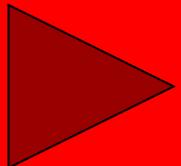# EXECUTIVE LINK

GMAT Secrets

By Mary Petersen

What is GMAT?

The GMAT is a required test for entrance into MBA programs.

It's a multiple-choice test, which means that there is always one (and only one) correct answer for each question.
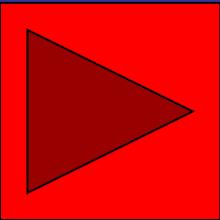
Is it a management test?

- The GMAT tests your verbal and quantitative skills, not your knowledge of management.

Is this a test of knowledge?

- A certain level of math and verbal skills is essential, but to *ace* the GMAT exam you'll also need to know how to *take* the GMAT.

Is it an IQ test?

- More than anything else, your GMAT score simply reflects your ability to take the GMAT. This is a test of your ability to take a test.

What's the breakdown?

Analytical Writing Assessment *(AWA)*
- » 1 Essay - Analysis of an argument

Integrated Reasoning

    30 Minutes, 12 Questions – NOT computer adaptive

    Multi-Source Reasoning, Table Analysis, Graphics Interpretation, and Two-Part Analysis.

8 min. BREAK

Quantitative (Mathematics) Section
- » 37 questions
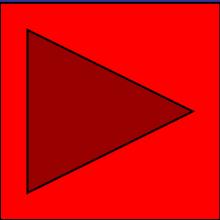 - Problem Solving
  - Data Sufficiency

8 min. BREAK

Verbal Section
- » 41 questions
  - Sentence Correction
  - Critical Reasoning
  - Reading Comprehension
    - Three main subject areas
      - » business
      - » social sciences
      - » science

What is the GMAT CAT like?

The tests at school were multiple choice (multiple guess), and only the number of questions you answered correctly determined your score.
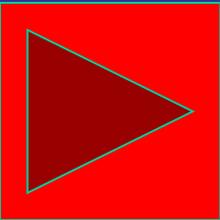
Your GMAT score will be calculated according to your accuracy and the level of difficulty of each question.

Answer right, and your score goes up.

Answer wrong, and yes, down it goes.

Don't answer at all? Not an option.

You **must** answer question number one to get to question number two (number two to get to number three, and so on).
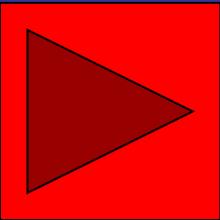
The CAT and You

Except for the Analytical Writing Assessment, Integrated Reasoning and the Reading Comprehension questions, all the questions on the computer test are adaptive.

It's imperative that you understand the adaptive principle if you hope to get a good score.

MY SECRET: You can skip questions in each section and still be guaranteed a score of 750.

You can skip the last ten questions, that is, if you get the first ten correct, because it's that first third that establishes your level of difficulty.
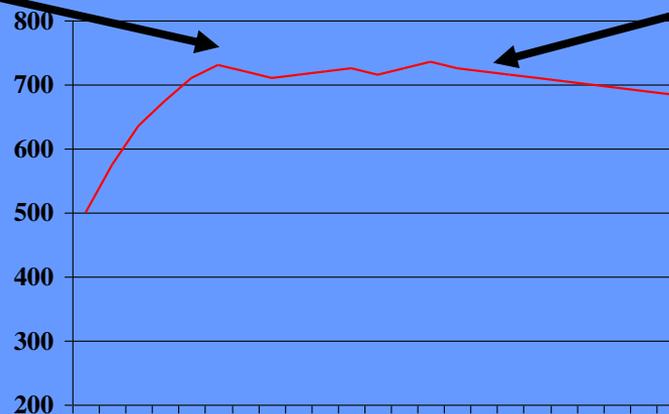
If you can answer the first ten questions correctly and are able to maintain that score during the second third, you can quit without answering the last ten questions of each section.
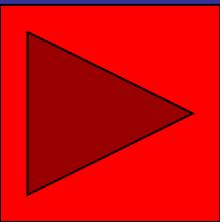
Take a look at this score chart…

This sample graph is not indicative of the actual ETS algorithm, but it should give you an idea as to the way your score will be determined.

