If you have a weak - anything less than 3.7 for BA or BBA and less than 3.5 for BS - but not horrible – below 2.5 - undergraduate GPA, a strong performance on the GMAT can demonstrate competence. You may still need to discuss your GPA in the supplemental essay or during your interview. It can be very difficult to overcome a GPA below 2.5, but you will need much more than a strong GMAT to compensate.

*A strong GMAT is
Quant greater than 48
and Verbal greater than 43.
Not either or, but both.*
Now what?

Remember, the story is in the scaled score not your percentiles, but they are related. Some students have very balanced scores, 42/43, reported as Quant / Verbal. While others have wildly diverging scores, 35/50 or 50/35.

The student with the 42/43 has a lower than desired quantitative score for a competitive program. That doesn’t mean he will be rejected, but if he is aiming for a top tier school, he should retake to increase his quant score. Get that quant to 48+.

The student with a Q35/V50 is likely to be rejected almost immediately whereas the Q50/V35 should at least get a review. Admission officers (wisely) will be concerned that the Q35 will struggle with the program’s quantitative courses. While the V50 is off-the-charts-spectacular, top of the top 1%, it doesn’t buy you a safety net to compensate for such poor quant. The opposite score Q50/V35 is okay, not great. So Q35/V50 probably rejected quickly - or at least asked to demonstrate math curriculum competency, but Q50/V35 probably reviewed as normal candidate. Even though they have the same overall score of 700.

Those are extremes based on 700. How does your score stack up?

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prepwise.com/my-account

How to Prepare

“Because the exam measures reasoning rather than subject matter knowledge, you most likely will not find it helpful to memorize facts.” -GMAC

The GMAT contains several question types specific to the GMAT in a timed setting. Before sitting for the exam you want to familiarize yourself with the question types as well as the pacing required to complete the exam successfully. The test does not require that you
study advanced English vocabulary or mathematical concepts. But for best results, you should be able to demonstrate proficiency with basic arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and basic English vocabulary and grammar.

Caution! Accessing live Integrated Reasoning, Quantitative, or Verbal test questions in advance or sharing test content during or after you take the test is a serious violation, which could cause your scores to be canceled and schools to be notified.

Practice Tests?

Having taught for both large and small GMAT prep companies, I’ve seen the full range of advice on taking practice tests. This is the biggest question students have before they’ve even started to prep. Which is kind of ridiculous.

Here’s the scoop, my students who do best take no more than 2 practice tests before they sit for the real test. In 2014 (last time I measured!), the median score among all of my students was 750, 98th percentile. That includes students who started in the 500s and students who started in the 700s. I will only allow them to take GMATPrep tests (even when I was working for MGMAT) and they sit for the IR and essay at least once in addition to the GMAT portion. The test is long enough to be a challenge to keep focus. If you take practice tests continually you are training for the duration but not for the best performance. Marathoners don’t run marathons to train. They train at much shorter distances in order to conserve their energy and excitement for race day. Can you sit for 4 hours? Can you focus on the game in front of you for 30-75 minutes at a time? Yes? Okay, you’ll be fine. So 1-2 practice tests is enough.

Do you still flub finishing on time on your second practice test? Then you are DOING SOMETHING WRONG. I know, a bit obvious, but remarkably students fail to complete the test sections (“I left 4 blank on quant”) as though that was a reasonable option. It is not. This is a game with 37Q, 41V questions. If time runs out, you have failed the game. Period. That is not okay. You MUST answer every question and preferably with enough time to digest it. So pacing is important. Every practice set of questions is an opportunity to improve pacing. It is foolish to wait for timing to magically come together on the practice test (or real test!).

