



GRE® vs. GMAT™ | The Smart Pick for MBAs

If you're applying to business school, one of the first decisions you'll need to make is which standardized test to take: the GMAT or GRE.

While these two exams have different formats and structures, top business schools treat GRE scores and GMAT scores equally. That is, **neither test is preferred.**

So, how do you decide which one is right for you?

In this article, we will walk through a practical framework to help you compare the two tests based on your study history, academic strengths, and goals.

Drawing from my first-hand experience working with students preparing for each exam, I'll explain why more and more test takers are choosing the GRE, and I'll help you decide whether it's the right move for you—especially if your goal is to get into a top MBA program efficiently, without overextending your study time.

How the GMAT and GRE Fit into the MBA Admissions Process

In recent years, the share of admits at top MBA programs [who submitted GRE scores](#) has grown steadily.

Programs at Harvard, Stanford, Wharton, and other elite institutions have reported increasing numbers of successful applicants with GRE scores. This trend suggests that the GRE is a solid option for candidates who want flexibility and feel more comfortable with the GRE format.

The rise in the GRE also reflects the holistic process used by admissions officers; that is, standardized test scores are just one factor among many, including academic background, experience, and other qualifications.

As a result, Admissions Committees care about the strength of your overall application, not whether you took the GMAT or GRE.

Are Top Business Schools Biased Toward the GMAT?

At Menlo Coaching, we've seen many successful applicants—including those admitted to the top ranked—apply with GRE scores. Some even received merit scholarships.

As we tell our clients, an impressive GRE score is just as compelling to Admissions Committees as an impressive GMAT score, so long as the score [falls within the school's average](#).

Choosing Between GMAT and GRE: Who Should Consider the GRE?

You now know that the GMAT and GRE are both viable options for your MBA applications; so how do you choose which to take?

Every applicant's strengths are different, so I recommend using the following question-and-answer framework to decide if the GRE is the better option:

1. Do you have strong verbal or math skills?

The GRE rewards core knowledge—especially in verbal reasoning and standard math operations. The Verbal Reasoning section consists of three question types: reading comprehension, text completion, and sentence equivalence. These question types are quite different from those on the GMAT exam, and you may find them more intuitive.

"We've seen students who struggled for months to improve their GMAT scores switch to the GRE and reach their targets within weeks," says Chris Kane, Head of Test Prep at Menlo Coaching. "For the right student, the GRE can feel far more straightforward."

2. Are you short on prep time?

The GMAT exam, especially the GMAT Focus Edition used since 2023, requires mastering tricky logic-based formats and specialized question types like data sufficiency.

In contrast, the GRE's more familiar structure may make it easier to focus your efforts and improve quickly. This is especially important for business school applicants facing tight deadlines.

3. Do you get anxious under pressure?

The GRE is a section-level computer-adaptive test, meaning the difficulty of the second Quantitative and Verbal Reasoning sections adjusts based on your performance in the first section. This structure allows more control over pacing and time management, as you can move freely within each section.

The GMAT, on the other hand, is a question-level adaptive computer adaptive test, which means the program selects your next question based on your previous response. This format can make it harder to recover if you get off track which is why many test takers find the GRE less stressful.

Key Differences Between the GMAT and GRE

If you answered yes to any of the questions above, the GRE might offer a more approachable path. But before you make a final decision, it's worth taking a closer look at how the two exams differ—especially in terms of structure and what each section is testing.

How the GRE Tests Analytical Writing—and Why It Matters

One key difference between the GMAT and GRE is the [Analytical Writing section](#). This section only exists on the GRE and evaluates your ability to think critically, organize your thoughts, and present an argument in a clear, persuasive essay. It's the only section on either exam that involves an extended written response, making it a distinctive feature of the GRE.

The GRE's Analytical Writing section asks you to analyze an issue in depth, demonstrating strong analytical skills and fluency in written English. You won't just be graded on grammar or structure—what matters most is your ability to dissect ideas, evaluate logic, and communicate your perspective effectively.

Since there's no equivalent section on the current GMAT, strong writers often see the GRE's Analytical Writing task as an opportunity to differentiate themselves. For business school applicants with a background in the humanities or experience in roles that demand written communication, the Analytical Writing section can showcase skills that aren't adequately conveyed by quant or verbal scores alone.

If you're more comfortable with written expression than data interpretation, this aspect of the GRE may tilt the scales in its favor. Solid performance in Analytical Writing won't make or break your application—but it can round out your profile and reflect well on your overall readiness for graduate-level work.

How the GMAT Tests Data Analysis Differently Than the GRE

The GMAT includes a dedicated Data Insights section, which tests your ability to interpret and analyze data through formats like data sufficiency, table analysis, and multisource reasoning.

The GRE also covers some of these skills, but they're integrated into its Quantitative Reasoning section, not separated into a standalone part of the exam.

What If You Already Started Studying for the GMAT Focus Edition?

If you've already started studying for the GMAT, much of that effort will carry over to the GRE.

Switching tests is more common than you might think - many students begin with one and then switch after taking a full-length practice test.

The math content is largely shared across GMAT and GRE, and the critical reasoning skills are transferable. Even with the newer GMAT Focus Edition, there's substantial overlap in the core competencies.

Switching from GRE to GMAT tends to be harder than going the other way, though. The GMAT features more specialized logic-based formats and takes longer to internalize. If you're unsure, taking full-length practice tests for both exams is the best way to determine your path forward.

Making the Switch—GRE Success Stories

I've personally seen several applicants switch to the GRE after hitting a wall with the GMAT—and go on to achieve impressive results.

An MBB consultant I worked with found herself plateauing on practice tests after weeks of GMAT prep. Her verbal reasoning strength wasn't translating to strong GMAT scores, so she shifted to the GRE. With her solid vocabulary and math fundamentals, she scored in the top 5%, earned multiple offers from M7 programs, and even secured a scholarship.

Another candidate, an engineer with strong quant skills and limited time before Round 2, chose the GRE for its straightforward format. After just a few weeks of prep, he achieved a top score and was admitted to a top graduate business program.

These examples show that both the GMAT and GRE require rigorous prep. But for some applicants, the latter exam—[especially when working with a GRE tutor](#)—leads to faster results.

Final Thoughts: Choose the Test That Fits You Best for MBA Admissions

Ultimately, your goal is to submit the strongest application you can for business school admissions. Whether you choose the GMAT or GRE, the key is playing to your strengths.

If you're aiming for a high score with less prep time—or if you're applying to a mix of business and other graduate programs—the GRE is a strong, flexible option. It's accepted by nearly all business schools, and strong GRE scores are taken just as seriously as strong GMAT scores.

Take the time to evaluate both exams, understand how your strengths align with the test structure, and choose the one that helps you stand out in the MBA admissions process.