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GMAT Focus Edition and GRE: Your Best Test Strategy

By Rachel Erickson Hee

Since September 2023, two major standardized tests for admission to business school have been significantly revised. Both the new GMAT exam and the GRE are brand new to us all — test-takers, admissions committees, and test prep experts alike — so it can be confusing to navigate the various options.

Fortuna Admissions previously shared information on [what to expect from the new GMAT and GRE](#). With all these changes, however, my fellow MBA admissions coaches and I are fielding questions from MBA candidates about the new GMAT Focus Edition exam, how it compares to the GRE, the state of test preparation materials, and which test they should take. We have pooled our wisdom, and in this blog, we share our best advice to help you determine your best exam strategy. We cover:

- [What's new on the GMAT?](#)
- [What changed in the GRE?](#)
- [How do they compare?](#)
- [What are my options?](#)
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What's new on the GMAT?

The new GMAT Focus Edition is shorter, with three sections. Quantitative Reasoning includes 21 questions reduced from 31; Verbal Reasoning has 23, reduced from 36 questions. The new Data Insights section has 20 questions, including data sufficiency and items from the former Integrated Reasoning section – a separate part of the test most business schools did not rely on heavily.

The Focus Edition eliminated grammar, sentence correction, and the essay from the test. Most geometry has also been deleted. Data sufficiency questions now appear in the new Data Insights section of the test and have been removed from the traditional quantitative questions. They are now more focused on analyzing information than pure math.

The GMAT new format gives test takers more flexibility. With the GMAT Focus structure, you can choose the order in which you take the sections, and you can flag questions to go back and review your answers later if time allows.

The new GMAT Focus score range is now from 205 to 805 instead of 200 to 800. All Focus Edition scores end in a “5,” which will help admissions committees distinguish them from old test scores.

The Focus Edition launched Nov. 7, 2023; test takers could choose whether to take the new, shorter exam or the old, better-known exam. That option ended February 1, 2024; so test-takers can no longer take the old GMAT. The GMAT vs GMAT Focus Edition decision is no longer an issue.

What changed in the GRE?

The GRE also changed its exam, shortening it from 4 to 2 hours as of September 22nd, 2023. To trim the test length, they removed the essay and the experimental section. They reduced the number of verbal questions from 40 to 27 and the number of quantitative questions from 40 to 27. The types of content covered in the GRE questions should remain substantially similar to the old format.

How do the GMAT Focus Edition and GRE compare?

In the past, the conventional wisdom has generally held that the verbal section of the GRE is harder than the GMAT, while the GMAT posed more difficult math questions. Now, the tests are converging, according to test prep experts who have tutored candidates on the GMAT and GRE for decades.

“The reality is that the GRE and GMAT are now colliding. There used to be much greater separation between the two tests,” says Fritz Stewart, a long-time tutor from [Inspirica Pros](#), a test preparation and tutoring agency. With the removal of grammar and the introduction of a Data Insights section that is reported with your score, the new GMAT test “is becoming more like the GRE,” he says. The math has gotten harder on the GRE in the last five years as well, making the GRE more like the GMAT.

We don’t have sufficient data from actual test takers to make solid comparisons across the new versions. Those who have taken the new Focus Edition are delighted that the sentence correction portion of the test is gone. They have found that the math is harder, but that may be just because the new GMAT is testing new things not on the old test and they may not have been adequately prepared for those types of problems.

As in the past, it’s not really a question of which test is harder. What matters is which test is harder for *you*.

What are my options?

The GRE made its changeover immediate; everyone has taken the new, shorter test since September. The GMAT Focus Edition launched Nov. 7, 2023, but test takers could choose

whether to take the new, shorter exam or the old, better-known exam. That option ended January 31, 2024, and applicants can no longer take the old GMAT.

