Score Architect

RESEARCH REPORT

GRE® Scores in Context: What the ETS Data Shows

Who takes the GRE® General Test, how they score, what a percentile rank means and how precise a score is, taken only from documents that ETS publishes.

> Period covered: ETS testing years 2020-21 through 2024-25 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2025). Mean scores are for 2024-25. Percentile ranks are for people who tested between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2025. The table for MBA applicants is older (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2023) and is marked as dated.

Free resource from www.scorearchitect.com/gre. Prepared 13 November 2026.

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Executive summary

ETS, the organization that makes the GRE® General Test, publishes detailed counts and score statistics every year. This report gathers those figures in one place: how many people take the test, who they are, how they score, what a percentile rank means, and how much uncertainty sits around any single score. Every number comes from an ETS document, and we add no estimates of our own.

206,004
people with valid scores on all three measures in testing year 2024-25, down from 366,686 in 2020-21[1]

152.0 and 156.9
mean Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores of 2024-25 test takers; the mean Analytical Writing score was 3.5[1]

61%
of 2024-25 test takers were not U.S. citizens; 39% were U.S. citizens[1]

82% and 50%
of test takers scored lower than 160 on Verbal Reasoning and on Quantitative Reasoning, respectively (tested July 2022 to June 2025)[2]

3.17 and 2.56
standard error of measurement, in scaled score points, for a Verbal Reasoning score and a Quantitative Reasoning score[3]

44%
of 2024-25 test takers did not state a graduate degree objective; 29% named a master's degree and 19% a doctorate[1]

- **Fewer people are taking the test.** ETS counted 366,686 test takers with valid scores in 2020-21 and 206,004 in 2024-25, a fall of about 44% by our arithmetic. The number of U.S. citizen test takers fell every year across the period[1].
- **The same scaled score means different things on the two multiple-choice measures.** A 160 has 82% of test takers below it on Verbal Reasoning and 50% below it on Quantitative Reasoning. A 165 has 95% and 67% below it[2].
- **Scores differ by intended field.** In 2024-25, intended Physical Sciences majors had the highest mean Quantitative Reasoning score (161.2) and intended Humanities and Arts majors the highest mean Verbal Reasoning score (155.5)[1].
- **A score is an estimate.** ETS reports a standard error of measurement of 3.17 points for Verbal Reasoning and 2.56 points for Quantitative Reasoning, and tells score users that scores "are not exact measures"[3,1].
- **ETS advises against cut scores.** Its guidance to programs asks for several sources of information, for the three measures to be read separately, and for programs to publish score ranges, not averages[1,4].

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How to read this report. Counts, means and percentages are quoted exactly as ETS published them. Where we add simple arithmetic to ETS counts (a percentage change, for example) we say so. We do not compute percentile ranks, predict scores or rank schools or countries. Score Architect is independent of ETS.

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1. What ETS publishes, and what it does not

ETS groups its interpretive material for score users on one page[5]. This report uses four of the documents listed there, plus the ETS pages that describe the structure of the test.

- **The Snapshot.** A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test gives performance information for people who tested between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, and volume information for five testing years from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2025. A testing year runs from July 1 to June 30[1].
- **The interpretive data tables.** Tables 1A, 1B and 1C give means, standard deviations and percentile ranks for everyone who tested between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2025. Table 3A breaks scores down by intended field[2,6].
- **Reliability and standard error of measurement.** Table 4A states how consistent the scores are and how large the measurement error is[3].
- **The Guide to the Use of Scores.** The 2026-27 edition sets out the guidelines ETS asks programs to follow[4].

How ETS counts test takers

The Snapshot counts people, not test sittings. Within each testing year, if someone had more than one set of scores, ETS kept the most recent set and removed the earlier ones. It then kept only test takers with valid scores on all three measures. The counts include tests taken at a test center and tests taken at home; the at home version was launched in April 2020[1]. The interpretive tables use a different base: everyone who tested in a three-year window, by measure, so their totals are larger and should not be compared with the Snapshot counts[2].

