



Four Ways to Use *GRE*[®] General Test Scores to Evaluate and Support Applicants



By *Harrison Kell*

Are you getting the most out of *GRE*[®] General Test scores? Here are four lesser known, but effective ways that graduate programs are putting this **common, standardized** measure to good use.

Use *GRE*[®] Analytical Writing scores to predict future GPA for students at both the master's and doctoral levels.

Of the three scores that the *GRE* General Test provides — Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning and Analytical Writing — **research shows** that how well applicants perform on the Analytical Writing section is frequently the best or second-best predictor of their future GPA. *GRE*[®] Analytical Writing scores provide direct insight into how applicants can both think critically and clearly express their reasoning in writing. The measure requires test takers to articulate complex ideas clearly, support ideas with relevant reasons and examples, and sustain a well-focused, coherent discussion. These skills are different from those assessed on the *GRE*[®] Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning measures. The *GRE* Analytical Writing responses are more authentic writing samples than the often-coached personal and research statements. Faculty committees can download and view applicants' actual essay responses to the two *GRE* Analytical Writing topics in the ***ETS*[®] Data Manager**.

Use GRE scores to identify and help students who may need additional support once admitted.

GRE General Test scores can provide helpful information to faculty members and other staff who focus on supporting and retaining students once they are admitted. Lower GRE scores may indicate which students are more likely to struggle, and in which areas; therefore this information can help advisors and faculty members provide these students with additional mentoring and support, if needed. For example, providing campus writing centers with access to applicants' GRE Analytical Writing scores and essay responses could help writing instructors intervene effectively. Rather than using GRE scores to screen students out, GRE scores can be used to help students stay in programs.

Use a large disparity between GRE General Test scores and undergraduate grade point average (UGPA) as a prompt to conduct a more thorough review of an applicant's application materials.

Research shows that both GRE scores and UGPA indicate academic readiness, and while there is typically reasonable agreement between the two components, large disparities could be a signal that the admissions committee should look more closely at other components of the application packet. Misalignment between GRE scores and UGPA can be caused by variations in undergraduate program rigor and grading practices, the **increasing pervasiveness** of grade inflation, "padding" of UGPA with undemanding courses, or simply having a bad day when taking the GRE test. When the misalignment is significant, taking a holistic approach to reviewing the application packet is even more important. Reviewing multiple pieces of evidence including letters of recommendation, work and research experience, and transcripts is particularly valuable for providing information about an applicant's skills, personal attributes and potential for success.

Use GRE General Test scores to evaluate international applicants within a common, comparable context.

GRE scores can be especially useful in evaluating international applicants, especially those who attended lesser-known undergraduate institutions outside of major metropolitan areas. Since GRE scores are the only common, objective component in the application packet, they can serve as a calibration tool for less straightforward measures. International student UGPAs can vary drastically since grading scales vary by country and even within countries. For example, some universities in India grade on a 7-point scale, and some on a 10-point scale. This makes it challenging to directly compare two students from the same country, let alone numerous students from different countries. However, if all of these students submit GRE General Test scores, direct comparisons are much easier. GRE scores can help contextualize the applications of individuals from different backgrounds, regardless of where they went to school.

GRE General Test scores can serve as a multipurpose tool for admissions committees to evaluate applicants from multiple viewpoints and set them up for future success. For more information, visit www.ets.org/gre/institutions/admissions/usingscores/.