800	
700	
600	
500	
400	
300	
200	

This test taker didn't have time to finish the exam, yet even without answering the last several questions, the score dropped only slightly. Those final questions were worth so much less.
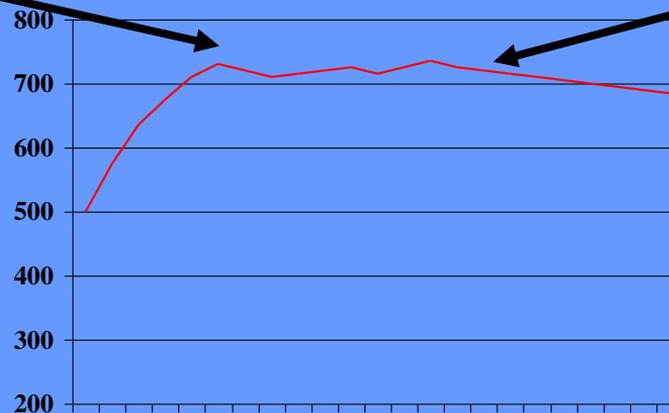
The increments on the sample graph get smaller after each question is answered. After 7 or 8 questions, the tracking system will have formed its general impression of your test abilities and as it continues to adapt the test to you, the following questions will vary by still fewer and fewer points.

Note that you will not see Reading Comprehension questions within the first seven questions of the verbal section
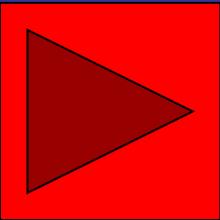
Get the first third correct!

Maintain that score!

800

700

600

500

400

300

200

Because several questions are related to a single passage, a poor understanding of one Reading Comprehension passage early on would kill your adaptive Verbal score.

Reading Comprehension passages will not occur until after the computer has determined your skill level within the Verbal section.
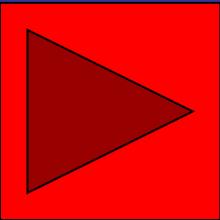
Keep these two things about the CAT principle in mind:

1. Higher scores come from the value, not the number, of questions you answer correctly.

2. The test is designed to quickly determine your test level, within the first few questions of both the Math and the Verbal sections, and fine tune it as you go along.

While you should aim at finishing all questions on the GMAT exam, it's the first seven to twelve in a section that you should spend the most time and energy on trying to solve. Adjust your strategy to the strategy of the test.

A safe time to guess is on the last question. It will hardly affect your score at all.
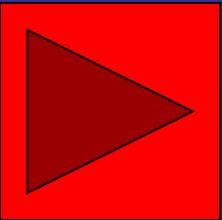
Frequently Asked Questions

Think you understand how the CAT works? If not, you'll need to go back through what we've talked about so far.

Or try some of the links below. These are some of the most frequently asked questions about the GMAT CAT.

1. **Should I answer questions wrong on purpose so the test gets easier?**

2. **How much does the level of difficulty change from question to question?**

3. **Does my performance on one section affect the level of difficulty of the questions in the other sections?**

4. **Is the computer program that precise?**
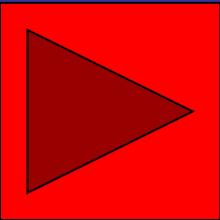
5. **Can I skip a question?**

Frequently Asked Questions – Answer 1

Should I answer questions wrong on purpose so the test gets easier?

Absolutely not! If you answer a question wrong, the computer will give you an easier question but your score will go down as a result.

If you want a good score (and you know you do!) you must answer as many questions as possible correctly . The harder the question, the higher the point value.

This is crucial information! Since the CAT scoring algorithm determines your test level very rapidly answering correctly without hesitation from the first question on is extremely important so that you start off with a high score. It's much easier to maintain a high score than it is to raise a low score.
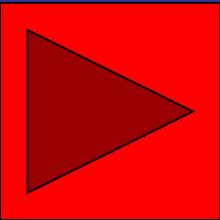
Frequently Asked Questions – Answer 2

How much does the level of difficulty change from question to question?

In the beginning, quite a lot - toward the end, not so much. This is an important quirk in the system. The objective of the CAT is to quickly determine (right from the beginning) your approximate test level and then fine-tune it while you continue the test.