Background details such as intended field or degree objective come from a questionnaire completed at registration. Test takers do not have to answer every question, so the number of respondents varies from one question to the next[1].

The test changed during the period

The five testing years in the Snapshot span a change in the test. The version given before September 22, 2023, took approximately 3 hours and 45 minutes[4]. Since that date the test has five sections and takes about 1 hour and 58 minutes[7]. The score scales did not change: Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning are reported from 130 to 170 in one-point increments, and Analytical Writing from 0 to 6 in half-point increments[4].

MEASURE	QUESTIONS	TIME
Analytical Writing (one section)	One "Analyze an Issue" task	30 minutes
Verbal Reasoning (two sections)	12 questions, then 15 questions	18 minutes, then 23 minutes
Quantitative Reasoning (two sections)	12 questions, then 15 questions	21 minutes, then 26 minutes

Structure of the GRE General Test for tests taken on or after September 22, 2023. Source: ETS, GRE General Test structure (web page), https://www.ets.org/gre/test-takers/general-test/prepare/test-structure.html. Accessed 13 November 2026.[7]

The Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning measures are section-level adaptive: the computer selects the second section of a measure based on performance on the first. The number of questions answered correctly is converted to a scaled score through a process ETS calls equating, which accounts for differences in difficulty between test editions[8].

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Two cautions from ETS

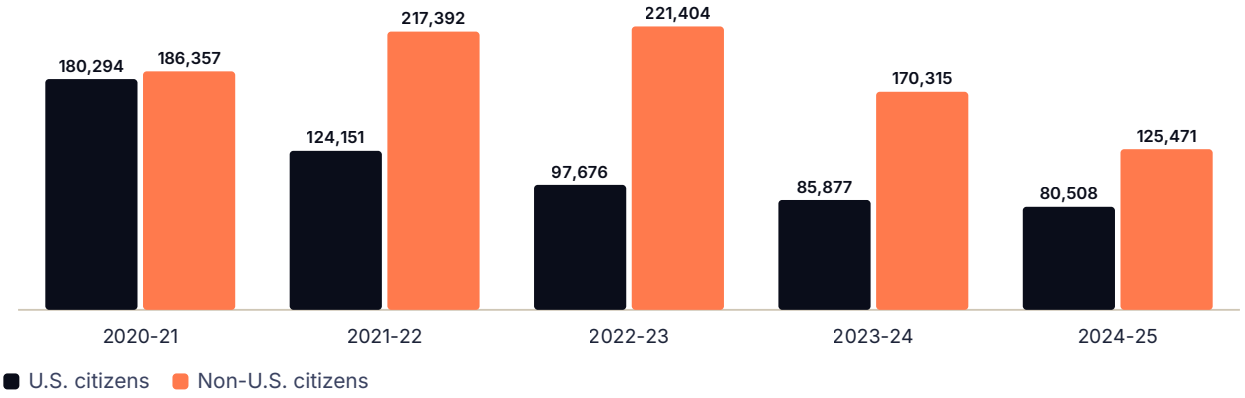
ETS states that the Snapshot data "are not meant to be representative of the population intending to attend graduate school", and that the report does not describe enrolled graduate students. It describes the people who chose to take the test[1].

ETS also says the test is not appropriate for comparing countries: "The GRE Program does not endorse the practice of ranking countries on the basis of GRE scores, as this is a misuse of data."[1] For that reason this report shows where people tested and their citizenship as counts only, and does not list mean scores by country.

2. How many people take the test

ETS reports 366,686 test takers with valid scores in 2020-21, then 341,574, 319,101, 256,215 and 206,004 in the four following testing years[1]. By our arithmetic from those counts, the 2024-25 total is about 44% below the 2020-21 total. ETS does not give reasons for the change in the Snapshot, and we do not offer any.

