

Taking the Graduate Record Exam (GRE)

This handout provides a brief overview of the GRE. For more detailed information including descriptions of the tests, practice materials, registration, and just about anything else you'd need to know, go to the GRE website at www.ets.org/gre. Much of the information below is adapted from this website.

GRE Basics

If you are applying to graduate school in psychology, or in many other fields, you will probably have to take the GRE. There are two GRE tests: the General Test and the Subject Test. The General Test is an aptitude test (similar to the ACT and the SAT) and is required by most graduate programs. The Psychology Subject Test assesses knowledge in specific areas of psychology. Most graduate programs do not require the Subject Test but some do and others may recommend that you take it.

GRE General Test Sections

- **Verbal Reasoning:** Assesses ability to analyze and draw conclusions from written information, and the meaning of words, sentences, and entire texts.
- **Quantitative Reasoning:** Assesses mathematical knowledge and reasoning skills in four areas: arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis (including descriptive statistics). **Note that this section does not include higher-level mathematics such as trigonometry and calculus.**
- **Analytical Writing:** Assesses ability to critically evaluate written ideas/arguments, and to construct and support your own written ideas/arguments.

GRE Psychology Subject Test Sections

- **Experimental/Natural Science (40%):** Learning, cognition, sensation and perception, behavioral neuroscience
- **Social/Social Science (43%):** Clinical, abnormal, developmental, personality and social psychology
- **General (17%):** History, applied psychology, psychometrics, research design and statistics

Test Fees, Administration, and Score Reports (Fees listed below are effective as of July 1, 2016. See GRE website for information on fee waivers)

- **General Test**
 - \$205 Price includes sending scores to 4 institutions
 - Computer-based administration
 - Offered frequently throughout the year
 - Score reports sent approximately 15 days after test date
- **Subject Test**
 - \$150 Price includes sending scores to 4 institutions
 - Pencil and paper administration
 - Offered 3 times a year, typically April, September, and October
 - Score reports sent approximately 5 weeks after test date

Preparing to Take the GRE

When to take the test

The short answer is to take it after you have prepared enough to give it your all. Do not try to “squeeze it in” shortly before applications are due when you already have a full plate. But do not procrastinate. Plan ahead. Make it a priority to devote serious time to preparing for the test, months not weeks, and make sure you take the test in time for programs to receive your scores before the next application deadline.

Study materials

Some preparation materials including test descriptions, sample questions, and practice tests are available for free on the GRE website. However you should also purchase (and use) other study materials. *The Official Guide to the GRE® revised General Test* contains additional sample questions and practices tests, sample essay responses, and test-taking strategies. A current Introductory Psychology textbook is good resource to help prepare for the Psychology Subject Test.

Study tips

- Give yourself plenty of time to study and study a lot! This is especially true for the General Test. Although schools vary in the weight they place on these scores, many programs weight them heavily in admission decisions.
- Take several practice tests. *POWERPREP® II* software available from the GRE website allows you simulate the experience of taking the actual test.
- Learn how the test is structured. In addition to studying the material per se, it is important to understand how the test is set up, the kinds of questions that appear in each section, and how to organize and submit your responses. You will focus better and be less nervous when you take the test for real if you know what to expect.
- Identify your weak areas. Use the practice tests to help identify the areas you need to work on the most and then focus on these areas when you study. This does not mean you should work only on these areas. You want to do your best on all parts of the test.

Retaking the Test

You can retake the GRE and use the *ScoreSelect*® option to decide which scores you want to send. If you need higher scores to get into your program to-die-for and you feel confident that you can improve your scores, then you might seriously consider this option. But you’ll have to prep and pay for the test all over again. So give it everything you got the first time.

Final Thoughts

No one likes to take the GRE. (Just ask your professors.) But don’t wig out. Instead, give yourself the time to prepare and when the time comes buckle down and dig in. Like most things in life, thinking about it can be more stressful than actually doing it.