Rather than focus on taking more and more practice tests, focus on doing higher quality practice with every practice set of questions you do.
Train for Time

1. **Use your time wisely.**

   Although the GMAT exam stresses accuracy more than speed, it is important to use your time wisely. On average, you will have about 1.75 minutes for each Verbal question, about 2 minutes for each Quantitative question, and about 2.5 minutes for each Integrated Reasoning question, some of which have multiple questions within the question - these can be painful. Once you start the test, an onscreen clock will show the time you have left. You can hide this display if you want, but it is a good idea to check the clock periodically to monitor your progress. The clock will automatically alert you when 5 minutes remain for the section you are working on. Prepare yourself to feel the timing. You should have a decent pace that keeps you on track. I suggest that all practice problems be done in sets of 4/8/16 with timing of 7 minutes per 4 questions. This will train you mentally and physically for the pace you’ll want on the test. For more specifics, see the free resources in your prepwise.com/my-account.

2. **Answer practice questions ahead of time.**

   After you become generally familiar with all question types, use the practice questions in the Official Guide and through GMATprep’s free software to prepare for the actual test. It is useful to time yourself as you answer the practice questions to get an idea of how long you will have for each question when you sit for the actual test, as well as to determine whether you are answering quickly enough to finish the test in the allotted time. But as mentioned in #1, don’t get too bogged down by question. Answer questions in sets of 4 or more.

3. **Read each question carefully and thoroughly.**

   Before you answer a question, determine exactly what is being asked. Never skim a question or the possible answers; skimming may cause you to miss important information or nuances. About 60-80% of the time you spend on any given question will be best spent on understanding the question stem. Really, really dig into what you are being asked. This is like the proverb measure twice, cut once. If you understand exactly what you’re being asked to do, you can choose how to do it.

4. **Learn how to cut your losses.**

   Do not spend too much time on any one question. If you are really having trouble with
it, pick an answer from the best of what remain and move on. The GMAT is a strategy game. You will be penalized HARSHLY for not completing all questions in each section. The GMAT considers that failure. There is no way to skip a question or to return to a question once answered so you must get comfortable with letting go. Your aim is not perfection but effectiveness. If you understand your strengths and weaknesses, you can make strategic decisions about how you will spend your time BEFORE you walk into the test. I strongly recommend!

Time to Prep for GMAT?

If you are over 550 and are within 100 points of your target score, you can effectively prep for the GMAT over 12 weeks, averaging 10-12 hours a week if taking a long course (9 weeks or more), 8 weeks, averaging 12-15 hours a week if taking a short course (5-6 weeks, like mine), or 3-5 weeks, averaging 12-15 hours a week if working with a great tutor (ahem :).

The students who fail to reach their targets usually fall into two buckets: study and execution. Either they did not complete suggested hours of actual study each week (12 hours sitting in a library is not 12 hours of study – how many times did you check your email?) or did very poor quality study despite putting in the hours or they did not execute well in the moment on test day.

Quality of study is determined by your choice of material to study and the intention you take in reviewing questions you have answered, including those you answer correctly. The GMAT is a logical test. All of the material you technically need is set out in the Official Guide. The important education points may not be obvious to you until you have studied what makes correct answer choices correct and the incorrect answer choices incorrect.

Pay attention to the patterns.

Also, make sure you are studying relevant material. If your scaled scores (the 38/43) are far apart, you need to shore up the weaker of the two in order to reach your target score more efficiently.
If you are between 550 and 600 and aiming for 720, expect to spend 12-15 DEDICATED hours a week.

If you are currently in the 470 to 520 range and aiming for 700+, expect to spend 22-25 hours a week of dedicated study time for 11-15 weeks. In one public course - not 1-1 tutoring, two very dedicated students jumped from 470/480 to 720 within 11 weeks. Both focused solely and intensely on the GMAT for those 11 weeks – yes, they both had full time jobs at the time. It can be done, but it takes a remarkable amount of discipline and focus. Here’s an overview of the GMAT study plan they used. Fair warning, the students who take 15 weeks are not studying for less time each week, they simply need more time to absorb and revisit the material.

Very few students can absorb 22-25 hours worth of material effectively each week for a long stretch. Be honest with yourself about the level of intensity you can sustain and your most effective learning pattern. Time spent is not always valuable. If your brain is done for the day, it needs rest just like your muscles. You wouldn’t keep lifting after you’ve hit agony, right? Work to a point of agony, but not beyond. We want you healthy to be fully productive.