Test takers with valid scores, by U.S. citizenship status and testing year



TESTING YEAR	ALL TEST TAKERS	U.S. CITIZENS	SHARE	NON-U.S. CITIZENS	SHARE
2020-21	366,686	180,294	49%	186,357	51%
2021-22	341,574	124,151	36%	217,392	64%
2022-23	319,101	97,676	31%	221,404	69%
2023-24	256,215	85,877	34%	170,315	66%
2024-25	206,004	80,508	39%	125,471	61%

Volume of GRE General Test examinees by U.S. citizenship status (Snapshot Table 2.1). Shares are ETS percentages of each year's total. Source: ETS, A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test, July 2020 to June 2025, https://www.ets.org/pdfs/gre/snapshot.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

The two groups moved differently. ETS notes that the number of U.S. citizen test takers "consistently declined over the past five testing years"[1]: from 180,294 in 2020-21 to 80,508 in 2024-25, which is about 55% lower by our arithmetic. The number of non-U.S. citizens rose to 221,404 in 2022-23 and then fell to 125,471 in 2024-25, about 43% below that peak by our arithmetic. Non-U.S. citizens have been the majority in every one of the five years, and made up 61% of test takers in 2024-25[1].

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Where people take the test

The Snapshot also reports the country in which each person tested. Three countries account for most of the volume. Testing in India rose from 66,326 people in 2020-21 to 111,476 in 2021-22 and then fell to 31,677 in 2024-25. Testing in China was 32,039 in 2024-25, close to its 2020-21 level of 32,925. The United States remained the largest testing location, with 95,077 people, or 46% of the total, in 2024-25[1].

COUNTRY WHERE TESTED	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
United States	214,441 (58%)	152,618 (45%)	122,997 (39%)	104,034 (41%)	95,077 (46%)
India	66,326 (18%)	111,476 (33%)	110,512 (35%)	59,133 (23%)	31,677 (15%)
China	32,925 (9%)	24,081 (7%)	32,943 (10%)	41,360 (16%)	32,039 (16%)

Number of test takers by country where they tested, with the ETS percentage of each year's total in parentheses. Source: ETS, A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test, July 2020 to June 2025, https://www.ets.org/pdfs/gre/snapshot.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

Citizenship gives a similar picture. In 2024-25 the three largest citizenship groups were the United States (80,508), China (43,541) and India (34,477)[1].

3. Who takes the test

Age and current education

Most test takers are in their early twenties. In 2024-25, 46% were aged 18 to 22 and a further 26% were 23 to 25. Across the five testing years, about 60% were college seniors or college graduates who were not enrolled at the time. Men and women each made up 50% of 2024-25 test takers (102,164 men and 102,512 women)[1].

AGE GROUP	TEST TAKERS	SHARE	VERBAL MEAN	QUANT MEAN	WRITING MEAN
18 to 22	95,705	46%	151.9	158.8	3.5
23 to 25	53,169	26%	151.7	156.1	3.5
26 to 30	35,885	17%	152.6	155.4	3.5
31 to 35	12,209	6%	151.9	153.9	3.4
36 to 40	4,871	2%	151.6	152.4	3.3

GRE General Test score information by age group, 2024-25 (Snapshot Table 1.4). The five largest age groups are shown; ETS also reports smaller groups under 18 and over 40. Source: ETS, A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test, July 2020 to June 2025, https://www.ets.org/pdfs/gre/snapshot.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

Mean Quantitative Reasoning scores are lower in each successive age group in the table, from 158.8 for those aged 18 to 22 to 152.4 for those aged 36 to 40, while mean Verbal Reasoning scores stay within about one point of each other[1]. These are averages for groups of different size and background. They do not say how any individual of a given age will score.

Intended field of study

Test takers are asked which field they intend to study. In 2024-25 the largest groups were Life Sciences (19%), Business (16%), Physical Sciences (15%) and Social and Behavioral Sciences (12%). Another 11% were undecided and 11% gave no field[1]. In ETS Table 3A, the Physical Sciences category includes computer and information sciences and mathematics and statistics[6].