To illustrate: a right answer on the first question results in an increase of 50 points, a right answer on the second, an increase of 40 points—on the second-to-last question a right answer nets you an increase of only 10 points.

So, if you answer the first few questions correctly, you'll swiftly receive more difficult (higher score value) questions and can therefore raise your score.
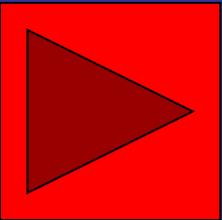
Frequently Asked Questions – Answer 3

Does my performance on one section affect the level of difficulty of the questions in the other sections?

No. Each section is scored separately and begins with a question at the 500-level score value.

If, for example, the Quantitative Section is the first section of the test, and if you get all the questions wrong, you'll still begin with a question valued at 500 on the Verbal Section.
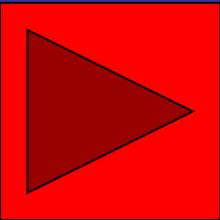
Frequently Asked Questions – Answer 4

Is the computer program that precise?

At The MBA Center, we don't think so: it's about as precise as the pencil-and-paper test. Standardized tests, even on computer, cannot be 100 percent accurate in their estimation of the level of difficulty of a given question.

Some students consider difficult questions to be easy, other students consider easy questions to be difficult—it varies from test to test, student to student. However, the Adaptive Scoring System comes closer to identifying a personalized test level than did the pencil-and-paper test.
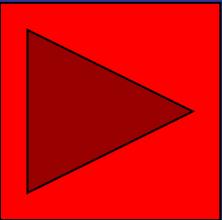
Frequently Asked Questions – Answer 5

Can I skip a question?

No. Unlike the old test, on the CAT you cannot skip a question and come back to it. Neither can you change your responses. In order to advance to the next question you must enter your answer and then confirm it.

The explanation is simple: the computer selects a question for you which depends on an algorithm that takes into consideration all of your answers thus far—if you could go back and change an answer, the continuity of the algorithm would be broken.
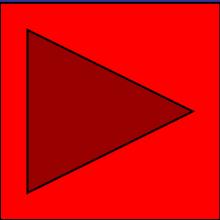
Strategies: Draw a Grid

Ten years ago, you would have been able to cross out wrong answer choices in your booklet.

This process of elimination was always a great strategy in the past. By ruling out answer choices that were definitely wrong, students could focus on the ones that were possibly right.

Unfortunately, since you can't write on the computer screen, you can't cross out the wrong answer choices. A new system is necessary to keep track of wrong answer choices.

Our **Process of Error Identification** is your best tool when you approach difficult questions, and drawing a grid will help you keep track of it all.
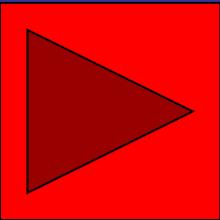
Strategies: Draw a Grid

When you sit down to take the test, use the time during the mandatory CAT-tutorial (which you will know well before the exam) and during the optional 5-minute break between the Quantitative and Verbal sections to draw yourself a grid, such as this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	X	X	X					
B	X	X	O					
C	O	X	X					
D	X	X	X					
E	X	O	X					

There are two specific advantages to the grid:

1. You can eliminate wrong answers and focus on remaining possible answer choices.

2. You can cross out an answer choice, and have a record of it, as soon as you see that it's incorrect.
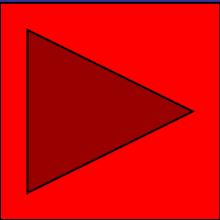
Further Strategies

The power of good guesswork is one reason why multiple-choice tests are rarely given in school.

Simply put, the correct answer is there right in front of you. That's why ETS makes every effort to try to steer you toward misleading, incorrect answer choices.

Realizing that most people who take the test make the same mistakes:

1 errors in calculation
2 jumping to conclusions
3 overcomplicating simple problems

If you know how wrong answers are made and what they're made of, you'll avoid being the victim of tricks and traps waiting for you.

Remember

ETS has had years of experience writing Problem Solving questions.

They know all about test takers' most common mistakes. You should too!

Don't get fooled by:

- Making simple arithmetic mistakes (adding instead of subtracting, for example)
- Omitting a step of a multiple-step problem
- Confusing units of measure or time (forgetting to convert from hours to minutes, for example)