The GMAT Uncovered

What is the GMAT? Should I go to business school?

Find out everything you need to know about the GMAT exam and admissions.

Exam Overview and Scoring | Myths and Experimental Questions | What Happens on Test Day | B-school Admissions Process | Types of MBA Programs

MANHATTAN GMAT

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Introduction

The GMAT, or the Graduate Management Admission Test, is one of the key components of the business school application process. The test evaluates certain reasoning skills and academic abilities of prospective MBA students, including general knowledge garnered during college and high school; it does not include any business questions. This document provides a thorough introduction to the GMAT, including the test format, question types, categories of knowledge tested, scoring algorithm, and more. It also examines the general business school admissions process.

The GMAT consists of four sections: Analytical Writing Assessment, Integrated Reasoning, Quantitative, and Verbal. The first section requires the student to compose an essay (typed), while the final three sections are all multiple-choice. The Quant and Verbal sections of the test are given in a Computer Adaptive format: the exam actually adapts itself to each student as the student takes the test. Each of these two sections begins with a random question and the computer chooses each subsequent question based upon the responses the student has given to that point in the test. Later in this document, we discuss all of the test sections, as well as the Computer Adaptive format, in detail.

The GMAT is administered 6 days a week, 52 weeks per year, for a fee of $250. While it isn't offered on Sundays or holidays in most locations, certain testing sites may provide accommodations for religious purposes; check www.mba.com for these and other details about how to register for the exam. Essentially, you can take the GMAT whenever you want, though you are limited to one test in any 31-day period, with a maximum of five tests per 12-month period. (If you happen to score an 800, you won't be allowed to take the test again until your score expires 5 years later!)

All together, the test itself lasts about three and a half hours: 30 minutes each for the Analytical Writing Assessment and the Integrated Reasoning section, and 75 minutes each for the Quantitative and Verbal sections. There are also two 8-minute breaks (before and after the Quant section). The sign-in security process and other procedures, such as selecting schools to receive score reports, can add up to an hour to the process.

The Format of the Exam

The GMAT is comprised of four separate sections: the Analytical Writing Assessment, Integrated Reasoning, Quantitative, and Verbal. There are two optional 8-minute breaks: one before and one after the Quant section.

Analytical Writing Assessment Format

The GMAT begins with the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA), which consists of an essay that is scored separately from the other test sections. The essay has a time limit of 30 minutes and requires us to read an argument and analyze it.

The essay score is based upon several factors:

Analytical reasoning, including the ability to establish a thesis (take a position on the issue at hand) and develop your position with relevant examples and reasons

Presentation of your ideas, including appropriate organization of the information (an introduction, body paragraphs with clear main points, a conclusion) and appropriate word choice to convey your ideas in a clear and crisp manner

Command of the English language, including grammar, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary (note: some accommodation is given to examinees whose first language is not English)

The Argument essay provides a one paragraph prompt in the form of an argument, with a conclusion and some premises intended to support that conclusion. The argument prompt is often very similar to the Critical Reasoning arguments that appear on the Verbal portion of the exam. You are asked to indicate whether the argument is well-constructed (and it will not be well-constructed or there wouldn't be much of an essay to write!) and you are expected to describe and discuss flaws as well as suggest fixes.

You are *not* asked to provide your opinion as to the "right" conclusion or the best w to achieve the given conclusion. For example, if the argument says that a company plans to increase its profitability by firing half of its workers to reduce the amount it pays out in salaries, your task is *not* to say that this is a terrible plan to increase profitability, or that the company should do something else to improve profitability. Your task is simply to show that the author of the argument has not provided sufficient evidence to support the claim that action A (firing half of the workers) will actually lead to conclusion B (increased profitability). In other words, the author hasn't provided enough information to indicate that the plan is likely to succeed. It will always be the case that the evidence provided is not fully sufficient; otherwise, it would be a very short essay.

For instance, the author has not discussed the potential risks of such a plan. The test-taker might write: "The author assumes that there are not significant negative consequences to the plan, consequences that could hinder the goal to improve profitability. Can the company still be as productive after losing half of the workers? Will the remaining workers demand higher salaries to compensate for the extra work they have to do, or simply quit? In order to solidify the argument, the author needs to address concerns about the potential risks that are tied directly to the plan."

Integrated Reasoning Format

The Integrated Reasoning (IR) section is always the second section of the test. As with the essay, the time limit is 30 minutes. The IR section consists of four different question types, each with one or two different question formats. These questions cover both quantitative and analytical reasoning skills—a cross between math and verbal. Some questions will more closely resemble pure math or verbal questions while others will be a true mixture of these skills. One major difference compared to standard quant and verbal questions, though, is that IR questions tend to provide extraneous information (information that we don't need to use in order to answer the question).

The IR section will consist of 12 question prompts. Similar to a Reading Comprehension passage, where we are given multiple questions for one passage, we may be given

multiple questions for one question prompt. We will have an average of 2.5 minutes to answer each question.

In this section, we discuss the IR question types and formats. Because of the nature of the way these problems are constructed, they cannot always be shown easily in a printed format. Official examples can be found on the www.mba.com website and additional examples can be found on the ManhattanGMAT website.

Multi-Source Reasoning

Of the four question types, Multi-Source Reasoning (MSR) tends to be the most text-heavy. These questions will provide two or three separate tabs of information; we will have to switch between tabs in order to read the text. Some of the tabs may be purely text; for example, an MSR prompt might consist of an email dialogue between two colleagues. Other MSRs will provide diagrams, tables, or graphs of information in one or more of the tabs.

MSR has two different question formats. First, there are regular multiple choice questions with the typical five options that we're used to from the quant and verbal sections of the exam. Second, there are "multiple-dichotomous choice" questions. That sounds a lot stranger than it is—"dichotomous" really just means "either-or." For example, True/False questions are dichotomous questions. On these questions, we will be given some kind of "either/or" choice—True/False is one possibility, but other possibilities exist. The multiple-dichotomous choice questions will come in sets of three; we have to answer all three parts correctly in order to earn points for that question. On average, we will have a total of 2.5 minutes to complete this three-question set.

Table Analysis

As might seem obvious from the title, Table Analysis (Table) questions consist of tables with some amount of text explaining the table or providing other information. Any explanatory text will not be long but it may contain very important information—make sure to read it. The tables will resemble spreadsheets, often with 5 or 6 (or more!) rows

and columns. The columns will be able to be sorted, and it will almost certainly be necessary to do so in order to determine correct answers to the questions.

Table problems will also present three multiple-dichotomous choice questions, similar to MSR; again, we have to answer all three correctly in order to gain any points on the problem and, on average, we will have a total of 2.5 minutes to complete this three-question set. These questions will tend to be a little bit more quantitatively focused, covering such topics as statistics, ratios, probabilities, correlations, and so on—though inference and other verbal questions are still possible.

Graphics Interpretation

Each Graphics Interpretation (GI) question will provide some type of graph; possible graph types include bar graphs, line graphs, scatterplots, and bubble graphs. More complex graphs might have two y-axes with two different scales, one on the left and one on the right. There may also be additional text explaining what the graph represents and providing other important information. As with Table questions, this extra text will not be long but will likely be crucial to understanding the problem. In fact, it is often valuable to read the text first in order to help avoid misreading or misinterpreting the graph.

GI questions will consist of one or two statements (sentences) containing a total of two blanks, and we have, on average, a total of 2.5 minutes to answer these two-part questions. There may be one sentence containing two blanks or two sentences each containing one blank. Each blank will have a drop-down menu from which the test-taker picks an answer. It is often very helpful to look at the options before beginning to try to answer the question; knowing what the answer options are is often integral to an efficient and effective approach to the solution.

Two-Part Analysis

Two-Part Analysis (TP) questions can closely resemble either standard Problem Solving math questions or Critical Reasoning or Reading Comprehension verbal questions, or they can be a mix of quant and verbal.

The answer choices are presented in an unusual way, unique to TP: we're given a 3-column table with up to 6 possible answers shown in one column, and from these we will need to choose answers to two different questions (listed in two different columns). These two questions are often closely related; for instance, we might be asked to find the values for two different variables in the problem, or we might be asked to find an answer that represents an assumption and another answer that would strengthen that assumption. As with other question types, we must answer both of these parts correctly in order to earn points on the problem, and we have a total of 2.5 minutes, on average, to answer both parts of the question.

Optional Break #1

Test-takers are offered two optional 8-minute breaks. The first occurs between the Integrated Reasoning and Quantitative sections. If you would like to take the break, raise your hand, and a proctor will escort you out of the testing room (you cannot stay in the testing room during the break). If you do not want to take the break, select the option on the screen to skip it.

It is strongly recommended that you take advantage of this time. If nothing else, it is important to have a small mental break from the stresses of the exam. This also gives you an opportunity to have something to eat or drink, to stretch, and to refresh yourself before beginning the next section. Also, when you take practice tests, shorten your breaks to about five minutes (or else add in a minute or two of waiting and walking around to simulate the proctor checking you in and out of the room).

Quantitative Section Format

Following IR is the Quantitative section, during which you will be asked to answer 37 questions in 75 minutes (on average, about 2 minutes per problem). This section marks the beginning of the adaptive testing format: every test taker will take a different exam with a different mix of questions, chosen based upon your prior performance as you work your way through the exam. The quantitative questions will come in two different formats, Problem Solving and Data Sufficiency, and the two question types can be presented in

any order. Test-takers are generally offered between 20 and 22 Problem Solving qu tions and between 15 and 17 Data Sufficiency questions.

Both question types can vary from quite easy to extremely difficult, but every problem has a solution method that will take two minutes or less, though not everyone will discover or be capable of executing that method in that timeframe. In general, as questions become more difficult, two things will separate those who get the question right from those who get it wrong: knowledge of the quantitative content being tested and knowledge of the optimal solution method. Timing strategies will be discussed in more detail later in this document.

Problem Solving

Problem Solving questions require you to set up and complete any necessary calculations in order to find a specific numeric or algebraic answer, which will be located among five answer choices provided with the problem. An example of a Problem Solving question and solution appears below.

Problem:

17^{27} has a units digit of:

(A) 1
(B) 2
(C) 3
(D) 7
(E) 9

Solution:

When raising a number to a power, the final units digit is influenced only by the units digit of that starting number. For example 14^2 ends in a 6 because 4^2 also ends in a 6.

17^{27} will therefore end in the same units digit as 7^{27}. The units digit of consecutive powers of 7 follows a distinct pattern; your task is to find that pattern:

Power of 7	Units digit
7^1	7
7^2	9
7^3	3
7^4	1
7^5	7 (repeat!)