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INTENDED MAJOR FIELD	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Life Sciences	76,603	59,321	49,629	42,535	38,653
Physical Sciences	62,314	70,657	65,791	47,475	31,844
Engineering	40,285	40,258	34,491	27,315	20,793
Business	38,141	35,284	37,191	37,376	33,087
Law	1,819	1,375	1,647	1,873	1,773

Number of test takers by intended graduate major field, selected fields (Snapshot Table 2.6). Source: ETS, A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test, July 2020 to June 2025, https://www.ets.org/pdfs/gre/snapshot.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

The fields have not moved together. Intended Business majors numbered 38,141 in 2020-21 and 33,087 in 2024-25, and their share of all test takers rose from 10% to 16% as other fields shrank faster. Intended Physical Sciences majors peaked at 70,657 in 2021-22 and stood at 31,844 in 2024-25. Intended Law majors are a small group, between 1,375 and 1,873 people in each of the five years[1].

Degree objective and study plans

Asked what degree they were aiming for, 29% of 2024-25 test takers said a master's degree and 19% a doctorate. Six percent (12,044 people) named an MBA and 1% (1,678 people) a JD. The largest single category is the 44% who did not answer, so these shares understate each objective by an unknown amount[1].

GRADUATE DEGREE OBJECTIVE	TEST TAKERS	SHARE
Master's (MA, MS, MEd)	59,564	29%
Doctorate (PhD, EdD)	39,565	19%
MBA	12,044	6%
JD	1,678	1%
Specialized master's in business	1,188	1%
No response	89,636	44%

Graduate degree objective of GRE General Test examinees, 2024-25 (Snapshot Table 1.12). Smaller categories are omitted, so the rows shown do not sum to 100%. Source: ETS, A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test, July 2020 to June 2025, https://www.ets.org/pdfs/gre/snapshot.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

ETS reports that 53% of test takers planned to enroll in a full-time program, with 42% not answering the question[1].

On location, ETS writes that in 2024-25 "the most preferred U.S. regions were the South, Northeast and West", and that outside the United States test takers preferred Canada and Western Europe. The number naming Canada as a preferred region fell from 48,588 (13%) in 2020-21 to 17,014 (8%) in 2024-25[1].

4. Mean scores by group and field

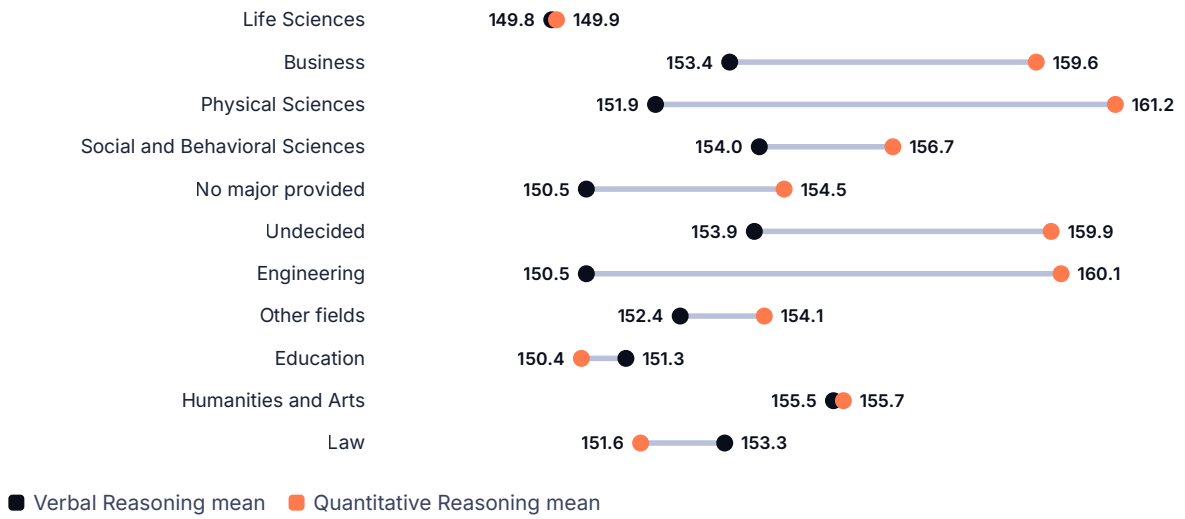
Across all 206,004 test takers in 2024-25, the mean scores were 152.0 on Verbal Reasoning (standard deviation 8.7), 156.9 on Quantitative Reasoning (standard deviation 10.0) and 3.5 on Analytical Writing (standard deviation 0.8)[1]. The three-year reference group used for percentile ranks, which is larger and covers July 2022 to June 2025, has means of 151.39, 157.62 and 3.46[2].

