
HOW TO BEAT THE GMAT IN 10-20 DAYS

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FIRST WORDS

Like most aspiring MBAs, when I first decided to take the GMAT test, I thought that getting a 700+ score required months of working through endless courses and textbooks. After beating the test myself and learning from others' experiences, I believe it's simpler.

This guide provides a proven and efficient GMAT study method. Myself and many others have used this method and gotten **700+ scores after 10-20 days of part-time study**. Some even did better than others who took the "full-fledged approach" and spent several months and hundreds of dollars studying for the GMAT.

Thus, I strongly recommend you to forget traditional wisdom, **sign up for a test date within the next few weeks, and follow the method below**. You don't have much to lose. Best case scenario, you study 10-20 days instead of 2-3 months and get a great score. Worst case scenario, you spend 10-20 days but don't reach your target score... so what? As far as I know, **b-schools don't care whether you took the GMAT once or four times, as long as you eventually got a good score**.

The next sections describe the study method, organized around nine questions:

1. What is the right mindset to beat the GMAT?
2. Where should I get the exercises to study from?
3. Where do I start once I have my study materials?
4. How do I quickly determine my strengths and weaknesses?
5. How do I distribute my study time?
6. How do I actually study?
7. Where do I get the content to study from?
8. When and how do I rehearse for the test?
9. How should I answer the essay section?

1. WHAT IS THE RIGHT MINDSET TO BEAT THE GMAT?

A key part of getting a high GMAT score is having the right mindset – you must base your preparation on two key principles:

1. **Practice with difficult exercises and spend most of your time reviewing the questions that you got wrong.** The GMAT scoring system will reward you more for improving where you are weak than for mastering areas where you are already strong. Reading books or doing easy questions is more “fun” (?), but will not improve your score.
2. **Avoid getting stuck at difficult questions... just answer your best guess and move on.** Using your time efficiently is critical – you have only 121 seconds per quantitative question and 110 seconds per verbal question. Trust me, this isn’t much time. The tricky part is that once you answer a question, you cannot go back and change your answer. This creates a dangerous trap where many fall into – some waste 4-5 minutes stuck in a single question because they think they “almost got it”. This is a terrible mistake that lowers your overall score. You will probably waste time, get the question wrong anyway, and force yourself to run faster over the next questions. Even worse, you may end up not finishing the test, severely hurting your score.

2. WHERE SHOULD I GET THE EXERCISES TO STUDY FROM?

Don’t be overwhelmed by the myriad of GMAT books, websites and courses available out there. You only need 3 resources:

1. **All three official GMAT guides.** They are your very best and most reliable source of formerly used GMAT questions.
2. **Official GMAT essays.** You get 2 by scheduling your GMAT appointment. You can also buy a few more if needed.
3. **GMAT Club subscription.** Go to <http://gmatclub.com/>. For a small fee you get unlimited access to hundreds of difficult math practice questions. Those are invaluable as they help you quickly identify your weak points and get better. After working on those super difficult questions, the real GMAT will seem easier in comparison. Also, their web interface works well and provides useful statistics on performance by type of question and time spent in each question.

3. WHERE DO I START ONCE I HAVE MY STUDY MATERIALS?

The first goal is to get familiar with the test’s structure. The GMAT has four sections: two that matter a lot, and two that matter very little. **You should spend 90-95% of your time studying for the quantitative and verbal sections, which determine your GMAT score.** You will then use your remaining 5-10% of time to get familiar with the integrated reasoning and essay sections. You are better off studying these last two sections just 1-5 days before the test.

The quantitative and verbal sections have 5 types of questions:

- Problem solving (quantitative)
- Data sufficiency (quantitative)
- Reading comprehension (verbal)
- Critical reasoning (verbal)
- Sentence correction (verbal)

Start your study by reading the official GMAT guide to understand each type of question. Don’t focus on the specific example questions, but more on how they look, how they work, what they are testing for, and how to correctly answer them.

4. HOW DO I QUICKLY DETERMINE MY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

Knowing where you are strong vs. weak is the first and most critical part of your strategy. This will allow you to spend most of your study time working on your weaknesses, which are the greatest source of GMAT score improvement.

To do this, **you must take a diagnostic test**. I recommend the one from the GMAT official guide. Take it seriously. Sit down properly and face the diagnostic as if it was the real test. Use a timer and give yourself only the official time. **Once you finish, calculate the % of correct answers for each of the 5 types of questions**. This is how you will know your strengths (high % of correct answers) vs. your weaknesses (low % of correct answers).