The pattern repeats after 4 powers, so every multiple power of 4 will end in the same units digit. For example, the units digit of 7^8 is 1, and the units digit of 7^{12} is also 1. Find the largest power of 4 that is still smaller than your desired exponent, 27. The largest power of 4 that is still smaller than 27 is 24, so 7^{24} has a units digit of 1. Count out the pattern on the chart (ignoring the fifth row, which is a repeat of the pattern): 7^{25} has a units digit of 7, 7^{26} has a units digit of 9, and 7^{27} has a units digit of 3. The correct answer choice is (C).

Data Sufficiency

Data Sufficiency questions require you to understand (a) how to set up a problem and (b) whether the problem can be solved with the given information. You do *not* actually need to solve the problem as you would with a Problem Solving question. In fact, you should not spend time completing the necessary calculations for these questions as you will then be unable to finish the test in the given amount of time. For example, if the question asks how old Sue is and provides the information that (1) Joe is 12 and (2) Jim is 18, then you *cannot* solve for the unknown value: Sue's age. If the information, however, tells you that (1) Joe is 12 and (2) Joe is 4 years younger than Sue, then you *can* solve for Sue's age,

but you shouldn't spend time doing so. Sue's age will not actually appear in any of t answer choices; rather, the correct answer choice will indicate that you need both data points (1) and (2) in order to solve the problem.

Data Sufficiency problems can be worded in one of two main ways: as *value* questions or as *yes/no* questions.

Type	*Description*	*Example*
Value: How old is Sue?	**Sufficient** data will allow you to calculate one unique value for the unknown in question **Insufficient** data will allow you to calculate either zero values or more than one value for the unknown in question	Sufficient: Joe is 12 and Joe is 4 years younger than Sue Not sufficient: Joe is 12 and Jim is 18
Yes/No: Is Sue 16 years old?	**Sufficient** data will allow you to determine that the answer is either always yes or always no **Insufficient** data will allow you to determine that the answer is maybe: sometimes yes and sometimes no	Sufficient: Sue is between 20 and 25 years of age Not Sufficient: Sue is between 15 and 20 years of age

A full example of a value Data Sufficiency problem and solution is on the following page.

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Problem:

What is the greatest common factor of positive integers *a* and *b*?

(1) $a = b + 4$
(2) $b/4$ is an integer

(A) Statement (1) ALONE is sufficient, but statement (2) alone is not sufficient.
(B) Statement (2) ALONE is sufficient, but statement (1) alone is not sufficient.
(C) Both statements TOGETHER are sufficient, but NEITHER one ALONE is sufficient.
(D) EACH statement ALONE is sufficient.
(E) Statements (1) and (2) TOGETHER are NOT sufficient.

Solution:

First, it's important to be aware that the five answer choices shown above are exactly the same on every data sufficiency problem. The text is identical and the order of the answers is always the same—for example, answer choice (A) *always* says that statement 1 is sufficient alone but statement 2 is not. You can, and should, memorize the answer choices before you go into the exam.

Factors are integers that divide evenly into other integers. For example, 4 is a factor of 8 because 8/4 = 2, an integer with no remainder. 3 is a factor of 9 because 9/3 = 3, an integer with no remainder.

The greatest common factor of two numbers is the largest factor that is common to both numbers. For instance, the greatest common factor of 4 and 8 is 4, because 4 is the largest factor that divides evenly into both numbers. The greatest common factor of 8 and 12 is also four, because 4 is the largest factor that divides evenly into both numbers.

Examine statement (1) alone first. If you try some numbers, you can see the fact that $a = b + 4$ leaves you with multiple possible answers to the question. For instance, if *b* is 4

and *a* is 8, then the greatest common factor is 4. If, however, *b* is 5 and *a* is 9, then the greatest common factor is 1. Statement (1), by itself, is insufficient to answer the question; eliminate answer choices (A) and (D).

Next, examine statement (2) by itself. This statement indicates that *b*/4 is an integer but tells you nothing about the value of *a*. As a result, you cannot tell what the greatest common factor of the two might be. Statement (2), by itself, is insufficient to answer the question; eliminate answer choice (B).

Finally, examine the two statements together. Statement (2), *b*/4 is an integer, indicates that *b* is a multiple of 4, though it does not tell you an exact value for *b*. Statement (1) tells you that, whatever *b* is, *a* is exactly 4 greater than *b*. If *a* is always 4 greater than *b*, then *a* must also be a multiple of 4, and *a* must also be the next consecutive integer multiple of 4. For example, if *b* is 4, *a* is 8. If *b* is 8, *a* is 12.

You can solve this problem if you know a certain number principle (one that you are expected to know for the GMAT): for any two positive consecutive multiples of an integer *n*, *n* is also the greatest common factor of those multiples. Because you know that *b* and *a*, respectively, represent two positive consecutive multiples of the integer 4, then 4 is the greatest common factor of *b* and *a*.

Bonus exercise: see if you can figure out why the principle discussed in the previous paragraph is always true.

Optional Break #2

The second of the two optional breaks occurs between the Quantitative and Verbal sections. The procedure will be the same as during the first optional break. Again, it is strongly recommended that you take the break.

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Verbal Section Format

After the Quantitative section, you will face the Verbal section, during which you are expected to answer 41 questions in 75 minutes (on average, slightly less than 2 minutes per question). The verbal questions will come in three different formats — Sentence Correction, Critical Reasoning, and Reading Comprehension — and the three question types can be given in any order (though the questions associated with one Reading Comprehension passage will always be grouped together). In general, test-takers are typically offered 14 to 15 Sentence Correction questions, 13 to 14 Critical Reasoning questions, and 12 to 14 Reading Comprehension questions.

Verbal questions ask you to find the *best* answer among the given five answers (as opposed to the *right* answer, as in the Quantitative section); essentially, for verbal questions, the right answer is better than each of the other four. As such, process of elimination is crucial to a strong performance on the Verbal section. The correct answer may not be what you would have thought of on your own, but it will be better than the other four choices.

Sentence Correction questions require you to know certain grammar rules in advance of the exam; you must bring this knowledge into the exam with you, in the same way that you must memorize the formula for the area of a circle. You will also need to pay attention to the clarity of the meaning expressed in the sentence. By contrast, Critical Reasoning and Reading Comprehension questions do not require any outside knowledge; these questions can (and should) be answered from the information provided in the accompanying text, as well as your general reasoning and comprehension skills.

Sentence Correction

Sentence Correction questions test you on your knowledge of English grammar and meaning, including the topics listed in the below table. These questions also occasionally test the meaning of a sentence, as well as concision.

Modifiers
Meaning
Parallelism
Comparisons
Subject-Verb Agreement
Verb Tense, Mood, and Voice
Pronouns
Idioms
Connecting Words and Punctuation
Quantity Expressions

Sentence Correction questions begin with a single sentence, some portion of which is underlined (possibly the entire sentence). Answer choice (A) always repeats the underlined portion of the sentence with no changes; this answer is the equivalent of saying that there is no error in the original sentence. Answer choices (B) through (E) offer alternatives for the underlined portion; by choosing one of these, the test-taker is indicating that the original underlined portion contained an error. An example of a Sentence Correction question and solution appears on the next page.

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Problem:

The number of acres destroyed by wildfires, which have become an ongoing threat due to drought and booming population density, have increased dramatically over the past several years, prompting major concern among local politicians.

(A) have become an ongoing threat due to drought and booming population density, have increased
(B) has become an ongoing threat due to drought and booming population density, has increased
(C) has become an ongoing threat because of drought and booming population density, has been increasing
(D) has become an ongoing threat due to drought and booming population density, have increased
(E) have become an ongoing threat because of drought and booming population density, has increased

Solution:

The original sentence begins with the main subject "the number (of acres)." "The number" is singular, so the main verb should match. In the original sentence, however, the main verb is "have increased." "The number have increased" is not an appropriate match; it should be "the number has increased." Eliminate answer choice (A) (representing the original sentence), as well as answer choice (D), which repeats the error.

The original sentence contains a "wildfires, which have become…" construction, indicating that the words following "which" should refer to the main noun preceding the comma. The noun "wildfires" precedes the comma, and the verb "have become" follows "which." "Wildfires" and "have become" are both appropriately plural, so this is an acceptable match. Answer choices (B) and (C), however, change this verb to "has become," which is incorrect. Eliminate answer choices (B) and (C).

That leaves you with answer choice (E) as the only remaining choice. (E) correctly says t
"wildfires… have become" and that "the number… has increased."

Below is a table showing the main sentence components (based upon the wording of the original sentence):

Critical Reasoning

Critical Reasoning questions (also called *arguments*) present test-takers with a short paragraph of information. These arguments contain a number of what we call building blocks. First, we have premises, information designed to support the argument's conclusion. Premises may be data, facts, or other information, and may also include some claims or opinions. Most arguments — though not all — also contain a conclusion, the *primary* claim made by the author of the argument. In general, most premises and claims are designed to support the argument's conclusion, though sometimes the information goes against the argument's conclusion; when this occurs, the information is called a counter-premise.

Arguments also rest upon certain assumptions, which are *not* stated in the argument but which the author believes to be true. For instance, if Sue states that cats make the best pets, then Sue is also assuming (but not stating explicitly) that dogs do not make better pets than cats.

premise	facts or claims designed to support the author's conclusion
counter-premise	facts or claims that go against the author's conclusion
assumption	not stated in the argument; information the author must believe to be true in drawing a certain conclusion
conclusion	the primary claim made in the argument

Descriptions of the various Critical Reasoning question types are listed in the following tables. We've organized the question types into three overall Families: Structure, Assumption, and Evidence. Each family contains two or more question types.

The Structure-Based-Family

These arguments contain both premises and conclusions and often contain counter-premises or some type of counter-argument as well. The answers are often presented in somewhat abstract language; they will often directly refer to conclusions claims, facts, opinions, and so on. The correct answer depends upon being able to understand the structure of the argument, and the way in which a certain piece of information is used (e.g., as a premise, as a counter-premise, and so on).

Type	Description
Describe the Role	Your task is to understand the role that some subset of the argument plays in the context of the overall argument. The subset in question will be presented in bold-faced font, and the correct answer will explain how that text relates to the overall argument.
Describe the Argument	This is a minor type. Most Describe the Argument questions will follow this format: one person claims something and a second person responds; you are typically asked to find the answer that explains how the response relates to the original claim.

The Assumption-Based Family

Assumption Family questions all contain conclusions as well as unstated assumptions. The key to correctly answering these questions will lie with discovering the necessary unstated assumption. An assumption is something the author assumes *must* be true in order to draw that conclusion, but he or she does not actually state that assumption in the argument. Note that the assumption does not need to be true in the real world; it merely needs to be something the *author* must believe in drawing the given conclusion.