U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens have different average profiles. In 2024-25, U.S. citizens averaged 152.8 on Verbal Reasoning, 151.3 on Quantitative Reasoning and 3.8 on Analytical Writing. Non-U.S. citizens averaged 151.4, 160.4 and 3.3[1]. Because non-U.S. citizens are 61% of the population, the overall Quantitative Reasoning mean sits well above the mean for U.S. citizens. This matters when you read

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percentile ranks in section 5: the reference group is everyone who took the test, wherever they intend to study.

Mean Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores by intended graduate major field, 2024-25



INTENDED GRADUATE MAJOR FIELD	TEST TAKERS	SHARE	VERBAL MEAN	QUANT MEAN	WRITING MEAN
Life Sciences	38,653	19%	149.8	149.9	3.6
Business	33,087	16%	153.4	159.6	3.6
Physical Sciences	31,844	15%	151.9	161.2	3.4
Social and Behavioral Sciences	24,460	12%	154.0	156.7	3.7
No major provided	23,357	11%	150.5	154.5	3.4
Undecided	23,303	11%	153.9	159.9	3.4
Engineering	20,793	10%	150.5	160.1	3.3
Other fields	3,991	2%	152.4	154.1	3.5
Education	2,442	1%	151.3	150.4	3.6
Humanities and Arts	2,301	1%	155.5	155.7	3.7
Law	1,773	1%	153.3	151.6	3.8
All test takers	**206,004**	**100%**	**152.0**	**156.9**	**3.5**

GRE General Test score information by intended graduate major field, 2024-25 (Snapshot Table 1.8). "No major provided" is the ETS category for test takers who gave no field. Source: ETS, A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test, July 2020 to June 2025, https://www.ets.org/pdfs/gre/snapshot.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

The spread between fields is much wider on Quantitative Reasoning than on Verbal Reasoning. Mean Quantitative Reasoning scores run from 149.9 for intended Life Sciences majors to 161.2 for intended Physical Sciences majors. Mean Verbal Reasoning scores run from 149.8 to 155.5[1]. ETS attributes differences within and across groups to factors such as course-taking patterns, interests, knowledge and skills, and to unequal educational, economic and social opportunity[1].

Distributions within a field

Means hide a great deal. Table 3A of the interpretive data gives the full distribution of scores by intended field for college seniors and college graduates not currently enrolled who tested between July 1, 2022,

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and June 30, 2025[6]. A few rows show how far fields differ at the top of the Quantitative Reasoning scale: among intended Mathematics and Statistics majors, 36.4% scored from 165 to 169 and 26.9% scored 170. Among intended Life Sciences majors as a whole, 2.9% scored from 165 to 169 and 1.1% scored 170[6].

INTENDED FIELD (TABLE 3A)	VERBAL: TEST TAKERS	VERBAL MEAN	QUANT: TEST TAKERS	QUANT MEAN
Life Sciences (broad category)	99,124	150	99,183	150
Health Professions and Related Programs	63,871	150	63,913	149
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	17,970	152	17,983	153
Physical Sciences (broad category)	88,489	152	88,588	162
Computer and Information Sciences	68,197	151	68,235	162
Mathematics and Statistics	12,331	154	12,373	165

