



GRE Prep: Error Analysis

One valuable way to improve your test performance on the GRE is to take and then analyze practice tests. First, take some tests untimed as opportunities to maximize your reasoning abilities. Alternate these with timed tests to refine your test-taking strategies. As you analyze your practice tests, try to identify the reasons you made errors. Then use this new information to modify your approach to the test. The following is a list of factors that may cause you to miss test items.

FACTOR	DESCRIPTIONS	VERBAL EXAMPLES	MATH EXAMPLES	SOLUTIONS
Lack of knowledge	Not answering questions due to inadequate prerequisite skills	Having a weak vocabulary	Not knowing the formula for the area of a rectangle	Give yourself ample preparation time to build your knowledge in the areas tested.
Failure to use all the given information	Ignoring information pertinent to answering a question	Not verifying reading comprehension answer by location information in the passage	Not using the fact that two lines are parallel	Underline all key words and pertinent information in test questions.
Poor test-taking skills	Improper pacing; not weighing and eliminating all choices; sacrificing accuracy to finish the test	Choosing the first item that looks feasible instead of choosing the best answer	Guessing without eliminating an obviously poor choice	Practice timed and untimed tests to apply test-taking and reasoning skills. Eliminate options and weigh remaining choices. Learn and practice test-wiseness.
Faulty reasoning	Settling for a vague understanding instead of thorough comprehension of the material; not thinking the item through completely; guessing instead of reasoning; failing to use visual or mental aids	Failing to establish a precise relationship between two “stem” words in an analogy before choosing an answer	Reasoning that a^7 is smaller than a^{12} because one fails to consider the case when $a < 0$	To ensure comprehension, focus on meaning. For example, draw a picture or diagram or underline words that indicate meaningful organization (therefore, because, however, etc.)





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Lack of perseverance	Giving up and guessing when reasoning would have led to the correct answer; a superficial instead of an in-depth approach	Not attempting a reading comprehension selection because it is in a field that one is unfamiliar with	Guessing at an answer when the first approach at solving the problem has failed	Most GRE items are not impossible, just difficult. Recognize the value of attempting to reason through all items unless it is very clear that you do not have the prerequisite knowledge necessary. However, be careful not to spend an inordinate amount of time on any one test item.
Anxiety	Exhibiting physical and/or psychological tension that interferes with performance; becoming self-oriented versus task-oriented	Seeing all multiple choice answers as correct because you can't discriminate differences among them	Re-reading a problem several times without understanding it	Learn to recognize signs of muscular tension and focus on relaxing these areas. The Sanger Center has many resources for learning strategies for relaxation.
Making unwarranted assumptions	Missing an item because one incorrectly inferred or over-generalized the given information	Assuming a single meaning of a vocabulary item instead of considering possible secondary meanings	Assuming that a triangle is a right triangle even though it is not indicated as such	Read all test items carefully; interpret items literally instead of reading into them. Whenever time permits, check your answers for accuracy.