Question Type	Description	Example
Find the Assumption	We're tasked with finding something that the author must assume to be true in order for the author to draw that conclusion.	*Argument:* Sue is less than six feet tall. Therefore, she will not be chosen for the basketball team. *Assumption:* One *must* be at least six feet tall in order to be chosen for the basketball team.
Evaluate	We're asked to find an answer that will help to determine *whether* the author's conclusion is valid. The correct answer will usually be in "either/or" form and can both strengthen and weaken the argument.	*Argument:* Sue is less than six feet tall. Therefore, she won't be successful as a member of the basketball team. *To evaluate:* Whether height is a necessary factor in the level of success for a basketball player.
Flaw	The "flip side" of Find the Assumption: find something that the author must assume to be true but present that assumption in a negative form.	*Argument:* Sue is less than six feet tall. Therefore, she will not be chosen for the basketball team. *Flaw:* It isn't necessarily true that you have to be six feet tall in order to be chosen.

Strengthen the Conclusion	The correct answer will consist of a new piece of information that makes it at least somewhat more likely that the author's conclusion is valid; the correct answer does not need to make the conclusion a certainty.	*Argument:* Sue was on the basketball team last year. Therefore, she will make the team again this year. *Strengthen:* Because Sue has been practicing all summer, she is better now than she was last year.
Weaken the Conclusion	The correct answer will consist of a new piece of information that makes is at least somewhat less likely that the author's conclusion is valid; the correct answer does not need to completely invalidate the conclusion.	*Argument:* Sue was on the basketball team last year. Therefore, she will make the team again this year. *Weaken:* Two new students who just started at Sue's school were the stars of last year's state championship-winning basketball team at their old school.

The Inference-Based Family

Inference Family questions will contain only premises; they will not contain any conclusions.

Question Type	***Description***	***Example***
Inference	Your task is to find a conclusion (in the answer choices) that *must* be true according to some or all of those premises. Note that this conclusion must not have any claims or things that are only likely to be true. The conclusion must be true according to the argument.	*Argument:* Sue is on the basketball team. The tennis team competes during the same season as the basketball team, and students are only permitted to be on one team per season. *Conclusion:* Sue is not on the tennis team.
Explain an Event or Discrepancy	The argument generally poses two premises that appear to contradict each other. The correct answer will provide a new piece of information that demonstrates that the two pieces of information are *not* actually contradictory.	*Argument:* Sue is on the basketball team and the tennis team. Students are permitted to be on only one team per season. *Conclusion:* Tennis and basketball are not played during the same season.

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An example of a Critical Reasoning question and solution appears below.

Problem:

Inorganic pesticides remain active on the surfaces of fruits and vegetables for several days after spraying, while organic pesticides dissipate within a few hours after application, leaving the surface of the sprayed produce free of pesticide residue. When purchasing from a farm that uses inorganic pesticides, consumers must be careful to wash the produce thoroughly before eating in order to minimize the ingestion of toxins. Clearly, though, consumers can be assured that they are not ingesting pesticides when eating produce from farms that use only organic pesticides.

The conclusion drawn above is based on the assumption that

(A) careful washing of produce that has been sprayed with inorganic pesticides is sufficient to prevent the ingestion of toxins
(B) produce from farms that use organic pesticides reaches the consumer within hours after it is picked or harvested
(C) no farm uses both organic and inorganic pesticides
(D) organic pesticides are not capable of penetrating the skin of a fruit or vegetable
(E) the use of either type of pesticide does not increase the cost of produce

Solution:

The conclusion of the argument is that consumers are not ingesting (or eating) pesticides when eating produce from farms that use only organic pesticides. The basis for that claim is the fact that organic pesticides dissipate (leave the surface) of produce within a few hours of spraying. In order for the author to believe that consumers are definitely not ingesting organic pesticides in this circumstance, the author must also assume that the organic pesticides are not present *anywhere* in the produce; the argument has established only

that the organic pesticides are not present on the *surface* of the produce (after seve hours).

Answer choice (A) states that careful washing can *prevent* the ingestion of toxins; the argument states only that washing can *minimize* the ingestion of toxins. The author is not assuming that such washing can prevent ingestion.

Answer choice (B) actually weakens the author's position. If produce sprayed with organic pesticides reaches the consumer very quickly, then perhaps the pesticides have not yet dissipated from the surface of the produce. The author must be assuming the opposite: that the produce does not reach consumers until enough time has passed for the pesticides to dissipate completely.

Answer choice (C) may be true, but it is outside of the scope of the conclusion. The conclusion addresses farms that use *only* organic pesticides. Farms that use both are not included in this part of the discussion.

Answer choice (D) is the correct answer. If the organic pesticides can penetrate the skin of the produce, then consumers may still be ingesting pesticides despite the fact that the pesticides have dissipated from the *surface* of the produce. The author must, therefore, assume that organic pesticides will not penetrate the skin of the produce (because the author assumes that consumers will not ingest any pesticide as long as the pesticide was organic).

Answer choice (E) may be true, but it is outside of the scope of the conclusion. Cost is not a concern in the above argument; the presence or absence of pesticide toxins is the concern.

Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension is a classic test-taking category. You're presented with complicated and fairly dense paragraphs of information about some topic (often rather obscure). You're asked to read and understand the information and then answer a series of questions about it. Passages tend to fall broadly into one of three categories: business (including history, trends, and theory), social science (including historical discussions of political or academic subjects), and physical science (including earth science, astronomy, psychology, and biology). As noted earlier, you do *not* need to know specific facts or information about any topics for the Reading Comprehension portion of the test beyond the text in the passage.

On the GMAT, passages can range from about 200 to about 450 words (though most often there are in the 200 to 350 word range), presented in one to five paragraphs. Some of the structure will be familiar to you from writing classes that you took in school. For example, the first or second sentence of a paragraph often functions as a topic sentence, introducing the main idea to be discussed in that paragraph. On the other hand, because the passages are relatively short, they often do *not* contain a conclusion paragraph (which you were likely taught to include when learning to write in school).

When a passage appears on the left-hand side of the computer screen, your first task is to read and understand the passage. One question will appear, from the start, on the right-hand side of the screen; only after you have answered this first question will you be able to see the next question. The passage will remain on the left-hand side of the screen as you answer all of the associated questions. The test typically offers a total of three questions on shorter passages and four questions on longer passages.

Reading Comprehension passages are accompanied by several different kinds of questions.

Type	Description	Example Question
General: Main Idea	The overall point, or main idea, the author is trying to convey; typically able to be summarized in one sentence (two at most)	"What is the primary purpose of the passage?"
General: Organization	The functional role of some part of the passage relative to the entire passage; e.g., *why* did the author include the third paragraph?	"What is the function of the third paragraph?"
Specific: Lookup	Your task is to locate one or more specific details in the passage in order to answer the question; you do not need to infer anything beyond what is already written.	"According to the passage, why are calico cats nearly always female?"
Specific: Inference	Your task is to locate one or more specific details in the passage and then make an inference: find an answer choice that must be true based upon those details.	"It can be inferred from the passage that which of the following is true of calico cats?"
Minor Types	Organization: You will be asked about the role of a specific sentence or two as it relates to a paragraph. Tone: You will be asked about the tone of the overall passage or of one specific part of the passage. Strengthen or Weaken: You will be asked to strengthen or weaken an assertion made in the passage.	

The GMAT Uncovered

Below is a one-paragraph excerpt from a full Reading Comprehension passage, followed by one question and solution.

Excerpt:

For years, scientists have been aware that bats emit slightly different frequencies in differing situations. Recent research has provided insight into how certain physical features help bats use this variability to differentiate among objects in their environments. Many species of bats have elaborate, intricately shaped flaps, or noseleaves, around their nostrils that are adorned with grooves and spikes. Three-dimensional computer simulations of these noseleaves revealed that furrows along the top of the noseleaves act as cavities that resonate strongly with certain frequencies of sound. As a result, the grooves cause different frequencies of sound to discharge in different directions. Lower frequency sounds are spread more vertically, while higher frequency sounds emit more horizontally. The complexity the noseleaves add to the bats' ultrasound perception could help the bats perform difficult tasks, such as locating prey while avoiding obstacles.

Problem:

Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the conclusion concerning the purpose of bats' noseleaves?

(A) The range of frequencies that bats hear is much smaller than the range of frequencies that bats emit.
(B) Many bats emit echolocation sounds through their mouths rather than through their noses.
(C) Dolphins rely on echolocation, and they do not have noseleaves.
(D) When their food sources are stationary, some bats rely on eyesight and smell rather than echolocation.
(E) The sound waves emitted during echolocation are limited to a range of fewer than one hundred feet.

Solution:

According to the passage, the noseleaves "could help the bats perform difficult tasks, such as locating prey while avoiding obstacles." The noseleaves function by allowing bats to emit differing frequencies of sound in different directions. These sound waves "bounce off objects and surfaces and then return to the animals' ears," providing the bats with vital information about their surroundings. To weaken the conclusion about the purpose of noseleaves, you must demonstrate that the noseleaves do not necessarily help the bats to gather additional, "vital" information about their surroundings.

Answer choice (A) states that there is a discrepancy between the frequencies of noise that bats emit versus the frequencies of noise that they hear. If they cannot actually hear all of the frequencies that they are capable of emitting, then there isn't as much value in being able to emit that broader range of frequencies, weakening the idea that this is the purpose of the noseleaves.

Answer choice (B) is out of scope; this paragraph concerns those bats who emit echolocation sounds via their noses.

Answer choice (C) is similarly out of scope, as it addresses dolphins rather than bats.

Answer choice (D) discusses a situation in which the bats would not need to use echolocation; this does not address the *purpose of noseleaves*.

Finally, the passage does not make any claims about the distance at which sound waves are emitted when using noseleaves for echolocation, so answer choice (E) is also out of scope.

Scoring

All four sections are scored individually; the Quantitative and Verbal section scores are then also combined into one overall score for those two sections. Historically, schools have not placed much emphasis on the AWA (essay) section, so most students do not spend as much time studying for that section.

Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) Scoring

The overall AWA score will be one number ranging from zero (low) to six (high), inclusive, in half-point increments (for example, 4.5 is one possible score). In order to calculate that number, the essay is scored twice: by a person and by a software program called GMAT Write®, an automated essay-scoring engine. These two scores are averaged and rounded up to the nearest half-point increment, resulting in an overall essay score between zero and six. A score of zero will be given only if the essay is not completed or if the essay did not address the given topic.