Number of test takers and mean scaled score for selected intended fields, seniors and nonenrolled college graduates who tested between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2025 (Table 3A). ETS rounds these means to whole numbers. Source: ETS, GRE General Test Interpretive Data by Broad Graduate Major Field, Table 3A (tested July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025), https://www.ets.org/content/dam/ets-org/pdfs/gre/gre-guide-table-3a.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[6]

5. Percentile ranks

A percentile rank on a GRE score report is the percentage of test takers in the reference group who scored lower than a given score[2]. The current tables are based on everyone who tested between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2025: 788,021 people for Verbal Reasoning, 790,864 for Quantitative Reasoning and 785,720 for Analytical Writing[2]. The table below reproduces ETS Tables 1B and 1C for scaled scores from 170 down to 140. We have not calculated or adjusted any of these values.

SCALED SCORE	VERBAL	QUANT	SCALED SCORE	VERBAL	QUANT	SCALED SCORE	VERBAL	QUANT	WRITING SCORE	% LOWER
170	99	89	159	79	47	149	34	21	6.0	99
169	99	85	158	76	45	148	30	19	5.5	98
168	98	80	157	72	42	147	27	16	5.0	93
167	97	75	156	68	39	146	24	14	4.5	85
166	96	72	155	64	37	145	21	12	4.0	63
165	95	67	154	59	34	144	18	10	3.5	40
164	93	63	153	54	31	143	16	9	3.0	16
163	90	60	152	48	29	142	14	7	2.5	7
162	88	57	151	43	26	141	11	6	2.0	3
161	85	53	150	39	23	140	10	5	1.5	1
160	82	50							1.0	1

Percent of test takers scoring lower than each score, based on all individuals who tested between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2025 (Tables 1B and 1C). ETS publishes values for the full scale; scores below 140 are omitted here for space. Source: ETS, GRE General Test Interpretive Data, Tables 1A, 1B and 1C (tested July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025), https://www.ets.org/content/dam/ets-org/pdfs/gre/gre-guide-table-1a.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[2]

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Selected rows of Table 1B, plotted. Each point is the ETS value for that scaled score. Source: ETS, GRE General Test Interpretive Data, Tables 1A, 1B and 1C (tested July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025), https://www.ets.org/content/dam/ets-org/pdfs/gre/gre-guide-table-1a.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[2]

Three things the table shows

- **Verbal and Quant percentiles are not interchangeable.** At every scaled score in the table, more test takers fall below that score on Verbal Reasoning than on Quantitative Reasoning. A 160 is at 82% on Verbal Reasoning and 50% on Quantitative Reasoning. A 165 is at 95% and 67%. Even the maximum score of 170 on Quantitative Reasoning has 89% of test takers below it, which implies that about 11% of test takers scored 170 (our arithmetic)[2].
- **In the middle of the scale, one point moves the percentile a lot.** On Verbal Reasoning, moving from 150 to 155 takes the percentage scoring lower from 39% to 64%[2].
- **Analytical Writing is coarse.** A 4.0 has 63% of test takers below it and a 4.5 has 85%, so a single half-point step covers a wide band of test takers[2].

Percentile ranks are not fixed. ETS explains that they "may change over time because they are always based on the population of test takers who took the test within a given three-year period"[4]. A percentile you saw quoted a few years ago may no longer match the current table. ETS also tells programs not to use percentile ranks to compare applicants across different tests, such as the GRE with the GMAT or the LSAT[9].

The three measures overlap only partly. ETS reports a correlation of .44 between Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores, .52 between Verbal Reasoning and Analytical Writing, and .08 between Quantitative Reasoning and Analytical Writing[2].

6. Applicants aiming for an MBA

ETS publishes a separate set of interpretive tables for test takers who named an MBA as their degree objective. The version available on the ETS site when we accessed it covers people who tested between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2023, so it is older than the main tables and predates the shorter test. Read it as dated[10].

