

Preparing for GRE Analytical Writing

..... a practical handout

What is analytical writing?

The GRE is a college admission test that measures your readiness for graduate school. Similar to the SAT, the GRE is organized into three sections: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing. Some graduate programs do not require the GRE to apply, so do some research on your desired program before signing up.

The GRE analyzes your ability to:

- **Express complex ideas clearly and effectively**
- **Defend a position and develop an argument**
- **Support ideas with strong evidence**
- **Understand claims and evidence**
- **Keep up a well-focused, coherent discussion**
- **Show your ability to use standard written English**

These are also the skills that are recommended for graduate school. After all, graduate school is a walk in the park—Jurassic Park.

Test Structure

There are two parts of the Analytical Writing section:

- **Analyze an Issue**
- **Analyze an Argument**

You are given 30 minutes *per prompt* to organize, write, and proofread your essay. The test is on the computer, but you will not have access to Spellcheck.

Due to the time limit, you should develop a pacing strategy to help organize your time and produce well-written essays. Kaplan's (2014) recommended pacing strategy is as follows:

<i>Step 1</i>	Take the issue/argument apart	2 minutes
<i>Step 2</i>	Select your main points	4 minutes
<i>Step 3</i>	Organize your thoughts	2 minutes
<i>Step 4</i>	Write your essay	20 minutes
<i>Step 5</i>	Proofread	2 minutes

Analyze an Issue

The "Analyze an Issue" task tests your ability to think critically about a topic of general interest and to clearly express your thoughts in writing.

Your essay should include:

1. *A compelling case for your own position on the issue*
2. *All points of view outlined by the directions*
3. *Evidence to support your case*
 - a. *Personal experiences*
 - b. *Examples from things you have read or seen, or hypotheticals*

Prompt Structure:

1. An issue prompt will always begin with a statement. Sometimes it will present one or two points of view. It is up to you to pick a side and defend it.

Example:

“Educational institutions have a responsibility to dissuade students from pursuing fields of study in which they are unlikely to succeed.”

2. The second part of the prompt will tell you specific directions for how to approach your essay.

Example:

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim. In developing and supporting your position, be sure to address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position.

The readers scoring your essay are not looking for a “right” answer. They are focused on how well you share your ideas and defend your position. Your evidence should be specific and apply to the issue prompt. If your evidence requires extra explanation to understand its importance to your position, your evidence might be too weak.

Analyze an Argument

The argument essay asks you to evaluate the logic behind the argument presented by another writer. **You are not expected to agree or disagree with the author.**

Your essay should include:

1. *A discussion of the author’s case by critically examining their line of reasoning and their use of evidence.*
2. *Evidence to support your case*
 - a. *Personal experiences*
 - b. *Examples from things you have read or seen, or hypotheticals*

Prompt Structure:

1. The argument essay prompt will always begin with a passage establishing the author's argument or position.
 - **Every argument presented on the test will be flawed in some way.**

Example:

The following is a recommendation from the Board of Directors of Monarch Books.

"We recommend that Monarch Books open a café in its store. Monarch, having been in business at the same location for more than twenty years, has a large customer base because it is known for its wide selection of books on all subjects. Clearly, opening the café would attract more customers. Space could be made for the café by discontinuing the children's book section, which will probably become less popular given that the most recent national census indicated a significant decline in the percentage of the population under age ten. Opening a café will allow Monarch to attract more customers and better compete with Regal Books, which recently opened its own café."

2. The second part of the prompt will tell you specific directions for how to approach the essay.
 - Use the argument and its evaluation of the evidence to make your case.
 - Explain how a different approach or more information would help make the argument better or worse.

Example:

Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be answered in order to decide whether the recommendation is likely to have the predicted result. Be sure to explain how the answers to these questions would help to evaluate the recommendation.

The readers scoring your essay are not looking for a "right" answer. They are focused on how well you understand the author's claims, demonstrate critical thinking, and articulate your ideas. **Every argument prompt on the test will be flawed in some way.** It is up to you to point out those flaws. You might not agree with the argument, but you are not supposed to take a side.

Advice from a GRE Veteran

- **Get a good night's sleep!**
 - Anxiety might try to keep you from getting enough rest, so go to bed early. Drink some Sleepytime tea, watch a TV show, or read a book—anything that will help you relax.
- **Don't cram the night before**
 - It might be helpful to look over your notes the morning of your test but staying up and cramming the night before are not good ideas.
- **Know which graduate programs you want to apply to**
 - Hopefully you have some idea about which colleges you are interested in attending. Once you have seen your scores, you have the option to send them to the colleges of your choice.
- **Bring a snack and a water bottle**
 - There is one ten-minute break after the third section and one-minute breaks in between each section. You can eat a snack, drink water, and use the bathroom. However, you cannot use your phone during these breaks.
- **Think positive thoughts!!**

*Visit ets.org/gre for more information on registering and test preparation

References

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