If the initial two ratings for an essay (the one given by a person and the one assigned by GMAT Write) differ by more than one point, then a second person will be assigned to rate the essay and resolve the discrepancy.

Integrated Reasoning Scoring

Integrated Reasoning is scored on a scale from 1 to 8, with 8 as the high score. Within one question prompt, partial credit is not given; if a question contains two or three parts, both or all three must be answered correctly in order to gain points on that particular problem. The scoring is based entirely on the number of correct questions; there is no penalty for an incorrect answer. As such, it's important to answer every single question, even if we're running out of time and have to guess blindly.

The GMAT Scoring Algorithm for the Quantitative and Verbal Sections

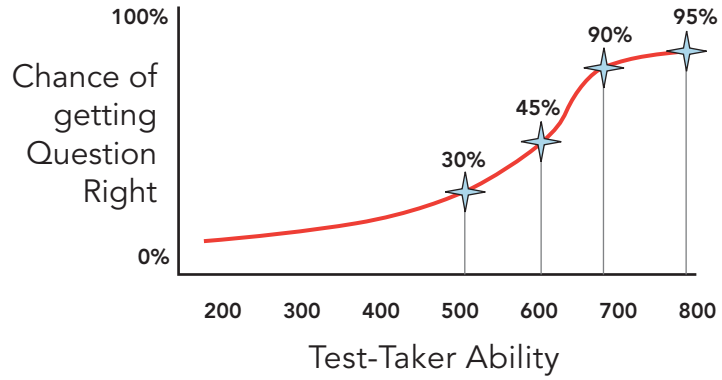
Tests you took in school were generally based on percentage of questions correct: the more you got right, the higher the score you received. As a result, we have been trained to take our time and try to get everything right when we take a test. This general strategy *does not work* on computer-adaptive sections of the GMAT. *The quant and verbal scores are* ***not*** *based on the percentage of questions answered correctly.* On the GMAT, most people actually answer similar percentages of questions correctly, typically in the 50% to 70% range (even at higher scoring levels).

If test-takers all get a similar percentage correct, how does the GMAT distinguish among different performance levels? "Regular" school tests gave everyone the same questions and performance was determined based upon who could answer more of those same questions correctly. On the quant and verbal sections of the GMAT, everybody answers different questions, some easier, some harder. You can think of the GMAT as a test that searches for each person's "60% level," or the difficulty range in which the person is able to answer approximately 60% of the questions correctly. (This is not exactly what happens, but it's a good way to think of the difference between "regular" tests and computer-adaptive tests.) Your score will be determined by the difficulty of the questions that you answer correctly versus the difficulty of those that you answer incorrectly.

How the Adaptive Algorithm Works: An Overview

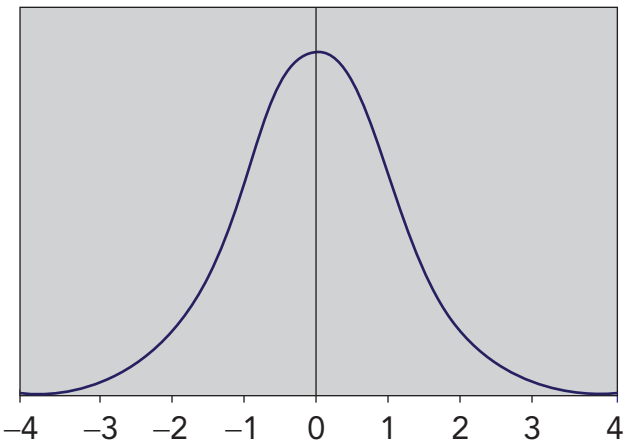
The approach discussed above requires the test-writers to know something about the difficulty level of the various questions offered on the exam. Although the "difficulty level" or "difficulty bucket" of an individual question is often talked about, the questions actually are *not* ranked by a specific percentile or difficulty level. Instead, each question has what's called an "Item Characteristic Curve" (ICC), a probability curve that describes how likely it is for a student of a certain ability level to get that particular question right.

"Item Characteristic Curve"



The ICC shown above indicates that a student with a 500-level ability has a 30% chance of answering this question correctly. A student with a 700-level ability, by contrast, has a 90% chance of answering this question correctly. Every question has its own ICC, developed during the experimental phase (discussed later in this section). Every question also has its own *inverse* ICC, a curve that shows the probability of answering the question *incorrectly*; this curve is called an inverse ICC because it is simply the mirror image, or inverse, of the regular ICC.

Now, think back to your studies of probability. When you want to calculate the probability of multiple events occurring (say, flipping a coin twice and getting heads each time), you multiply the probabilities of each individual event. In this coin example, you would multiply ½ by ½ to calculate an overall probability of 1/4. The same thing happens on the GMAT, but the overall curves get multiplied, not just single numbers. If you get a question right, the scoring algorithm uses the regular ICC; if you get a question wrong, the scoring algorithm uses the inverse ICC. All of the curves (regular or inverse) for all of the questions you've answered are then multiplied to give a new "estimator" curve. That new estimator curve will look like a bell curve (pictured below), with a peak somewhere in between the two end-points; this peak represents the algorithm's best estimate of the test-taker's current performance up to that point on the test.



Calculating the Scaled Scores

An individual, two-digit score, called a *scaled score*, will be calculated for the Quantitative and Verbal multiple-choice sections. While both sections will be scored on a scale of zero (low) to sixty (high), the two scoring scales are *not* the same. For example, as of April 2012, a scaled score of 40 on the Quantitative section represents the 55th percentile, while a scaled score of 40 on the Verbal section represents the 89th percentile. Essentially, the same scaled score, 40, represents a much higher performance on Verbal than on Quantitative.

The two individual sub-scores are then converted into one three-digit scaled score given on a scale of 200 (low) to 800 (high). This is the score people are talking about when they tell you what they got on the GMAT. The exact conversion mechanism, from two-digit sub-scores to three-digit scaled score, has not been made public by the test-makers, but the Verbal sub-score appears to be given somewhat more weight in the overall score than the Quantitative sub-score (this effect can range from minimal to mild, depending upon the exact mix of sub-scores).

Pacing and a Bit More About the Adaptive Algorithm

Because of the way the scoring works on an adaptive test, there are some crucial recommendations for maximizing your score when taking the quant and verbal sections of the GMAT.

To begin with, you need to accept that you are going to get a lot of questions wrong. Not only do you *not* need to get everything right, you actively *do not even want to try* to get everything right. Such an attempt will likely negatively impact your score.

How is that possible? Let's revisit the scoring algorithm for a moment. Because of the way the algorithm works, certain events cause especially steep drops in scoring.

First, getting an easier question wrong hurts your score more than getting a harder question wrong. In fact, the easier the question, relative to your overall score at that point, the more damage to your score if you get the question wrong. (Note: it is still very possible to get the score you want even if you make mistakes on a *few* of the easier questions.)

Second, getting three or four questions wrong in a row hurts your score more, on a per-question basis, than getting the same number of questions wrong but having them interspersed with correct answers. In other words, the effective per-question penalty actually increases as you have more questions wrong in a row.

The second of the two penalties just discussed is the more important of the two: it is *critical* to avoid putting yourself in a position to get more than four questions wrong in a row. The most common way in which people miss that many questions in a row is by mismanaging their time. The most widespread scenario is simply running low on time: that is, using too much time earlier in the section and then having to rush towards the end, increasing the chances of making multiple mistakes. A less common scenario is rushing toward the beginning of the section due to general time pressure, thus making multiple mistakes in a row early on.

Note: the biggest penalty of all is reserved for running out of time before all of the questions have been answered. If you are running out of time, guess an answer for the remaining questions; getting a question wrong will hurt your score less than leaving a question blank.

So, given the significant differences in the way that this test is scored (compared to regular paper tests), test-takers need to approach computer-adaptive tests with a different mindset. It's critical to maintain steady timing, giving yourself a fair chance at every single question, including the last one. This means you will have to "let go" of some questions, guess, and move on; most people have to do this on 4 to 7 questions per section.

If you have trouble adopting this mindset, pretend you're playing tennis — yes, tennis! In tennis, you don't need to win every point in order to win the match. Ultimately, the point that matters most is the very last point; that's the one you absolutely have to win in order to win the match. Your overall goal is to put yourself into a position to win that last point.

The GMAT is similar to tennis in this regard: you need to put yourself into the best position possible to "win that last point," or have a chance to answer the last question correctly (though, on the GMAT, it's still okay to get that last question wrong). Getting any one question right along the way is not worth it if you have to spend so much extra time that you do not even give yourself a chance to "win that last point" — that is, if you cause yourself to run out of time before you're done with the section.

This is exactly why it is so critical to **maintain steady timing** throughout the test, giving you a fair chance at every single question, including the last one. As you study and take practice tests, keep reminding yourself of the tennis analogy to help maintain that steady timing. When necessary, let a problem go; guess and move on if it is taking too much time. Remember, everyone has to do this at least a few times during the test.

Debunking a Myth: The Early Questions are NOT Worth More

Many test-takers are under the impression that the earlier questions on the adaptive portion of the exam are worth more and thus believe more time should be spent on those questions. That line of thinking is actually based on a myth. When the first version of another computer-adaptive test, the GRE, was made more than 15 years ago, it's true that the earlier questions were worth more. However, test takers soon caught on and then the test makers changed the test.

Then, in 1999, not long after the GMAT first switched to the computer-adaptive format, some researchers at the Educational Testing Service (Manfred Steffen and Walter D. Way) did a study on adaptive testing. (At the time, the Educational Testing Service was responsible for making the GMAT.) In the study, they examined many different simulated scenarios, starting with what would happen if someone got the first question right vs. wrong, or the first two questions right vs. wrong (the remaining questions were answered identically). The results showed that answering the first questions correctly led to a score increase in some circumstances, but the simulation didn't completely mirror reality—the researchers were only interested in theory at this point in their study. Here's the specific assumption that didn't mirror reality: the test-taker *did not take any extra time* to answer those early questions correctly.

The researchers later adjusted the simulation to account for the reality of the situation: spending more time on earlier questions may improve performance earlier in the section, but it would also *decrease* performance toward the end of the exam due to lack of time later in that section. The researchers first assumed that the test-taker would answer a certain number of questions in a row correctly at the beginning, earning a certain score premium at that point on the test. Next, the researchers calculated how many questions the test-taker could answer incorrectly in a row at the end without offsetting that score premium earned at the beginning. In other words, if the test-taker had more questions wrong in a row at the end than "allowed," then the score premium earned earlier would be completely erased; if enough problems were wrong, the test-taker could see a significant *drop* in the score.