In that group, 34,765 people had a Verbal Reasoning score (mean 153.57) and 34,788 had a Quantitative Reasoning score (mean 155.59). The mean Analytical Writing score was 3.86[10]. The more recent Snapshot gives means for the 12,044 test takers with an MBA objective in 2024-25: 154.8 on Verbal Reasoning, 155.9 on Quantitative Reasoning and 3.9 on Analytical Writing[1].

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SCALED SCORE	VERBAL: MBA ASPIRANTS	VERBAL: ALL TEST TAKERS	QUANT: MBA ASPIRANTS	QUANT: ALL TEST TAKERS
170	99%	99%	96%	89%
165	92%	95%	82%	67%
160	74%	82%	63%	50%
155	51%	64%	43%	37%
150	29%	39%	25%	23%
145	14%	21%	12%	12%

Percent of test takers scoring lower than selected scaled scores. MBA aspirants: tested July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2023. All test takers: tested July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2025. The two columns cover different periods and are shown side by side for orientation only. Source: ETS, GRE General Test Interpretive Data for MBA Aspirants, Tables 1A, 1B and 1C (tested July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2023), https://www.ets.org/content/dam/ets-org/pdfs/gre/2024-25-table-1A-1B-1C-MBA-Only.pdf; ETS, GRE General Test Interpretive Data, Tables 1A, 1B and 1C (tested July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025), https://www.ets.org/content/dam/ets-org/pdfs/gre/gre-guide-table-1a.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[10,2]

Compared with all test takers, the MBA group has a higher Verbal Reasoning mean and a lower Quantitative Reasoning mean. As a result, the same Quantitative Reasoning score ranks higher within the MBA group than within the full population: a 165 had 82% of MBA aspirants below it, against 67% of all test takers in the later period[10,2]. Neither figure tells you what a particular business school expects. Section 9 explains where to look for that.

7. How precise a score is

No test measures perfectly, and ETS publishes how much error to expect. Reliability indicates how far test takers would keep the same relative standing if they took the test more than once. The standard error of measurement (SEM) is an index of the variation in scores to be expected from measurement error[3].

MEASURE	RELIABILITY ESTIMATE	SEM OF INDIVIDUAL SCORES	SEM OF SCORE DIFFERENCES
Verbal Reasoning	0.88	3.17	4.48
Quantitative Reasoning	0.94	2.56	3.62
Analytical Writing	0.77	0.40	0.57

Reliability estimates and standard errors of measurement for the GRE General Test (Table 4A). SEM values are in scaled score points. Source: ETS, GRE Guide to the Use of Scores, Reliability and Standard Error of Measurement (Tables 4A and 4B), https://www.ets.org/content/dam/ets-org/pdfs/gre/gre-reliability-standard-error-measurement.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[3]

What the SEM means for one score

The Guide to the Use of Scores gives a worked example. For a test taker with a Quantitative Reasoning score of 153, ETS says a score user can be 68% confident that the true score lies between 150 and 155, and 95% confident that it lies between 148 and 158[4]. In general, about 95 percent of test takers obtain scores within two standard errors of their true scores[3].

What it means for two scores

Comparing two people, or two attempts by the same person, involves the error in both scores. ETS provides a separate index for this, the SEM of score differences, and instructs users to multiply it by 2:

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differences larger than the result are likely to reflect real differences in ability at about a 95 percent confidence level[3]. Applying that instruction to Table 4A gives 8.96 points for Verbal Reasoning, 7.24 points for Quantitative Reasoning and 1.14 points for Analytical Writing (our arithmetic). A gap of two or three points between two Verbal Reasoning or Quantitative Reasoning scores is therefore well inside the range that measurement error alone can produce.

Analytical Writing has the lowest reliability estimate of the three measures, 0.77. ETS notes that the two ratings given to an essay agree about 97 percent of the time and differ by one score point about 2 percent of the time[3].