5. HOW DO I DISTRIBUTE MY STUDY TIME?

Your individual study plan should be based on your available time and diagnostic results. First, you need to realistically define how many days and hours you will invest studying for the GMAT. **Note that the minimum effective study time is 1.5-2 hours per seating**. As reference, 30-60 hours in total should be a good aim. In my opinion, studying more than 4-6 hours in a single day is too much. It's important to keep a healthy balance and not let the GMAT completely take over your mind, as it can hurt your performance.

Once you have determined your personalized study schedule, you need to allocate time. **Your time distribution should directly relate to your weaknesses**. A quick rule of thumb is:

- **40-60%** time to work on the 1-2 question types where you performed the worst
- **20-30%** time to practice the 1-2 questions types where you performed OK
- **10-20%** time to stay sharp on the 1-2 question types where you performed best

Stick to your time allocation, but stay flexible. After a few days you may really improve in one type of question, but still struggle in other areas. In this case, re-distribute your time to focus on your new, updated weaknesses.

6. HOW DO I ACTUALLY STUDY?

You must always study in "blocks". A "block" covers a single question type (e.g., only data sufficiency) and lasts 1.5-3 hours, depending on how many questions you want to work on. A typical 2-hour block looks something like this:

- **~10 minutes to review content** (don't use books! More details below how to do this)
- **~40 minutes to complete ~20 practice exercises** (you can change the number of exercises to adjust the block's length). Note: when choosing the exercises to practice, **pick the hardest ones that you can manage**. In the official guide, the last exercises are the hardest. In GMAT club, you can select your difficulty level.
- **~70 minutes to review in depth your mistakes and struggles**. Mark the questions where you either answered incorrectly, that somewhat guessed, or took too long to answer. Review those questions in detail and **don't move onto the next question until you fully understand what went wrong, and how to correctly and quickly answer the question**. This is critical. Those frustrating 20 minutes spent understanding a seemingly impossible question, are when you really learn something that will improve your score.

7. WHERE DO I GET THE CONTENT TO STUDY FROM?

The web is the best way to find the solutions for difficult questions. Just Google the first words of the question that you are struggling with, and you will find multiple online forums where people discuss the right answer and the easiest approach to solve the question. These are invaluable.

You will also need a notebook to document the critical lessons that you learn. Whenever you understand a new concept, or learn a new trick that makes answering some questions easier/faster, you must write it down in a way that makes sense to you. **Over time, your notebook will become your own little “cheat sheet” with the tips and tricks that really help you.** This is much better than generic guides that cover topics that you have already mastered.

Thus, you should spend the first 10 minutes of each study block reviewing your notebook. This is the only content review that you need to make. There is no need to read books and review subjects that you remember well from high school. You only need to review the few concepts and tricks that matter to you.

8. WHEN AND HOW DO I REHEARSE FOR THE ACTUAL TEST?

You must take at least 2 full official practice tests before the actual GMAT. Ideally, take the first practice test ~1 week before the real test, and the second 1-2 days before it. You must take them seriously, and work exactly like you would on the test day. Follow all the instructions and take the recommended breaks.

Taking the full practice tests has three main goals:

1. **Get comfortable with the test structure and computer interface.** The Official GMAT practice tests look and feel exactly like the actual test.
2. **Get familiar with the integrated reasoning section.** The 12 questions in this section cover the same concepts from the quantitative and verbal sections, but with different question mechanics. **This section does not require any specific study, just take 1-2 full practices and review your answers.** This should be enough.
3. **Get a sense of where your score is.** Official practice tests are the best predictor of your real GMAT test. From my own and others' experience, in the real test people typically score 10-20 points lower than in practice tests. I believe that this happens because of the added pressure/nervousness of being at the test center. If you are too far from your target score, you may consider re-scheduling your test for a few weeks later (which is cheaper than taking a new test).

9. HOW DO I ANSWER THE ESSAY SECTION?

This is the final step and should be done 1-3 days before the test. Bear in mind that your performance on the essay section does not affect your overall GMAT score. It is rumored that b-schools will only check your score to make sure that your writing is decent enough and to verify that you wrote your own application essay, but they really don't care too much whether you got a great score.

Thus, you should not spend much time on this. There are several templates online with a typical essay structure. Learn one, and write 1-2 essays following it. You can find a good one at <http://gmatclub.com/forum/how-to-get-6-0-awa-my-guide-64327.html>.

THAT'S IT! YOU ARE NOW READY TO BEAT THE GMAT

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please feel free to reach me at <mailto:javier@ejecutivojoven.com>