Note: the researchers assumed that spending extra time at the beginning automatically meant that those questions would be answered correctly. Obviously, when you spend extra time on the real test, there is no guarantee that you will answer that question correctly!

"True" level	# questions correct at beginning	# allowed wrong at end before score is damaged
370	3	6
500	3	3
780	5	1

All data from "Test-Taking Strategies in Computerized Adaptive Testing, Steffen and Way, Educational Testing Service, presented at the National Council on Measurement in Education, Montreal, April 1999.

Let's look at the data. If a 370-level scorer could get the first 3 questions right, the test-taker could get as many as 6 questions wrong in a row at the end before wiping out the score premium earned at the beginning. That sounds pretty good, except for one thing: it's very unlikely that a 370-level scorer will answer the first three questions in a row correctly, no matter how much extra time is spent.

The performance for a mid-level scorer at the 500-level ends up evening out. The extra time spent to get 3 questions right at the beginning would probably result in at least 2, if not 3, wrong answers at the end, due to lack of time. In addition, it would be challenging for a 500-level tester to answer the first 3 questions in a row correctly, regardless of time spent.

Now let's look at a high-level scorer at the 780-level. If the highest-level test-taker answers the first 5 questions in a row correctly, he or she cannot get more than one question wrong at the end; if the test-taker does get more than one wrong at the end, then the score premium earned from the first 5 problems will *completely disappear*! This means that the highest-level test-taker has to answer all of those early questions correctly *while spending almost no extra time*.

So what's the big take-away? If you want to spend an extra 15 to 20 seconds on a few of the early questions, feel free to do so—but choose to do so specifically because the problem seems to warrant a little bit of extra time, not just because the problem is an

early problem. Absolutely do **not**, however, spend 60+ extra seconds on those early questions (or any questions anywhere in the section); the data clearly shows that it's not worth it in the end.

Why Educated Guessing is Important

Given what was discussed earlier about scoring and timing, you should anticipate guessing on some questions. There are two kinds of guessing: random and educated.

Random guessing is exactly what it sounds like: you have no idea what to do on a problem (or maybe you don't even have time to read the problem) and you guess randomly from among the answer choices, giving you a 20% chance of answering the question correctly if there are five answer choices. Ideally, you would like to avoid having to make any random guesses at all during the GMAT.

You cannot, however, entirely avoid making guesses on the test, so when you do have to guess, you want to make educated guesses. An educated guess is simply this: you identify and cross off some wrong answers before guessing, improving the odds that you will guess correctly. (On occasion, you may be able to use educated guessing to identify and eliminate all of the wrong answers, so you can answer the question correctly even if you don't know how to figure out the right answer in the "official" way!) There are multiple ways to make an educated guess, and different methods are appropriate for different kinds of questions. One of your tasks, when studying, is to learn how to make educated guesses, depending upon the type of problem or the content being tested.

Here are some examples of educated guessing methods on the Quantitative section (there are many more than appear in this table):

Note: PS = Problem Solving; DS = Data Sufficiency

Problem Type	*Technique*	*When we can use the technique*
PS	Estimation	when the answers are in the form of real numbers
PS	Test real numbers	when the answers are in the form of variable expressions (e.g., $3x + 5$)
PS or DS	Test real numbers	when the problem tests pure theory; the solution is not tied to a specific real number
PS	Partial answer	when a number appears part-way through the calculations and is also in the answer choices, that number is almost never the right answer
DS	Partial answer	when you can deal with only one of the two statements, you can still eliminate 2 or 3 of the answer choices
PS	Wrong calculation	when an answer choice is the result of calculations that you know are the *wrong* way to solve the problem; for instance, if an answer is the result of multiplying two numbers but you know that multiplication is the wrong way to solve

Rate or Work	Odd one out	when the answers are in "pairs," eliminate the "odd one out." For instance, Johnny and Susie together walk a total of 20 miles. How far does Johnny walk? 6, 8, 9, 11, 12. The answers are in pairs of possibilities for Johnny and Susie: 8 + 12 = 20 and 9 + 11 = 20. 6 is the odd one out.

On the Verbal section, it is rare not to be able to eliminate at least one answer choice (in particular, on Sentence Correction) and it is typically the case that you'll find the right answer on a verbal question by first eliminating the four wrong answers. On Sentence Correction, even if you don't know all of the grammar rules being tested, you will likely know or be able to make a good guess about at least one of the rules.

To get better at eliminating wrong answers on Verbal, you need to study not just why the wrong answers are wrong, but why the *tempting* wrong answers are so tempting. You also need to study both why the right answer is right and why someone might mistakenly think the right answer is wrong. On Reading Comprehension questions, for example, wrong answers are often "out of scope" — things that go beyond the scope of the information given in the passage. Even if you're not entirely sure what the question is asking, you may be able to eliminate a couple of choices because they talk about things that were not actually discussed in the passage.

Because the Integrated Reasoning section is testing a mix of quantitative and verbal skills, you can use many of the same educated guessing techniques.

There are innumerable ways in which you can make these kinds of educated guesses during all three sections; it's necessary to analyze problems (ideally from one of the official sources published by GMAC, the makers of the test) in order to learn how to eliminate wrong answers effectively. Remember to include time for this analysis in your study.

Experimental Questions

The GMAT includes what are called experimental, or nonoperational, questions. These questions do not count at all towards your score; instead, the test-makers are testing these questions on you in order to determine the difficulty levels (among other things) so that these questions can be used on future tests. Up to ten questions each in the Quantitative and Verbal sections may be experimental. The Integrated Reasoning section will also contain some experimental questions, likely two or three (though the test makers have not disclosed the exact number).

There are two big things to remember. First, you have no idea which questions are experimental. You have to assume that any question you see counts; even very experienced test-takers cannot tell which ones don't count. Second, the experimental questions don't have any assigned difficulty level, so during the adaptive portion of the test, the algorithm doesn't know that it's about to give a very high-level test-taker a 10th percentile question, or vice versa. If, during quant or verbal, you're suddenly given a question that seems much easier than the previous questions, that doesn't mean you've bombed the test; the question may be experimental. By the same token, if you suddenly see an impossible question, don't despair *or* celebrate; again, there is a good chance that the question is experimental. Try your best within the expected timeframe for a question of that type and then move on.

The GMAT Uncovered

Topics Tested on the GMAT

Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA)

At the most basic level, the essay tests your ability to develop a coherent narrative (including a clear position, strong organization and persuasive reasoning) and your control of language (including diction, syntactic variety, and grammar). Below is a rubric for the skills necessary to achieve a certain score.

	Position; examples	*Organization*	*Language (syntactic variety, grammar, usage, diction)*
6	clear; astute	strong throughout	superior; few errors
5	clear; well-chosen	mostly strong	strong; few errors
4	clear; relevant	adequate	adequate; some errors
3	limited; weak	poor	poor; some major or frequent minor errors
2	unclear; few or none	disorganized	poor; frequent major errors
1	no position or examples	no organization	poor; major errors that severely interfere with meaning

Integrated Reasoning

Integrated Reasoning tests a mix of quantitative and analytical reasoning skills. According to the test makers, Integrated Reasoning tests the ability to: apply, evaluate, infer, recognize, and strategize.

What do those things mean? Some questions will provide us with some information, concepts, or principles and test our ability to understand and **apply** that information given some new rules or future scenarios. We will also need to **evaluate** information, for example whether some information strengthens or weakens a position, or whether there are flaws or gaps. We will be asked to **infer** from the information provided—to determine something that must be true given the information in the question prompt. Some questions will require us to **recognize** relationships between different pieces of information. This could involve quantitative skills (for example, the relationship between two variables) or reasoning skills (for example, areas of agreement and disagreement between two parties). Finally, we will need to strategize—to make judgments or decisions related to a desired outcome or goal. Again, these could involve quantitative skills (e.g., a formula that will yield the desired outcome) or reasoning skills (e.g., the steps needed to achieve a certain goal).

All of the content we study for the Quantitative section could show up in the Integrated Reasoning section. Further, the reasoning skills that we learn while practicing Critical Reasoning or Reading Comprehension questions (from the verbal section) will also be invaluable while taking IR.

The GMAT Uncovered

Quantitative

The Quantitative section tests your knowledge of certain mathematical concepts, rules, and formulas, as well as your ability to carry out calculations or reasoning based upon that knowledge. Below is a list of the major skills tested on the Quantitative portion of the GMAT.

Topic Area	Sub-Topic
Arithmetic	*Order of Operations* *Divisibility and Primes* *Odds and Evens* *Positives and Negatives* *Counting (including Combinatorics and Probability)* *Digits and Decimals* *Fractions and Percents* *Ratios*
Algebra	*Linear Equations* *Exponents and Roots* *Quadratic Equations* *Formulas, Functions, Sequences, Patterns* *Inequalities*
Geometry	*Polygons* *Triangles and Diagonals* *Circles and Cylinders* *Lines and Angles* *Coordinate Plane*
Word Problems	*Algebraic Translations* *Rates and Work* *Statistics* *Consecutive Integers* *Overlapping Sets*

Verbal

The Verbal section tests your knowledge of certain grammar, punctuation, and language usage rules, as well as your ability to comprehend and make reasoned judgments about a given text. Below is a list of the major skills tested on the Verbal portion of the GMAT.

Question Type	*Topic*
Sentence Correction	*Modifiers* *Meaning* *Parallelism and Comparisons* *Subject-Verb Agreement* *Verb Tense, Mood, and Voice* *Pronouns* *Idioms* *Connecting Words* *Punctuation* *Quantity Expressions*
Critical Reasoning	*Understanding Argument Structure, including Counter-Arguments* *Finding / Interpreting the Conclusion* *Determining Assumptions* *Devising or Evaluating a Plan of Action*
Reading Comprehension	*Understanding Passage Structure* *Finding / Interpreting the Main Idea* *Understanding / Evaluating Specific Details* *Making Inferences* *Evaluating Counter-Arguments* *Determining Assumptions*

What Happens on Test Day

At the Test Center

Official GMAT test center rules are *extremely* strict to prevent students from smuggling anything in or out. Upon arrival, you must put all belongings into a locker; the only items permitted inside the testing room are your ID and the locker key. All aids, including calculators, notebooks, protractors, and personal watches are prohibited. You are not permitted to study any notes or to write anything down during the breaks, nor are you allowed to use cell phones or other communication devices. Do not store any study notes or GMAT prep materials in your locker; do not even bring such items to the test center. (And if you can't stop yourself from checking your email or voicemail, don't bring those devices into the test center either.) Students caught cheating face invalidated scores and the possibility of being denied admission to business school.

