

## Guidelines for the Use of GRE® Scores

The GRE® Board has adopted a statement regarding fair and appropriate use of GRE scores. This statement can be found on the GRE® Program website at [www.ets.org/gre/guidelines](http://www.ets.org/gre/guidelines).

### Introduction

These guidelines have been adopted by the GRE® Board to provide information about the appropriate use of GRE test scores for those who use the scores in graduate and business school admissions and fellowship selection processes and for guidance and counseling for graduate study. They are also intended to protect applicants from unfair decisions that may result from inappropriate uses of scores. Adherence to the guidelines is important.

The GRE General Test and Subject Tests are designed to assess academic knowledge and skills relevant to graduate study. As measures with known statistical properties and high-quality technical characteristics, the scores from these tests, when used properly, can improve graduate admissions and fellowship selection processes. The research section of the GRE website includes research reports that provide validity evidence for the use of GRE scores in graduate admissions and fellowship selection processes. The research reports can be found at [www.ets.org/gre/research](http://www.ets.org/gre/research).

Any GRE test, however, has two primary limitations: (1) it does not and cannot measure all the qualities that are important in predicting success in graduate or business school study or in confirming undergraduate achievement and (2) it is an inexact measure; consequently, the standard error of measurement of the difference between test scores can serve as a reliable indication of real differences in applicants' academic knowledge and developed abilities.

Although limitations and cautions apply to all admissions measures, the GRE Board has a particular obligation to inform users of the appropriate uses of GRE scores and to identify and try to rectify instances of misuse. To this end, the following policies and guidelines are available to all GRE test takers, institutions, and organizations that are users of GRE scores.

### Policies

In recognition of its obligation to ensure the appropriate use of GRE scores, the GRE Board has developed policies designed to make score reports available only to approved users, to encourage these score users to become knowledgeable about the validity of the test score uses and interpretations, to protect the confidentiality of test takers' scores and to follow up on cases of possible misuse of scores. The policies are discussed below.

**Score users.** Undergraduate and graduate institutions and non-degree-granting organizations that award graduate fellowships are eligible for consideration as score users. The GRE Board retains the right to make exceptions to this policy in special circumstances.

**Validity.** The general appropriateness of using GRE test scores for graduate admissions, fellowship selection and guidance and counseling for graduate study has been established by research studies carried out by ETS and others. GRE scores may be appropriate for some other purposes, but it is important for the user to validate their use for those purposes. To assist departments and programs in evaluating proposed uses, these guidelines include information about appropriate uses and uses without supporting validity evidence.

**Confidentiality.** GRE scores, whether those of an individual or aggregated for an institution, are confidential and can be released only by authorization of the individual or institution or by compulsion of legal process.

**Use of reportable scores.** For tests taken on or after July 1, 2016, scores are part of a test taker's reportable history for five years after the test date.

For tests taken prior to July 1, 2016, scores are part of a test taker's reportable history for five years after the testing year in which they tested (July 1 – June 30). GRE scores earned

August 1, 2011, to the present are available in test takers' reportable GRE score history.

The five-year policy was developed to support the validity of GRE test scores. Older scores may not reflect an applicant's current ability in verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, analytical writing, and critical thinking. Applicant's experiences over a long period of time (more than five years) between testing and applying to a graduate or business program may impact their ability, and their scores in these areas may have changed. Only official reportable scores should be used in the admissions and fellowship selection processes.

**Use of scores in aggregated form.** Graduate departments and programs are urged to report GRE scores in ranges, such as the highest and lowest scores of the middle 50 percent of the admitted applicants and to avoid use of a precise mean or median. Presenting information by score ranges emphasizes the diversity of individual scores for any one graduate department or program, and also makes clear the overlap of scores among graduate departments and programs.

Use of GRE scores in aggregated form as a measure for ranking or rating graduate programs, institutions, university systems or states is strongly discouraged except when the scores are used as one indicator among several appropriate indicators of educational quality.

**Use of concordance scores.** Concordance tables are available at [www.ets.org/gre/concordance](http://www.ets.org/gre/concordance) to help score users transition from using Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores on the prior 200–800 score scale to using scores on the current 130–170 score scale, and to facilitate the comparison of scores of individuals who took the General Test prior to August 1, 2011 with those who take the current General Test. The concordance tables show the relationship between the two score scales.

There are separate tables for the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning measures. Each of the tables provides a point estimate of the corresponding score on the 130–170 scale for each score on the prior 200–800 scale. Also included are the most recent percentile ranks associated with each new scale score.

**Encouragement of appropriate use and investigation of reported misuse.** All users of GRE scores have an obligation to use the scores in accordance with published GRE Board policies and guidelines. Departments and programs have a responsibility to ensure that all users of GRE scores are aware of the GRE Board score-use policies and guidelines and to monitor the use of the scores, correcting instances of misuse when they are identified. The GRE Program staff is available to assist institutions in resolving score-misuse issues.

## Guidelines

### 1. Use Multiple Criteria

Regardless of the decision to be made, multiple sources of information should be used to ensure fairness and to balance the limitations of any single measure of knowledge, skills or abilities. These sources may include undergraduate grade point average, letters of recommendation, personal statement, samples of academic work and professional experience related to proposed graduate study. A cut-off score (i.e., a minimum score) should never be used as the only criterion for denial of admission or awarding of a fellowship.

Use of multiple criteria is particularly important when using GRE scores to assess the abilities of educationally disadvantaged applicants, applicants whose primary language is not English and applicants who are returning to school after an extended absence. Score users are urged to become familiar with factors affecting score interpretation for these groups as discussed in this publication.