Your choice is now between the Focus Edition and the GRE or, for some schools, the Executive Assessment (EA) exam. Most US business schools are agnostic about the GMAT vs. the GRE, and unless stated otherwise, they will accept either for all applicants. They truly have no preference and will evaluate whichever test you submit. You will not be penalized if you take the GRE exam, which is designed for admission to any graduate degree program.

EA, on the other hand, is not as widely accepted. It only came on the scene in 2016 and was designed as a shorter, focused exam for Executive MBA applicants with more business experience. Some schools accept the EA only for their executive or part-time MBA programs. It's essential to check each MBA program you're applying to in order to confirm which tests they accept.

What test prep is available?

Test prep for the GRE is readily accessible, because the most significant change is the length of the exam. The key is to be sure you understand the structure and how the test works technically so you can use your time strategically. Practice exams and advice from a reliable test coach can help with that.

The Graduate Management Admissions Council, the owner of the GMAT exam, has partnered with MBA.com to provide prep materials for the Focus Edition. Although at the time of this writing, the links to prep materials on the GMAC website are inactive, you can find the official prep materials on MBA.com. Now that everyone is taking the Focus Edition, all the test prep companies will be rapidly building their expertise based on practice tests and real, live exam experience.

Your best test strategy

First, some reassurance: If you have a solid GMAT score you're happy with, and it's less than five years old, you're all set. GMAC has affirmed that GMAT scores remain valid five years after the test date. Schools will continue to accept these scores. GMAT has published a [score concordance table](#) to correlate scores for the old and new exam and the score percentiles, as well.

However, if you're just starting your MBA journey and trying to decide which test to take, our old advice still applies: take the test that plays to your strengths. Because of the changes to these tests, we suggest this approach:

- Before deciding which test to study for, take a full diagnostic (practice) test of the GRE and the GMAT. Be sure to take them on separate days to avoid fatigue during the second test. Take each test in one complete sitting and make sure that you take each test in similar conditions.

- Your scores are less relevant in this situation than your comfort level with the material on each test. They are quite different tests, and different people may have preferences for one test over the other.
- If you prefer one test, this is the one we recommend you study for and take. If you are equally comfortable with the material on both tests, then we recommend assessing the study materials available or consulting with your tutor/test prep company before making a decision.
- Both the GMAT and GRE are adaptive tests, meaning the difficulty of the questions adjusts based on your answers and ability. The shorter tests may come with increased variation and greater unpredictability in test scores. With fewer questions, one mistake or one correct answer will have a greater weight on the overall score. As a result, when developing your timeline for your application process, build in some buffer time so you can take the test multiple times to achieve your desired score if needed. We recommend allowing yourself enough time to take the test two or three times if necessary.
- Although it is too early to know for certain, GRE scores are expected to remain similar in terms of test-takers' scores and overall percentiles. However, the GMAT has a new scoring system, so it is not possible to directly compare old and new scores. Schools will be looking at percentiles and admitting people who score in the same percentile on the new test as they selected with the old GMAT. Thus, when evaluating your score, you should also look at the percentiles, as opposed to the raw number.

Some final words of reassurance:

All these exam changes are not unusual. In conversation with test prep experts from *Inspirica Pros*, tutors with decades of experience point out that these standardized tests do undergo revisions periodically, and any bumps in the process usually work themselves out. History suggests that there shifts in the dominance of one test over another as users shift between them. In my experience, when the SAT test for college admissions was revised, some students decided to take the ACT the first year because the availability of solid test preparation guidelines and materials for the new SAT was limited. Over time, the share of SAT vs ACT test takers evened out.

Business schools are readily adapting to new scoring. Launching the GMAT Focus is a great move from GMAC. "I don't see why the GMAT Focus would not be a good indicator, as much as the GMAT was," says Virginie Fougea, the Director of Admissions at INSEAD. "We will continue using the percentiles in the same fashion since the data they use to calculate the percentiles is based on past test scores."

It may be a bit nerve-wracking to face a revamped exam, but remember, everyone is in the same situation—so no one will have an edge.