GMAC, the organization that administers the GMAT, is very serious about securing test-takers' identities. The extent of the security process can be off-putting for a first-time test-taker, which is why it is important to be prepared for this ahead of time. All test-takers will be asked to submit appropriate ID. You should check www.mba.com for the requirements in your country, noting that requirements can vary based upon citizenship. You will also have to undergo digital verification, including a fingerprint or palm vein pattern, signature, and photo. Every time you enter or leave the testing room, the digital fingerprint or palm vein pattern will be taken again, and the proctor will check you against your digital photo.

If you are concerned about distractions as others enter or leave the testing room, you can request earplugs; it's best to make this request before entering the testing room.

As you are about to enter the testing room, you will receive one laminated scratch paper booklet and one pen to take notes and solve problems during the exam. The booklet consists of five sheets of legal-sized (8.5 inch by 14 inch) yellow graph paper, each of which has been laminated, bound together along the top edge. Note that pen marks

cannot be erased from this booklet without water, which you won't have access to in the testing room. If you make a mistake, don't attempt to erase and correct your work; just begin working again from the point at which you made the error. But be sure to use space wisely! Although you may request a new booklet or pen at any point during the exam, swapping booklets in the middle of a section can waste valuable time. It is advisable to stick to one booklet and pen per section, only swapping for new ones during each 8-minute break. This way you can begin each section with fresh materials. Note that you will have to return the old booklet or pen when given a new one.

Before the test begins, you will be able to select which schools you want to receive your GMAT scores; you may select up to five schools for free. (There is a $28 per-school fee for any additional score reports after that point.) Score reports contain all valid GMAT scores, as well as an indication of any cancelled scores. GMAT scores are valid for 5 years from the date of the test.

Students often question whether to report their scores because they are selecting schools before they know their test score. That's a natural response, but it actually makes sense to select five free schools anyway. The score you get will end up on your official GMAT "transcript"; you cannot remove or hide anything. You must submit this transcript if you want to apply to a school, which means they will eventually see all of your scores. Because you have to give them access anyway, you might as well give them access before you know the score, when it doesn't cost you anything extra! Don't worry — admissions offices have no time to look up your score before you've even applied. In fact, some schools do not even verify your self-reported score until after they've accepted you.

Before you get started, you will also have the option to complete a short tutorial explaining how the exam will work. During the test, a countdown clock on the screen will display the time remaining (in minutes and seconds) in a given section. You can choose to turn this clock off if desired. When answering questions, you must first click "next" when finished with a question and then click "confirm" before a new question will appear on the screen.

When you've completed the exam, you will have to choose whether to accept that day's test results before seeing the actual score. If you choose to accept the results, your Quantitative and Verbal scores will appear on the screen immediately and, after leaving the testing room, you will be given a printed copy of the scores. If you choose to cancel the results, your score will not be calculated and you will not be given any information as to how you performed. Your score report will still show that you took the exam on that day, but it will indicate that you chose to cancel the score. You will still have to wait 31 days before taking the exam again, and no refund will be provided.

The essay and Integrated Reasoning scores will not be provided on test day. You will receive your official score report about 20 days after taking the test, and this score report will contain the essay and IR scores, as well as the quant and verbal scores.

The GMAT feels hard for everyone, even those scoring at the highest levels—and this is especially true of the adaptive sections (quant and verbal). It is not uncommon for people who end up scoring very well to feel as though they performed poorly on the exam; you should keep this in mind when deciding whether to cancel your score. Even if you do not do as well as you would have liked, you will benefit from receiving scoring information that can help you prepare to retake the test. If you cancel your scores, you will not receive any data as to how well you performed on any of the test sections. In general, we advise that test-takers who finish the exam accept their scores, even if they feel they may have to take the test again. We only recommend canceling scores in unusual circumstances (for example, if the test-taker is too ill to finish the exam).

After the test is over, you will be asked to answer a series of demographic questions. If you previously provided the answers to any of these questions (for example, during the registration process), the test will already display those answers and you will be asked to confirm the data if the information is accurate or to correct the data if the information is inaccurate.

What to DO or AVOID on Test Day

There are a number of things you should do, and other things you should avoid, on the day of your official test and the days leading up to it.

Things to DO Right Before or During the Exam

What to DO	Why
Mimic test conditions on practice tests	*When taking practice tests, mimic test conditions as closely as possible, including the time of day you take the tests. Do the essay, take only 8-minute breaks between sections, and leave your seat during the break. (Do not look at notes or write on your scrap paper during the break!)*
Sleep and eat like an athlete	*In the several days before the exam, it's important to have a consistent sleep schedule and to eat foods that will give you good mental and physical energy; eat enough before and during the exam that you're not hungry but not so much that you become sluggish or sleepy.*
Eat energy food	*Appropriate foods include those that contain complex carbs (whole grains) or good fats within moderation (nuts, olive or other oil high in monounsaturated fats). Consider eating avocados, dates, raisins, tuna or chicken salad with small amounts of mayo, peanut butter, or your favorite Powerbar (one you've had before). During the last break, you may also want to give yourself a shot of fast-acting glucose—an energy drink or fresh fruit juice (but don't do this earlier; this kind of energy tends to spike and then fall, so it won't last for 4 hours).*
Get everything ready the night before	*ID (check the requirements, depending on your country and citizenship status, at www.mba.com), directions to the testing center, money, food and drink, practice problems.*
Arrive early at the test center	*The most basic reason: you don't want to be late. For another reason, see below.*

Warm up just outside the test center	*After you arrive (early!) but before you enter the test center, do about 5 very easy practice problems; rip out the first page of a section from one of the Official Guides for GMAT Review and bring it with you. Do NOT bring the answers. (You are merely warming up your brain; you are not testing yourself.) Also, do NOT bring the practice problems into the testing center with you; leave them in your car or throw them out.*
Take the breaks	*Technically, the breaks are optional, but you should absolutely take the breaks. After leaving the testing room, stretch, eat, drink, and do whatever else necessary to lift your energy/mood going into the next section.*
Eat and drink during breaks	*See above for what to eat; eat and drink a small amount during the break, even if you aren't hungry or thirsty.*

Things to AVOID Right Before or During the Exam

Things to AVOID	*Why*
Burning yourself out	*Don't over-train in the few days before the exam. This can include: taking a practice test within 3 days of the real exam; reviewing for more than 30 minutes on the day of the exam; studying for more than 2 hours on the day before the exam; studying for more than 4 hours per day in the several days before that.*
Changing your routine	*Don't suddenly change the way you do basic things. Keep to the same sleep schedule. Don't take a sleeping pill for the first time the night before. Don't have three cups of coffee when you'd normally have one.*
Bringing GMAT notes into the test center	*You're not allowed to look at notes or practice problems even while on a break; the proctors can cancel your exam if they see you doing this. So don't bring any notes into the test center in the first place! And again, make sure you don't touch your cell phone or anything else electronic during the breaks. You may just be checking the score of the game, but the proctors may cancel your exam on the spot.*
Dwelling on past problems	*Focus on the problem on the screen in front of you; don't think about problems that have already come and gone. If you find yourself obsessing about a past problem (or anything), tell yourself: "I can think about that all I want, but first I have to finish the problem I'm on right now." If you're still thinking about the past problem when you finish the current one, tell yourself the same thing for the new problem on the screen.*
Trying to figure out your score	*Don't even think about it! It's almost impossible, even for a 99th percentile expert, to figure out one's performance during the exam. Most likely, you'll remember only the hardest problems and think you're doing poorly — this increases anxiety and will likely hinder your performance.*

General Business School Admissions Process

This section discusses how business schools use the GMAT, the major components of the application process, and the general timeline for completing these components. It concludes with short overviews of the different types of business school programs, as well as what to do when visiting schools or sitting for an interview.

How Do Business Schools use the GMAT?

For Admissions Committees, the GMAT is a leveler, a way to compare the basic skills of students from different schools and academic backgrounds. Unlike GPA, the GMAT subjects each student to the same standards and grading process. Studies also show the test to be a fairly reliable predictor of students' first year performance at business school.

Every school uses the GMAT differently. Some schools have official minimum score cut-offs based upon the quant and verbal sections, but most do not. For those that don't have official cutoffs, it's still important to remember that the ranking of an MBA program is based, in part, on the average quant and verbal GMAT results of its program participants. The average quant and verbal GMAT score worldwide is 540; the average GMAT score for students admitted to the top ten full-time programs in the United States is around 700 to 720.

Schools are typically most concerned with applicants' three-digit scaled score ranging from 200 to 800, because their primary interest is your performance on the Quantitative and Verbal sections. While they do look at your AWA results, Admissions Committees typically aren't concerned unless the score is below a 4.5. It is therefore less important to focus on the essay section when preparing for the test as long as you can score 4.5 or higher.

The Integrated Reasoning section will be a bit of a wild card for the first year to two years. Initially, business schools will likely continue to make their decisions as they have in the past, with a primary focus on the quant and verbal scores. The schools will gather data

about IR scores and see how the students do once in business school. As more analy becomes available about the validity of the IR score and what it can convey about an applicant, the schools will begin to utilize IR in the decision-making process as well.

Schools often use the GMAT as a type of screening device though it's important to remember that even a great GMAT score isn't enough to automatically get you into a school. If you have weak GMAT scores, the rest of your application needs to be strong enough to overcome that. Focus on your accomplishments and make your essays as strong as possible. Some schools even allow you to include an optional essay on a topic of your choice; if your GMAT scores are weak, tackle the problem head on by explaining why the score is not an appropriate measure of your ability to succeed at that school.

You can take the GMAT as many times as you wish, and you should plan to take the GMAT more than once just in case. As a result of greater familiarity with the test and/or more preparation, the average test-taker's score increases by roughly 30 points between the first and second attempt. Of course, if you're happy with your first test score, you don't have to take the test a second time.

Business schools do not care if you take the GMAT multiple times, though at five times or more some schools begin to discount your score as a result of increased practice. As a general rule, you should stick to three or four times at the most — typically, scores change very little after that point. At that time, it's best to focus on improving other aspects of your application. The exception is students who spread their test-taking over a long time period. If it's been a few years since your last three tests, it's probably acceptable from the schools' point of view to retake the exam.

Schools will generally use your highest set of scores when considering your application, though a few claim to average the scores of students with multiple scores. (Check with the schools you want to apply to if you are concerned about this.) Schools rarely combine scores from different exams, taking the best Quantitative score from one test and the best Verbal score from a different test, for example.

The GMAT Uncovered

Major Components of a Business School Application

The GMAT is one of the major aspects of your business school application. As previously mentioned, some schools have minimum score requirements while others place particular emphasis on certain sections of the test. Research your target schools to find out what kind of score will make your application competitive.