8. How ETS says scores should be used

ETS describes the tests as having been "created over 70 years ago" to give programs a common measure for applicants from different backgrounds[4]. Its guidelines for programs are consistent across the Snapshot, the Guide to the Use of Scores and its short guidance for admissions staff. The main points, in the words of ETS:

- **Use several sources of information.** "No single test or source of information can provide all of the information that a decision maker would like to know about an applicant."[1]
- **Do not use a minimum score on its own.** Using a minimum GRE score as the only criterion for admission or for a fellowship "is not good practice because it overinflates the role of one measure" of an applicant's value over others[1]. The short ETS guidance for admissions staff puts it this way: "Using a cut score might cause you to lose out on an applicant who would otherwise be a great asset to your program."[9]
- **Read the three measures separately.** "Consider Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing scores as three separate and independent measures."[1]
- **Allow for measurement error.** "Interpret GRE scores carefully because, like all tests, they are not exact measures."[1]
- **Publish ranges, not averages.** ETS warns programs that reporting an average score may cause an applicant to self-select out of applying, and says it "strongly urges" programs to report scores in ranges, such as the middle 50 percent of admitted applicants[4].

These are recommendations to programs. Each program decides how it weighs scores, and practice varies. The guidance is still useful to applicants, because it explains why many programs publish a range of scores, why a published average is not a threshold, and why a strong score on one measure does not stand in for another.

What the ETS data cannot tell you

- **Whether you will be admitted.** None of these documents reports admission outcomes. They describe test takers, not admitted or enrolled students.
- **What a given program expects.** ETS does not publish program-level score expectations in these documents. Only the program can say what it looks for.
- **Why volumes changed.** The Snapshot reports counts and does not explain them.
- **How you will score.** Group averages by age, field or citizenship describe groups. They are not predictions for individuals.

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9. Using this data as a test taker

The points below are Score Architect's reading of the ETS material. They are suggestions for how to use published data, not predictions and not ETS advice.

- **Use the current percentile table.** Percentile ranks are recalculated on a three-year window[4]. When you look up what a score means, use the table in force now, on the ETS site, and check its date range.
- **Compare like with like.** The headline percentile compares you with everyone who took the test. If you want to know how you compare with people heading for your field, Table 3A gives the score distribution for each intended field[6].
- **Look at each measure on its own terms.** A 160 sits at very different points on the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scales[2]. Programs are asked to read the measures separately[1], so a combined total hides information that programs are advised to look at.
- **Do not over-read small differences.** With SEMs of 3.17 and 2.56 points[3], a one-point or two-point change between two attempts, or between you and a published figure, may be measurement error.
- **Get program expectations from the program.** If a program publishes a score range for its admitted or enrolled students, that range, read alongside its other criteria, is the relevant reference. This report does not list any, and neither should any third-party list be treated as a requirement.
- **Check the test facts at the source.** Format, timing and scoring rules are set by ETS and can change. The ETS pages listed under Sources are the reference.

Sources

Every source below was retrieved for this report and was last accessed on 13 November 2026. Numbers in the text refer to this list. Figures are quoted as published; where a source rounds, we keep its rounding. In quotations, long dashes in the original are shown as hyphens.

1. ETS, A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test, July 2020 to June 2025. https://www.ets.org/pdfs/gre/snapshot.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.

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4. ETS, GRE Guide to the Use of Scores, 2026-27. https://www.ets.org/content/dam/ets-org/pdfs/gre/gre-guide-to-the-use-of-scores.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.

5. ETS, GRE score interpretation resources for score users (web page). https://www.ets.org/gre/score-users/scores/interpret-scores.html. Accessed 13 November 2026.

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7. ETS, GRE General Test structure (web page). https://www.ets.org/gre/test-takers/general-test/prepare/test-structure.html. Accessed 13 November 2026.

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9. ETS, Best Practices for Admissions with GRE Scores (infographic). https://www.ets.org/content/dam/ets-org/pdfs/gre/gre-holistic-admissions-infographic.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.

10. ETS, GRE General Test Interpretive Data for MBA Aspirants, Tables 1A, 1B and 1C (tested July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2023). https://www.ets.org/content/dam/ets-org/pdfs/gre/2024-25-table-1A-1B-1C-MBA-Only.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.

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