The other challenge is execution day of. Sometimes this is just a bad day. Other times it points to an internal question mark – you own self doubt. **You can’t study your way out of doubt.** But you can choose to prepare yourself properly and then do what is asked of you on test day. Don’t waste your time feeding your ego’s doubt-lust. Prepare and complete. Trust in your prep.

The more clear your vision for the purpose of the MBA - legitimately, not dreamy - often, the more calm you can be with execution. Students who feel that they “always” do poorly on standardized tests are using the test as an excuse. If that’s been you, stop it. The test isn’t the problem. Your attitude towards the test is.

So get over it.

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prepwise.com/my-account
Example Study Plans

Use these as you like. Since they have not been written by a coach specifically for you, your results may vary. Wildly. So, consider checking in with a pro before you get started and as you go along your journey.

The 22-Hour Student

For students with a significant gap between current GMAT score and target score, 200+ points, it is imperative to bring a consistent attack to foundational materials. Expect to spend 22-25 hours a week on foundational, building block, and GMAT materials over a period of 12-15 weeks. What does a 22-hour study week look like?

Sunday – relax, you need some rest to handle the mental intensity coming …

Monday – 5-7a Reading Comprehension
• 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
• 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
• 8 minutes: passage 7 in the Official Guide (OG), read the passage and answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review passage 1, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later. Do this for every answer choice A-E (A-E), every question - even if correct.
• 8 minutes: passage 8, read the passage and answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review passage 2, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later. Are you seeing clues you’ve seen before?
• 8 minutes: passage 9, read the passage and answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review passage 3, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later. Are you seeing clues you’ve seen before?

Monday 7-9p Quantitative
• 10-15 minutes warm drills, best if you can find them online, my students use ixl.com (6-8th grade and Algebra chapters)
• Foundational knowledge: Roots and Radicals in Schaums Elementary Algebra, 3rd Ed, work through the content and all of the problems . . . ALL. You may not finish.
• Begin work in the dimensional analysis chapter.
Tuesday – 5-7a Critical Reasoning
• 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
• 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
• 7 minutes: OG answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review each question, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later. (A-E process)
• 60 minutes: Content reading – Second half of Arguments 101.

Tuesday – 7-9p Quant
• 10-15 minutes warm drills
• Foundational knowledge: Quadratic Equations in Schaums, work through the content and all of the problems . . . ALL. You may not finish, complete Thursday.
• Complete work in the dimensional analysis chapter.

Wednesday – 5-7a Quant
• 10-15 minutes warm drills
• Foundational knowledge: Finish Roots and Radicals in Schaums

Wednesday – 7-9p Review
• Run through everything you have covered this week. What seems comfortable, what needs more work? Flag and schedule topics that need more work. Don’t forget to evaluate your timing as well.

Thursday – 5-7a Sentence Correction
• 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
• 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
• Read to refresh on grammar construction, use Prepwise Grammar guide, look at a handful of OG questions simultaneously to see the principles in action.

Thursday – 7-9p Quant
• 10-15 minutes warm drills
• Foundational knowledge: Finish Quadratic Equations in Schaums.
• Complete any lingering problems in the dimensional analysis chapter

Friday – 5-7a Drills
• 2 hours of math drills in ixl and schaums, work for speed and accuracy. These low level problems should come easy 5-20 second responses.
Saturday – 8a-12p Address Content Weakness
• Increase your understanding of critical thinking terms and processes by reading and responding to the prompts in Arguments 101.
• Break up your reading with 20-minute bursts of math problems. Start with the low level GMAT Quant Review Guide (QR) problems.

The schedule is loaded specifically to address how tired you are likely to get during the week. This is just one example. While an intense amount of work, I have witnessed several students gain over 200 points, as many as 340, by methodically working through the appropriate materials this way.