### 2. Accept Only Official GRE Score Reports

The only official reports of GRE scores are those issued by ETS and sent directly to approved institutions and organizations designated by the test takers and to vendors the score recipients might designate to process the scores they receive. Scores obtained from other sources should not be accepted. If there is a question about the authenticity of a score report, the question should be referred to ETS. ETS will verify whether an official report was issued and the accuracy of the scores.

### 3. Conduct Validity Studies

Departments and programs using GRE scores for graduate or business school admissions, fellowship awards, and guidance and counseling for graduate study are encouraged to collect validity information by conducting their own studies. The GRE Program staff will provide advice on the design of appropriate validation studies without charge.

### 4. Maintain Confidentiality of GRE Scores

All GRE score users should be aware of the confidential nature of the scores and agree to maintain their confidentiality. Institutional policies should be developed to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. For example, GRE scores should not be placed on documents sent outside the institution.

### 5. Consider Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning and Analytical Writing Scores as Three Separate and Independent Measures

Since the level of skills in verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning and analytical writing abilities required for success in graduate and business schools varies by field or department, Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning and Analytical Writing scores should not be combined into a single score. To understand factors related to combining scores, view the GRE DataViews article *A Balanced Approach to GRE Score Use* at [www.ets.org/gre/balancedapproach](http://www.ets.org/gre/balancedapproach).

### 6. Conduct Reviews of Subject Test Content

Although each Subject Test is developed and updated regularly by a committee of examiners who are actively teaching in the field, the match between the test and the curriculum in a given department may not be exact and may vary over time. Departments are encouraged to periodically review the test content description in order to verify the appropriateness of the content for their programs. The free practice books can be downloaded at [www.ets.org/gre/subject/prepare](http://www.ets.org/gre/subject/prepare).

### 7. Avoid Decisions Based on Small Score Differences

Small differences in GRE scores (as defined by the standard error of measurement [SEM] for score differences) should not be used to make distinctions among test takers. SEMs vary by test and are available in this publication.

### 8. Use the Appropriate Percentile Ranks when Comparing Candidates

Percentile ranks are provided on score reports and can be used to compare test takers' relative performance among the measures. Percentile ranks indicate the percent of test takers in a group who obtained scores below a specified score. The percentile ranks are generally based on previous GRE test takers from a recent three-year period.<sup>1</sup> Percentile ranks should be compared only if they are based on the same reference population. Percentile ranks are updated annually and are available at [www.ets.org/gre/percentile](http://www.ets.org/gre/percentile).

### 9. Do Not Compare Scores from Different Subject Tests

Subject Test scores should be compared only with other scores on the same Subject Tests (for example, a 680 on the Physics Test is not equivalent to a 680 on the Chemistry Test). Percentile ranks should be compared only if they are based on the same reference population.

### 10. Transition to the 130-170 Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning Score Scales

Departments and programs are encouraged, if they have not already done so, to transition from using Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores on the prior 200–800 score scale to using scores on the current 130–170 score scale. The estimated Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores based on the concordance, and the actual scores from test takers who took the General Test on August 1, 2011 or later can be used to facilitate the transition and score interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup>The percentile ranks for the General Test and Subject Tests for the 2016-17 testing year are based

on a three-year cohort of examinees who tested between July 1, 2012, and June 30, 2015.

#### **11. Use Concordance Information to Transition to the Current Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning Score Scales**

The concordance tables may be appropriately used for translating an institution's historical guidelines for GRE Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores on the prior 200–800 scale to the current 130–170 scale. Using the tables in this way should result in the selection of approximately the same proportion of test takers. Note that the scores in the concordance tables are approximations, not equivalences. A test taker who has a particular score on the prior GRE scale would not necessarily obtain the concordant score on the current scale.

#### **Normally Appropriate Uses and Uses Without Supporting Validity Evidence**

The suitability of a GRE test for a particular use should be explicitly examined before using test scores for that purpose. The following lists of appropriate uses of GRE scores and identified uses without supporting validity evidence are based on the policies and guidelines outlined above. The lists are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive, in nature. Uses other than those listed below should be discussed in advance with GRE Program staff to determine their appropriateness.

If a use other than those appropriate uses listed below is contemplated, it will be important for the user to validate the use of scores for that purpose. The GRE Program staff will provide advice on the design of such validity studies free of charge.

Subject Test scores may be considered for the award of undergraduate credit only in the field of the test and only when a rationale has been developed that discusses the relationship between GRE Subject Test scores and the amount of credit awarded. This rationale must be made available to users of any transcripts that contain credit awarded in this manner.

#### **Appropriate Uses**

Provided all applicable guidelines are adhered to, particularly the use of multiple sources of information in the decision-making process, General Test and Subject Test scores are suitable for the following uses:

1. Selection of applicants for admission to graduate school
2. Selection of graduate fellowship applicants for awards
3. Guidance and counseling for graduate study

#### **Uses Without Supporting Validity Evidence**

Uses and interpretations of General Test and Subject Test scores without supporting validity evidence are inappropriate, including the following:

1. Requirement of a minimum score on the General Test for conferral of a degree, credit-by-examination, advancement to candidacy or any noneducational purpose
2. Requirement of scores on the General Test or Subject Tests for employment decisions, including hiring, salary, promotion, tenure or retention
3. Use of any measure involving a summation of Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning and Analytical Writing scores or any subset of these scores
4. Use of the Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning or Analytical Writing measures as an outcomes assessment

Comments, complaints, inquiries and suggestions about the use of GRE test scores are welcome. To contact the GRE Program office, see the inside front cover.