Essays

Your essays need to give the admissions committee a firm sense of your experience, your current interest in their MBA program, and your future career goals. It's important to balance all three subjects. While many prompts ask you to discuss your work history, your personal statement should not be simply a restatement of your résumé. You want to convey how this particular school's MBA program, combined with your experiences, can help you achieve your well-articulated goals. Be as specific as possible when explaining your desire to attend a school — discuss programs, classes, professors, and even local features that appeal to you. Note that, in contrast to GMAT essays, your application essays are generally considered a crucial element of the application process.

Most MBA students enter their programs with at least some solid work experience. The more practical business knowledge you have, the better you can engage with and contribute to your classes. While schools don't have set rules about the number of years of work experience needed or the number of jobs held, Admissions Committees do want to see that you're able to achieve a high level professionally. For this reason, your essays and interviews should highlight any leadership or management positions you've held.

Recommendations

Recommendations are another important part of your application. You should choose recommenders who know you well and can speak in depth about your strengths. Don't ask a distant overseer with an impressive title for a letter. In addition, your recommenders should have relatively strong communication skills, both technically (grammar, punctuation) and emotionally (articulate, persuasive).

GPA

While most MBA applicants are at least several years out of college, undergraduate **GPA** does still matter. Admissions Committees are also interested in the level of difficulty of your coursework and the college attended. They pay special attention to quantitative courses, such as statistics, accounting, and economics, so if your performance in these areas was weak, consider taking additional courses at a local college to bolster your application.

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities can also impact your chances for admission. Involvement in organizations or activities outside of work can demonstrate your propensity for getting more involved at business school. If you hold a leadership position or have a significant level of responsibility, this can also speak to your potential to achieve; this can be especially important to highlight if you don't hold any significant leadership position at work. Finally, these activities give you a chance to flesh out your application and help the Admissions Committee get to know the person behind the written words and statistics.

Together, these factors determine admission to business school. Students are rarely rejected or admitted based solely on one factor. But if one element of your application is particularly weak, focus on increasing your appeal to the Admissions Committee on other fronts.

Managing Your Time During the Application Process

Start work on your applications early. Rushing to finish before looming deadlines won't allow you to produce your best work and it will put you under enormous — and unnecessary — pressure. Applications for full-time programs are typically released in mid-July of the year before you would start business school, but you can start working on some components of the application much earlier than that.

First Half of the Year (January through June)

Make a New Year's resolution to focus on ways to distinguish yourself from other applicants. Pick up the pace with any personal achievements you've been working toward. If you're one class or test away from completing a certification, do it. There's no need to launch into a completely new endeavor, but do finish projects you've already started. Consider taking a leadership role in your community: join an organization you're passionate about and work hard to make an impact. If you start in January, you'll have at least nine months to make your mark.

Studying for the GMAT can take up a lot of your spare time, so try to prepare for the test early. Ideally, take the GMAT for the first time by June of the year in which you plan to apply (which means starting to study by March at the latest). If you aren't satisfied with the score, you'll still have time to re-take the test in July (remember: at least 31 days later); this allows you to complete the GMAT before jumping into your essays.

If your GPA is weak or your transcript is light on quantitative classes, consider taking introductory courses in accounting, finance, economics, or statistics at a nearby college. While your GMAT score, references, and work experience weigh more heavily with Admissions Committees, good performance in additional classes demonstrates your aptitude for MBA work and that you take academics seriously. A summer class won't make poor grades disappear, but it will strengthen your case. (If you do take a class, make sure to get a great grade!)

The summer is also a good time to prepare your résumé, so you can simply tweak it in October for first-round deadlines. As you work, think about your accomplishments and experiences. This is a good way to start generating ideas for your essays. If you're unsure of your long term career goals and how to articulate them in your personal statement, spring or early summer is a good time to conduct informational interviews or even job-shadow for a day.

While laying the groundwork for your application, you should also begin thinking about what's important to you in an MBA program and which schools might best meet your needs. As part of the school selection process, it's a good idea to visit campuses that interest you (especially if the campuses are nearby). Visiting classes and speaking to current students not only helps you determine whether a school suits you, but also gives you a wealth of information with which to tailor your personal statement.

Finally, if you're planning to remain with your current employer post-MBA, research whether the company will sponsor your degree. Besides the obvious financial benefit, Admissions Committees like knowing that students have solid, well-defined goals and are guaranteed employment post-graduation.

Second Half of the Year (July through December)

Most schools release essay prompts in mid-July. By then, you should have your short-list of safe, competitive, and reach schools to which you plan to apply; it's best to have three to six schools total. A "safe" school is a school to which you are very confident you will be admitted. If you absolutely want to go to business school no matter what, you need at least one safe school in the mix. If you don't want to attend business school unless you get into a more competitive school, however, then you can skip the safe school. A "competitive" school is one to which you have a reasonable chance of being admitted, though you still may not be admitted. A "reach" school is one to which it would be difficult to gain admission — but you never know unless you try!

Next, determine during which rounds you want to submit your application for each school. Most schools have at least two rounds of deadlines: first round (often in October) and second round (often in December or January). Some schools will have a third round later in the winter. It's next to impossible to develop four to six fantastic applications for the first round (remember that applications are only released in mid-July), so you'll have to set some priorities. Generally speaking, it is fine to apply for the first or second round of any school, as acceptance rates are roughly comparable in most cases. Acceptance

rates drop sharply for third round applicants though, so try your best to avoid being in that group if you're serious about getting admitted.

Then you'll need to get to work! Start brainstorming your essay topics and figure out who you want to ask for recommendations. Before sitting down to write an essay, consider whether your idea is truly illustrative of your goals and experiences. Don't settle for a topic that's too obvious, easy, or cliché.

By August, you should contact and, if possible, meet with your recommenders. While your recommenders should write their letters independently, it's still a good idea to make that task as easy for them as you possibly can. When meeting with recommenders, first give them the forms to be completed and explain how the process works. Compile and bring with you anything positive that they have written or said about you in the past: formal employee reviews, project reviews, emails, and so on. In addition, bring a list of the projects on which they supervised you, the goals that you accomplished, the skills that you demonstrated, and any awards, promotions, or special bonuses that you received (make clear to them that you are not writing the recommendation for them, but that this information is merely there to help jog their memories). This will help your recommenders create more compelling recommendations.

Some schools require that one of your recommenders be a current supervisor; if you cannot ask any supervisors because you don't want to tell them that you are applying for business school, then you will have to justify that omission in your application. Even if the school does not require a current supervisor, it is a good idea to include one in the mix — though if you have only one supervisor, you will have to take the workload into account. Generally, it isn't a good idea to ask one person to write six recommendations.

Follow up with your recommenders again in September. There's a good chance your recommenders, with their busy schedules, will leave your letter until the last minute, so build a little leeway into the deadline you give them. If your application is due October 10, you may want to ask that they complete the letter by September 30.

In the meantime, continue writing and revising your essays. The essays are the single best way for you to distinguish yourself from other applicants, and they demand time and patience. Don't simply list your accomplishments — discuss how you achieved each one. Properly done, these essays show Admissions Committees who you are and why you're a standout individual who should be admitted to their program. Do ask for feedback from one or two people, ideally someone who has been through the process before — possibly a professional consultant or admissions insider. Some admissions consulting firms even offer free consultations; you might as well take advantage of any such free services. Be wary of expanding your network of readers too far, however. Too many opinions and ideas from too many sources will simply bog you down.

Late summer is also a good time to start working on the short answer portion of your application. Many applicants work diligently on the longer essays but leave the short answer topics for the last minute. Take this section just as seriously as any other. Use complete sentences and consider the questions carefully. Thoughtful, well-written answers send the message that you're putting your best into the application.

In September and October, wrap up your essays and continue checking in with recommenders until they've sent your letters. You should also visit your remaining top choice schools, while you can still integrate what you learn into your essays.

First round deadlines generally fall in the first two weeks of October. Do your best work and submit it — but don't obsess once you've sent your application in. Instead, move on to your second round applications. December and January deadlines approach quickly!

Some schools (though not all) conduct interviews; invitations for first-round applicants start to arrive in November. Don't worry about whether you're asked to an on-campus or local alumnus interview — Admissions Committees insist that both types of interviews are treated the same. Prepare by reviewing your essays and résumé, and reflecting on your experiences and decisions.

By December, you'll begin hearing about your first-round applications. Don't panic if your friend hears before you do. Different schools release their decisions at different rates — some all at once online, some over the phone over the course of a few weeks. Don't call the schools; they can't give out the information any faster and you'll only annoy them. For second-round applications, expect to start hearing in February, continuing into March.

Hopefully, by March, you'll be weighing offers from multiple schools. Now that you're in, you may want to revisit campuses and reevaluate the potential strengths and weaknesses of competing programs. Plan to visit while class is in session — it will give you a more accurate picture of student life and more insight into your decision. You may also want to negotiate — carefully and diplomatically — for better financial aid at your top choice, using another school's offerings.

Different Types of MBA Programs

MBA programs can be full-time or part-time; in this section, we discuss some common characteristics of the different types of programs.

Full-Time Programs

Full-time MBA programs typically last two academic years, with a three or four-month summer break, which students typically use for internships. Students cover fundamentals in the first year, and then have a choice of electives and a focused area of study in the second year. Useful for both people changing careers and those hoping to accelerate their current career track, these programs offer the chance to develop a specialization and a deep network of contacts. Full-time programs also typically boast features such as career services, social clubs, and speakers' series. To take full advantage of these opportunities, applicants need a firm sense of their long-term goals and how an MBA can advance those goals. Students also need to be able to finance school while not earning a full-time salary.

One of the biggest advantages of a full-time MBA is the internship opportunities it affo Internships are a great way to build your résumé and gain practical experience, and many businesses hire former interns to fill open positions. The career services office typically offers guidance during the internship process, and you can also turn to classmates who've already completed one. Some non-full-time programs also offer internships, though they typically don't allow a full immersion into the internship for 6 to 10 weeks.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of full-time programs is their strong sense of community, leading to more opportunities to develop a rich network of contacts. Social clubs offer the chance to spend time with classmates outside of class. Students will likely see familiar faces in all of their courses and can set up study groups more easily because everyone is on the same schedule. Your fellow students will be the core of your long-term network of contacts.

Experienced professionals who are less interested in core courses or specialization might consider one-year accelerated programs. Marked by stricter work and academic prerequisites than two-year programs and intense competition, these programs allow students to more quickly leverage their experience into an MBA. That said, one-year programs offer fewer internship opportunities, and some firms requiring MBAs prefer two-year degrees.