One caution! If you are more than 200 points away, you probably have some large holes in your foundational knowledge – even if you were good at math in school. Please, please, get outside help to guide you or be very humble as you go through the concepts on your own. Did you really understand? Could you explain this concept to an 8-year old? It isn’t that you need to meet with a tutor weekly; you just need to make sure you aren’t persisting with or reinforcing bad habits.

If you are going to meet with a tutor, consider front-end loading your study with a few tutoring sessions – to cover rules and mechanics, then work on your own for several weeks before returning to the tutor for finishing touches.

The 15-Hour Student

For students with a reasonable gap between current GMAT score and target score, 50-150 points, it is still imperative to bring a consistent attack to foundational materials, but you will progress more quickly into GMAT materials. Expect to spend 15 hours a week on foundational, building block, and GMAT materials over a period of 8-12 weeks. What does a 15-hour study week look like?

Sunday – relax, you need some rest to handle the mental intensity coming …

Monday – 5-7a Reading Comprehension
• 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
• 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
• 8 minutes: passage 7 in the OG, read the passage and answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review passage 1, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later
• 8 minutes: passage 8, read the passage and answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review passage 2, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later. Are you seeing clues you’ve seen before?
• 8 minutes: passage 9, read the passage and answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review passage 3, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later. Are you seeing clues you’ve seen before?

Monday 8-9p Quantitative
• 10-15 minutes warm drills: multiplication tables, geometry puzzles, 1-60 OG Quant problems, etc.
• Begin work in the dimensional analysis chapter

Tuesday – 5-7a Critical Reasoning
• 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
• 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
• 7 minutes: OG answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review each question, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later.
• 60 minutes: Content reading – second half of Arguments 101

Wednesday – 5-7a Quant
• 10-15 minutes warm drills
• Foundational knowledge: Finish Roots and Radicals in Schaums

Wednesday – 8-9p Review
• Run through everything you have covered this week. What seems comfortable, what needs more work? Flag and schedule topics that need more work.

Thursday – 5-7a Sentence Correction
• 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
• 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
• Read to refresh on grammar construction, use Prepwise Grammar guide, look at a handful of OG questions simultaneously to see the principles in action.
Friday – 6-7a Drills
• 1 hour of math drills work for speed and accuracy. These low level problems should come
easily in under 30-second responses. Use 1-60 in the OG or QR.

Saturday – 8a-12p Address Content Weakness
• Increase your understanding of critical thinking terms and processes by reading and
responding to the prompts in GMAT Critical Reasoning.
• Break up your reading with 20-minute bursts of math problems. Start with the low level
QR (same as drill set).

The schedule is loaded specifically to address how tired you are likely to get during the
week. Do take one day a week off and make sure you have a few days with extra effort. The
two-a-day sessions are actually good for mental interval training.

The 5-Hour Student

For students with a less significant gap between current GMAT score and target score,
under 80 points, if you bring a consistent attack to the materials you can be done with only 5
hours a week over a period of 5-8 weeks. What does a 5-hour study week look like?

Side note: my students who are actually within 50 points of the target
score are OFTEN the ones who study the most. They tend to be compulsive.
That’s okay, but can be overkill.
Just don’t wear yourself out before the real deal. pretty please.

Sunday – relax, you need some rest to handle the mental intensity coming ...

Monday – 5-7a Reading Comprehension and Critical Reasoning
• 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
• 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
• 8 minutes: passage 7 in the OG, read the passage and answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review passage 1, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was
correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you
cues later. Are you seeing clues you’ve seen before?
• 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
• 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
• 7 minutes: Blue Book answer 4 questions
• 20 minutes: review each question, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later.

**Monday 8-9p Quantitative**
• 10 minutes warm drills
• Review Foundational knowledge: Roots and Radicals in Schaums Elementary Algebra, 3rd Ed, work through at least 20% the content and the problems. Make sure everything is clear. Fix anything broken.

**Wednesday – 5-7a Quant**
• 10-15 minutes warm drills
• 15 minutes: Set of 8 practice problems
• Remainder of time reviewing set of 8.

