

The GMAT and its Relevance

By Joern Meissner

Depending on admissions criteria, Business School applicants are usually required to take the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT). The GMAT is a standardized test delivered in English. Unlike academic grades, which have varying significance based on each school's grading guidelines, the GMAT scores are based on the same standard for all test takers and they help business schools assess the qualification of an individual against a large pool of applicants, with diverse personal and professional backgrounds. The GMAT scores play a significant role in admissions decisions, since they are more recent than most academic transcripts of an applicant and they evaluate a person's verbal, quantitative and writing skills.

The GMAT is a four-hour, Computer Adaptive Test (CAT) and can be taken at any one of many test centers around the world 5 or 6 days a week. The GMAT consists of four separately timed sections. Each of the first two 30-minute sections consists of an analytical writing task, also known as Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA). The remaining two 75-minute sections (Quantitative and Verbal) consist of multiple-choice questions delivered in a computer-adaptive format. Questions in these sections are dynamically selected as you take the test to stay commensurate with your ability level. Therefore, your test will be unique. Just one question is shown on the screen at a given time. It is impossible to skip a question or go back to a prior question. Each problem needs to be answered before the next question.

You may take the GMAT only once every 31 days and no more than five times within any 12-month period. The retest policy applies even if you cancel your score within that time period. All of your scores and cancellations within the last five years will be reported to the institutions you designate as score recipients. You will receive an



unofficial copy of your scores immediately after completing the exam and prior to leaving the testing center. Your official score report will be available to you on-line via an email notification 20 days after test day. The paper score report will be available via mail, upon request only.

2006 has ushered in a wave of changes in the administration process (not the test content) of the GMAT. This is a result of the General Management Admission Council's (GMAC) decision to switch from its previous test administrator ETS (Educational Testing Service) to Pearson VUE, the electronic testing business of Pearson. There have not been any test content

changes. Rather, some logistics have been revised and improved, such as the replacement of scratch paper with erasable laminated graph paper and the requirement of completing the AWA sections

before proceeding to the Quantitative and Verbal sections.

The scores necessary to get into top schools are increasing year-by-year, making quality preparation an even greater necessity. Studies indicate that applicants who prepare for the GMAT score substantially higher than those who don't. In addition to the admissions process, GMAT scores are also considered in job recruitment and scholarship awards. A good GMAT score can save you

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thousands of dollars in tuition. Disciplined and dedicated preparation for the GMAT will allow you to get the best score possible in the exam and get into the school of your choice.

GMAT Scores and Sections

Total GMAT scores range from 200 to 800. About 66% of test takers score between 400 and 600. The Verbal and Quantitative scores range from 0 to 60. For the Verbal section, most people score between 9 and 44. For the Quantitative section, common scores are between 7 and 50. The Verbal and Quantitative scores measure different things and cannot be compared to each other, however, each section's score can be compared across different GMAT tests. Scaled scores of 750 out of 800 on the combined test generally correspond to the 99th

percentile. 680 out of 800 corresponds to the 90th percentile.

There are two categories in the Quantitative Section with 37 questions in total: Problem Solving and Data Sufficiency. The Verbal Section comprises three groups with 41 questions in total: Sentence Correction, Critical Reasoning, and Reading Comprehension. In both the Quantitative and Verbal sections, everyone starts out with an average difficulty level. The difficulty of subsequent questions then increases or decreases based on the correct or incorrect answers a person submits in the test. For each correct answer you give, you are given a harder question for each subsequent question and for each incorrect answer you are given an easier question. This process will continue until you finish the section,

at which point the computer will have an accurate assessment of your ability level in that subject area. In each section, all test categories can appear in a random order and a mixed manner.

Your score is determined by three factors:

- 1) the number of questions you complete;
- 2) the number of questions you answer correctly and;
- 3) the level of difficulty and other statistical characteristics of each question. To derive a final score, these questions are weighted, based on their difficulty and other statistical properties, not their position in the test.

For the AWA section, one person and one computer programmed for grading (E-rater) score each essay based on essay content, organization, grammar and syntactic variety. Graders assign scores out of 6.0 based on intervals of 0.5 points. Your final, single score is an average of both individual scores obtained on the issue and argument essays. AWA scores are computed separately from other sections and have no effect on the Verbal, Quantitative, or Total scores.

GMAT Preparation and Test-taking Logistics

High quality preparation is essential to achieving your best score on the GMAT. High quality preparation means becoming intimately acquainted with the test structure, format, and the types of questions that are being asked. It means improving upon your weak areas through practice and repetition. It means developing your ability to answer correctly the tougher questions. It also means becoming aware of the types of answers that tend to be the correct ones.

Are there any advantages in taking a top-quality GMAT Prep course versus studying alone with the books and CDs available on the market? It really depends on your academic background, study habits, availability and, ultimately, your desired test score. Preparing on your own can save you some financial resources, but may not be as effective as learning from instructors who dissect each answer and impart knowledge and advice from their own GMAT-taking and MBA experiences. Studies show that visualization and discussion in a seminar environment will enable you to recognize complex structures better than learning the same material in a non-interactive way. Good luck!

About the author: Dr Joern Meissner is the Academic Director of Manhattan Review, a company that offers in-person and interactive online GMAT preparation courses worldwide. For details and a free GMAT insider-report, please visit www.manhattanreview.com