Part-Time Programs

For students interested in earning an MBA while working full-time, there are part-time programs that hold evening and weekend classes. Some programs require fewer courses by cutting out specialization, while others demand as many courses as a full-time program, spread out over a longer period of time. Popular with those looking to energize their current careers, these programs are best for experienced students already working in their chosen fields. Many employers even offer tuition reimbursement to encourage employee enrollment.

However, not all part-time programs offer the same range of specializations as full-time programs, and scholarship money tends to be more limited. Because career services support and internships are less available, these programs aren't ideal for those looking to change careers. It's also important to note that part-time credits rarely transfer to full-time programs.

One of the most important aspects of a part-time application is showing commitment to the program. Use the essays to demonstrate that you've spoken to your employer and family about the school's demands and you've really carved out time to devote to the program. Because part-time programs often lose students, they're eager for committed participants.

Executive Programs

A specialized subset of part-time programs, executive programs are specifically targeted to experienced professionals who do not want to change careers but want to focus on enhancing management skills to go further in their current fields. These programs are popular with those recently promoted or expecting to advance in the near future and are often employer-sponsored. If sponsored, a student will continue to work full-time for his or her employer, with time off to attend the program, and the employer typically pays for all or most of the tuition. These programs typically run for two years, with classes meeting on alternate Fridays and Saturdays. Balancing work and school is highly demanding for most attendees, and absences are prohibited. Internships, opportunities for specialization, and scholarships are all rare.

Visiting Schools

As you consider what's important to you in an MBA program and which schools might best meet your needs, it's a good idea to visit campuses that interest you. Most schools welcome visitors from October through April; if possible, visit the school during the spring before the fall in which you apply. Obviously, the visit will help you to decide whether a school suits you. If it does, then your experience there will help you tailor your personal

statement, so take copious notes during your visit. Additionally, Admissions Committees keep track of who visits; if you have very positive (or negative) interactions with current students, professors, or admissions staff, that information can make its way into your student file. At the very least, the Admissions Committee will notice that you were interested enough to take the time to visit the school, and every little bit helps.

Do your background research before you go — look up average GPA, GMAT, demographics, and other statistics that interest you. You don't want to ask questions with readily available answers. Then investigate the school's reputation and specialty areas, as well as its potential weaknesses and downsides. You may also want to research clubs and other extracurricular activities at the school to get a sense for the interests of the student body.

Once you're on campus, be sure to visit classes and speak to current students, as well as attend any official events. If you attend a class, ask the professor a very good question after class (don't ask any random question just to ask a question — make a good impression).

Interviews: What to Expect and How to Prepare

(From the mbaMission Complete Start-to-Finish Admissions Guide)

If you get an invitation to interview, accept immediately and enthusiastically, even if the school is lower on your list of choices. If nothing else, the experience will give you great practice for future interviews!

The MBA interview can take on a variety of forms. Some MBA programs offer you the opportunity to schedule an interview at your leisure, while others will extend an invitation (or not extend one) after reading your application. Further, some Admissions Offices conduct all candidate interviews themselves either on campus or at events in foreign countries, while others will ask students or alumni

to conduct interviews in person or even over the phone. Regardless of the venue or of the person interviewing you, your goal remains the same — to communicate your distinct attributes and prove that you have the personality to support the stand-out application you have already submitted.

The vast majority of MBA interviews are simple and straightforward. Candidates often fear that interviews will be aggressive, but most are relatively friendly "get to know you" sessions, wherein you can expect to be asked questions about your personal and professional history, career goals and reasons for applying to the particular school that is interviewing you. Therefore, try your best to relax. By relaxing, you will enjoy the process more, and you will likely show your best side to the interviewer(s).

You will almost certainly know the answers to the questions you are asked during the interview, because they will virtually always be about you and your experiences. You will never be asked to explain the theory of relativity or to discuss economic policy in Namibia (unless, perhaps, you happen to be a physicist or a specialist in Namibian economic policy!). Remember, interviews are not tests of your general knowledge or subject knowledge, but explorations of who you are as an individual and a professional. The best strategy during an interview is to respond in a relaxed manner with the most natural, truthful and direct answer possible to the question asked.

The first rule of an MBA interview is "know your story." Most interviews take place several months after you have submitted your application. We strongly recommend that before your interview, you reacquaint yourself with your story as you submitted it to the school: review your résumé, essays and application form so that you are prepared to discuss your ambitions, your experiences, and all of the other details and themes you presented in your application documents.

During your interview, time management is critical. Interviews are typically 30 minutes long, most interviewers will have a list of questions prepared (maybe

not a physical list before them, but at least a mental agenda), and they want to get through their entire list in the time allotted. If you babble on and take eight minutes to answer a single question, for example, you could give the interviewer the impression that you lack self-awareness and may talk too much in class. Using up time in this way also limits the interviewer's capacity to ask other questions and can thus prevent you from being able to offer other critical or interesting stories and information.

Many interviews begin with an open-ended request like "Tell me about yourself," "Walk me through your resume" or "Discuss your career progress since graduating from college." You should answer such open-ended "questions" in three to four minutes at the most. The interviewer only wants the highlights of your life/career and does not need to hear about each project undertaken in every position you have ever held. If interviewers are particularly interested in something you mention, they will ask follow-up questions and probe deeper.

After this open-ended first question, many interviews proceed with follow-up questions like "What are your short- and long-term goals after graduating with an MBA?" "Why do you need an MBA?" and "Why do you need an MBA from our school?" Generally, you should answer such questions in two to three minutes each. Your responses should be detailed but concise — though not too concise. Responding to a career question with "I intend to go into consulting and then pursue an entrepreneurial venture" is not enough. You should elaborate and offer details, as well as a rationale for why this career suits you and why pursuing these career goals upon graduating with your MBA makes perfect sense, but do so within the recommended two to three minutes.

Similarly, when you are asked why you have applied to a particular school, an answer such as "XYZ School has a great entrepreneurship program and a very small student body," for example, would not be sufficient. A persuasive response would cite specific features of the school and display your intimate knowledge of the school's particular benefits and culture: "When I visited XYZ, I was impressed

by the school's commitment to entrepreneurship. The programs offered through the Thompson Center, the Venture Formation Program and the Managers Round Table will offer me precisely the sort of academic experience I am seeking in an MBA program. What's more, I love that the student body is small and intimate." Offering a detailed response in two minutes is entirely possible, and the best way to prepare yourself to provide such a response is to refresh yourself on the school's strengths in your area of academic interest and need (in this example, the Thompson Center and its benefits for entrepreneurship) and on the school's culture and reputation (in this example, the small, tightly knit student body) before your interview.

After about the first four questions, the interviewer will likely ask about your career or extracurricular activities, posing questions such as "What are your strengths and weaknesses as a leader?" "Of what accomplishment are you most proud?" and "Discuss a time when you led a team. How were you effective as a leader? What could you have done better?" Again, you should answer such questions in detail but also concisely. You should also always offer real-life examples of your experiences to support any claims you make. Saying "As a leader I am a strong motivator, a clear communicator and a goal-oriented implementer" is simply not enough. By providing examples of instances in which you demonstrated such characteristics and skills, you will establish legitimacy for your claims: "As a leader, I am a strong motivator. I remember that on the XYZ project, morale was quite low because we were dealing with a difficult client. Recognizing the problem, I took the following three steps…. In addition, I am a clear communicator. I find that by establishing very clear expectations with my coworkers, I am able to set the agenda in an effective but respectful manner. On one case in particular, our team was…." Again, "fleshing out" your claims with real examples drawn from your life makes your answers much more effective and persuasive — not to mention much more interesting.

The second phase of questions will generally be very open and malleable. Candidates often get flustered because they cannot, for example, come up with

their "greatest accomplishment" on the spot. Whether your greatest accomplishment is when you took an entrepreneurial risk or when you raised $10K for charity does not matter — there is no "right" answer. Rather, the key is to respond intelligently, thoughtfully, and thoroughly to the question asked.

The final phase of the interview often consists of a personal question or two, such as "What do you do for fun?" or "What are your favorite hobbies and activities?" Again, these questions have no wrong answers. Think to yourself how you would answer such questions if one of your friends had asked them. While these kinds of questions may seem unusual, given that you are focused on your career goals and on getting into a particular MBA program, the answers are still within you and are not difficult to find. Relax and answer — and, where appropriate, tie your answer to certain extracurricular activities you could pursue at the school. For instance, if you are asked "How do you most enjoy spending your free time?" an excellent answer could be, "I love playing ice hockey — my earliest memories are of skating on the frozen pond on my grandparents' Minnesota farm. I still play twice each week with a group of friends, both because I love the sport and because it is great exercise. In fact, yet another reason I am so excited about earning my MBA from XYZ school is because of the student hockey team." Note how this answer is concise yet detailed, how it uses real-life examples and links directly with the school's extracurricular offerings.

Most interviewers will leave time for you to ask a few questions. The interview is not the time to learn about the school (you should know the school "inside and out" before you arrive), but rather a time to ask insightful questions that inferentially showcase your knowledge of the school or that show you are critically evaluating your options. For example, this is not the time to ask, "What entrepreneurial programs do you have?" If you are interested in entrepreneurship, you should already know the answer to this question. However, you could ask, for example, "The new dean has been in place for three months now. Would you say that the school has changed in any significant ways during this time?" Such a question shows that you know what is happening on campus and are

evaluating the school in part based on this major change — you have not just looked at the school's ranking and made the decision to apply, but have really done your research and considered your options. Avoid overarching exploratory questions ("What should I know about your finance program?") and vague questions with no direct connection to your goals ("What do you like about the Booth School?"), while also keeping in mind who your interviewer is — alumni may not know specifics about recent changes to curriculum or budgets on campus, for example, whereas admissions personnel may not have as much insight into how the MBA comes into play in the workplace as an alumnus/alumna would.

Also, be sure to have multiple questions ready for the interviewer to show that you have not done just the minimum to get by and also so you have backup queries, in case your main questions are naturally answered during the course of your interview. Take the time and do the homework necessary to ensure that your questions show you are truly knowledgeable about and interested in the school, and that they pertain to information you need and want to know. Remember that the interview is also your opportunity to get immediate, personal answers to your questions about the place that could change the course of your career and your life.

Finally, treat this as you would any other job interview. Pay close attention to how you present yourself throughout. Be on time, dress professionally, bring copies of your résumé, and don't forget to send a thank-you note afterward!

On Your Mark… Get Set… Go!

All right, you're ready to go! Hopefully, this document gave you some good information to help you get started with your GMAT preparation and the overall business school application process. If you have any questions, please drop us a line at studentservices@manhattangmat.com.

Happy studying and good luck!