**Wednesday – 8-9p Review - Optional**
• Run through everything you have covered this week. What seems comfortable, what needs more work? Flag and schedule topics that need more work.

**Thursday – 6-7a Sentence Correction**
• 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
• 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
• Read to refresh on grammar construction, use Prepwise Grammar guide, look at a handful of blue book questions simultaneously to see the principles in action.

**Saturday – 9a-12p Address Content Weakness**
• 10 minute warm up.
• 15 minutes set of 8 Data Sufficiency.
• 25 minutes review the set of 8.
• 15 minutes set of 8 Data Sufficiency.
• 25 minutes review the set of 8.
• 15 minutes set of 8 Data Sufficiency.
• 25 minutes review the set of 8.
• 15 minutes set of 8 Data Sufficiency.
• 25 minutes review the set of 8.
• Remainder of time review all 32 questions covered today. Look for themes in your strengths and weaknesses. Identify areas to work on this next week.

Hopefully you noticed that those hours do not add up to 5. To be fair, none of my “5-hour” students ever actually ONLY do 5 hours. It’s far more often that my 15-20 hour
students only do 5 hours. Motivation is hardest when you’re stuck in the middle - especially if you don’t feel like you’re making progress. :

If you’re really a 5-hour student, you can do the following in a typical week and on weeks when work is light, you can do 10+ hours to help yourself feel like you’ve properly covered the material. It breaks down to 2 total sessions a week: one verbal, one quant. I would specialize on SC or CR+RC not try to jam all 3 together each week, but you’ll figure out what will work best for you. Don’t forget that the **review process is the MOST IMPORTANT part of the process**, especially early on in your studies.

### What a real 5-hour week looks like

**Monday – 5-7a Reading Comprehension, Critical Reasoning and Sentence Correction**
- 10 minutes: reading warm up – read an easy book or work a crossword puzzle
- 20 minutes: reading drills, practice for speed
- 8 minutes: passage 7 in the OG, read the passage and answer 4 questions
- 15 minutes: review passage 1, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later. Are you seeing clues you’ve seen before? (A-E)
- 7 minutes: OG answer 4 questions in CR
- 15 minutes: review each question, answer choice by answer choice, write down what was correct, what was incorrect, does the tone match, etc. Look for key words that can give you clues later.
- 15 minutes: answer 10 SC questions.
- 20 minutes: review the SC using the A-E process to deconstruct each answer choice.
- 10 minutes: review all work from the day. Identify next practice steps.

**Saturday – 9a-12p Address Content Weakness**
- 10 minute warm up.
- 15 minutes set of 8 Data Sufficiency.
- 25 minutes review the set of 8.
- 15 minutes set of 8 Data Sufficiency.
- 25 minutes review the set of 8.
- 15 minutes set of 8 Data Sufficiency.
- 25 minutes review the set of 8.
- 15 minutes set of 8 Data Sufficiency.
- 25 minutes review the set of 8.
- 15 minutes set of 8 Data Sufficiency.
- 25 minutes review the set of 8.
- Remainder of time review all 32 questions covered today. Look for themes in your strengths and weaknesses. Identify areas to work on this next week.
Example Score Feedback

What follows are a sample of the questions I received when this was first published. These are actual student questions. **Unaltered.** It is important to see how your peers are thinking about the GMAT, how they frame questions, and how they use language. The way you ask a question shares a lot about you.

Hi Lindsey,

assuming this was your first take, yes, please retake.

Your overall score is likely too low for top 20 programs to consider carefully without at least a second shot. Considering your mismanagement of time on this first take, it would be unwise to submit applications without a retake. You should be able to put several points on the board just by finishing. Treat the GMAT like a strategy game. You win by perfecting your mix of time and accuracy. You may need to sacrifice a question or two along the way. Small sacrifices along the way cost less than timing out. - *Kate*

Hi Kate. I recently took the GMAT and bombed out on my verbal (despite verbal being my first language). I mismanaged my time and think I was penalized heavily for running out of time, resulting in a 31. Quants went well, however, with a 47. Do you think the verbal score will significantly impact my chances of being accepted into a top 20 business school (and chances of bursaries etc) or would you recommend I rewrite?

*lindsey*

Hi Sid, great work on the quant! The verbal however points to potential language issues. One comment from business schools in the past 5+ years has been, more students are scoring well on the overall GMAT, but not following in class. That is one of the reasons the GMAC developed the IR section. They hope it may prove to be a strong indicator of how someone will follow in class. Since you topped out on IR, you are covered for IR.

Overall, you are in decent shape. If you hope to attend top 10 programs, your school will put you in the bottom half of the class. Do you feel good about running those odds?
1. If this was first take, retake. Get your verbal up.
2. If this was not first take and at least one other take is comparable to this one, you have probably squeezed all you are likely to squeeze out of the GMAT in the near term.
3. If you are not applying for bschool now-ish, it would be wise to beef up your verbal.

Best wishes! - Kate

Hi Penta, given your written comment, I would offer that you have more room for improvement than time management. The most efficient way to clean up your English is to read prolifically. For students who start with your demonstrated language ability, I recommend at least one book a week. Choose fiction or non-fiction, but read, read, read! By immersing yourself in English books, the language will wash over you. It will be the more efficient way for you to pick up phrasing. - Kate

Hi Bryan, depends on the School and your other metrics. The 720 won’t hurt the School’s average so that works in your favor. If your GPA is better than the program’s average, you’re probably fine. If your GPA is low and this was only your first take, it would be wise to retake – more for the sake of showing effort. That said, I would not feel compelled to

Hi Kate,

I understand that the 80% threshold is the gold standard for Q scores, but I’m wondering at what point a Q score is considered low enough that an applicant should address it. I scored 1 45Q (68%)/ 44V (97%) which equated to a 720. Is a 45Q something to worry about?

Thanks,

Bryan
address this as a “weakness” in the optional essay. That often looks like showboating. You did fine. But it would be nice to see that quant up - it is low. - Kate

Hi Jessica, bummer on the static quant. Top 20s is not hopeless. I would not spend any more time on the GMAT unless you seek professional input. A 39 points to foundation deficiencies. You need someone to observe you in action to pinpoint the major issues. GRE isn’t as “easy” as it may seem as the schools seem to prefer higher percentiles for the quant**. The quality of the GRE quant is lower, but you must execute faster. If you are able to memorize problem types, you may be able to pull a win on the GRE. GRE problems are more 1-2 punch whereas GMAT problems benefit from greater logic application.

Remember, the nice thing about bschool is, if the school really wants you, there are ways around a mediocre GMAT/GRE. My lowest scoring student, literally . . . ahem, is at HBS. My second lowest scoring student (actually a decent score) is ALSO at HBS.

- Kate

**A student recently reported that his 68th percentile GMAT quant was considered average, but his 80th percentile GRE quant was considered below average at one of his programs. The expectation is for a higher percentile on the GRE. Certain schools (Columbia for example) will not consider a GRE if a GMAT has been taken.
Hi David,

The 700 is a nice tick mark so kudos there. If it was your first GMAT, consider a retake to boost quant. It won’t matter if your overall score slips a little. You use your best when you apply. If it wasn’t your first take, see below.

So 10-30 on the schools – you are probably just at the school average for many of them so it would depend on which school. If you are at or within 20 points (high or low!) of the target School’s GMAT average, you’d do well to retake. If you are 40 points above your school’s average, you have much more flexibility (i.e. you can put the GMAT behind you without a retake). - Kate

Hi Kate,

I just took the GMAT after a long prep and got a 700. My subscores were Q 44 V 41. I am concerned about the low 60th percentile quant. I have a major in accounting, minor in finance, with straight As, but from a small, not very prestigious school. Additionally, my quant score has been stagnant (43,44) on multiple practice test going back 3 months. The only quant improvement has been speed, as I was able to get 44 with 10 mins remaining, whereas before, it was down to the wire.

For schools in the 10-30 rank range, will this score and GPA in a quant based undergrad program be enough?  

David

Hi Lost,

As long as the aggregate is over 730, most programs will give you a check mark for the GMAT if you’re that close. The only time I’ve seen serious push back (from inside) was when the team really didn’t want the candidate but needed a strong enough reason to not accept given a strong donor affiliation. The kid had a 42 on quant and a 730 overall. Admissions dinged him and the donor accepted the decision without a fuss.

I have been scoring 99th percentile for verbal (45+), and my math score has been hanging around 45,46,47…if my aggregate score is in the 730/740/750 range, will that still be cause for concern at the top tier programs (Stanford, Harvard, Wharton, Northwestern, etc)

Lost

But if those are only practice test scores, do consider refining your prep on quant a bit
before heading in. Execution is everything. If quant wastes you, you may find your natural verbal ability drops post quant section. Remember to shake of the quant before you engage on verbal.

-Kate

Hi Irina, the score won’t prevent you from attending business school, but it does give you essentially a check minus in the GMAT category. Won’t kill you, but isn’t helping. If your essays are very, very strong and the school wants you, the 670 isn’t likely to keep you out. But if you have an average profile and an average set of essays, you may find it difficult to gain admission at a top 20 program. Best wishes! Kate

Hi Whitney,

As lovely as the 700 is, I would retake – unless you’ve taken 2-3 times already. To keep your verbal up, read, read, read. Your score indicates a solid grasp of the verbal concepts. Great! The best way to bolster is (even) more critical reading. As you hit articles ask yourself about the author’s argument, how would you strengthen, weaken, what are the assumptions, etc. I’m partial to the New Yorker, NYT/WSJ/FT op-ed pages. This is helpful at your level and less directly helpful to those below 42 on verbal (for the rest of you reading!!).

The best thing for you to do is have a GMAT expert watch you respond to quant questions. Your timing may be off, but an expert can show you why it’s off (you mess up XYZ

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Hello Kate,
My GMAT score was 670, with Q49 and V33. English is not my native language, so it was a little challenging. That was my 2nd attempt – I screwed with timing in the fist one.

How would think that can rate for business schools?

Thank you in advance.

Irina

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Hi Kate,

I just took the GMAT for the first time and received a 700 but not with a particularly balanced score (Q 40, V 44). I was a Business and Psychology major in college with a 3.55 GPA overall and good grades in several math-based classes for both majors but should I consider re-taking to improve my Quant score for application to a top 10 program?

Thanks in advance,

Whitney
when doing PQR, etc.). Or perhaps it’s a foundational gap. An impartial, well trained observer can help you understand the challenges and next steps. I am not the low cost leader, but I do single triage sessions online and face to face. In a single session you can get a clear sign of what isn’t working for you and a path for how to fix. If you can’t swing me, the next tier down is ManhattanGMAT and they’re all over the place now. You can probably find a local instructor who is reasonably competent in most major metro areas in the US and a few overseas. The tier below that won’t be worth your time. You’ve already outscored the Kaplan teacher requirement…. (680)

-Kate

P.S. Part of the recommendation to retake is based on a low GPA in what some will term “soft” majors. You want to show more math chops if possible.

Hi L.J.,

Assuming you are targeting a top tier program for full time MBA

Well, the quant is in the clear as one would expect from an Aerospace Engineer – so good work there. Unfortunately, you are in a position where your verbal score is crushing your opportunity. In the past 5 years business schools have demonstrated more concern for a student’s ability to perform well in class. Specifically, for a student to understand the lecture and then take the understanding and build upon it, on his own. Assignments are less, do problems X,Y,Z and more here’s a concept, how might you apply this concept to businesses X,Y,Z and what are the potential outcomes.

Can you demonstrate success with non-engineering curriculum? It need not be a literature class, but something that demonstrates more qualitative thinking and critical position development. Classes that are largely discussion oriented may be good examples. Since you’ve taken twice and the performance has not changed, you want to demonstrate other positive ways for them to consider your candidacy. If you’ve managed the leadership group of a community organization, run a political campaign (even if very small local…) or done something else that says, “Hey this candidate is trusted by a group,” that can demonstrate the qualities many programs seek.
You will need to show that you are not just a quant jock. You will also need killer essays and recommendations.

If you are NOT targeting top tier or full time . . . you have a lot more breathing room. A 620 is not ideal, but you have enough work experience in years to be a strong executive program applicant if your career has had a decent trajectory. You’ll still need to put together a compelling application, but the burden is not as heavy as if aiming for top 10 full time MBA programs.

Best wishes with the application process. I’d set the GMAT aside and go for broke on the essays. - Kate

Hi Jason,

You are an English major in denial. I understand your perspective, but the chances are you don’t fully understand the math and logic processes to be a stellar candidate. Does that mean you can’t get in? No! But, you would be wise to beef up your quantitative skills before matriculating. The 39 on verbal is mighty disconcerting for an English major. That is fundamentally weak. You appear to be in denial of both your quantitative and verbal abilities. The GMAT is a critical thinking skills test – the math skills are 6-8th grade. So . . . one need not have stellar math skills. 8th grade proficiency is all that is needed.

For your chosen tier of schools, you may not have much trouble getting in with the 640. Expect to have trouble with your first year Accounting and Finance courses. I would be
much less blasé toward those. But buckle down year 1 and you may right the ship after all.

Best wishes!-Kate

Hi P.G.,

If you are aiming for a top tier program, you should retake. The score and especially the quant scaled score are just too low. A top notch Masters in Finance program will have very competitive candidates. Q44 won’t cut it. You want to raise that to 48+. They won’t care as much about the verbal. But the verbal will impact your overall score. - Kate

Hi A.J.,

Good work making progress on your score over time. You are incorrect however in your assessment of your score. You are very balanced. 41/39 is balanced. And low. Your quant is far too low to be considered acceptable at a top 10 program and your verbal does not mask it. For example a 41/48 would put you in the 710 range so the 48 verbal masks the low quant.

Five years of varied work experience was also disconcerting. Think about business schools as wanting to groom the future leaders of the (business) world. Random variety is less desirable than planned diversity. That’s nice that you joined the corps though without knowing which one I can’t say how “nice” that would be considered by the schools. Some are selective, others are not.

Based on very little known about you, top 10 looks out of reach.

Hi Kate , I just gave my gmat today and was disappointed with my scores 650 q44, v 35 ir 7. I'm planning to go for masters in finance or masters in mangement. Is my score good enough or should I retake the gmat ? My undergrad degree is in commerce with a gpa of 3.7. Please advise.

-PG

Hi Kate, Would love your opinion on my score as well as my chances on getting in to the top 10 schools. This is my third attempt of the GMAT- first attempt 600, second attempt 630 and latest attempt 650 (q41,v39) while overall percentile is 77, quant is unbalanced (49%) and verbal is 89%. I have 5 years of varied work experience- including being a corps member to teach and worked in the edtech sector. Do you think I need a retake?

-AJ
DANGER ZONE:

Because your profile is not yet outstanding (only based on what you’ve shared so far), you really do need to make a super strong connection for the school. As in, you need to write your app as though they are the only school for you. This is tough when you don’t know that they will say yes, but it really is your best shot. So, apply as early as possible; make sure you know exactly what about the school will help you make your next career move; make sure the school knows that you know that, and finally, make sure the school believes that you will be able to follow through.

This can all seem absurd at the time you start the process. You don’t really know that much about the school (most likely), and if you are like most bschool students you don’t really (REALLY) know what you want to be when you grow up. So spend some energy figuring out what you want to do long term in your life and career and back your way into your next 2-3 steps to making that happen. You’ll share some of this in your essays.

You need to demonstrate that you know a significant amount about the school and are committed to to them so go get to know them. Find recent grads, find super old grads, visit campus, do the tour, etc. If you’re applying to the 5-15 bracket, it almost does not matter which one. There’s no substantive difference between Number 6 and Number 12. So pick the best fit.

Best wishes and good luck! - Kate