

*Kindle edition*

# Business School Application Guide



**gmatclub**

<http://gmatclub.com>

**Strategies that Work**

# **The GMAT Club Guide to the Business School Application**

**A GUIDE TO STUFF AND OTHER THINGS**

by Rhyme

edited by Av, the GMAT Club MBA Section Director

and by bb, the GMAT Club Founder

© January 2011

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rhyme, a legend at GMAT Club, has been of a tremendous help to many applicants. Having gone through the rigorous application process in 2007 and graduated from the Chicago Booth program in 2009, he has shared his wisdom about the school along the entire way. With more than 5,000 posts and thanked almost 1,000 times by many members, his iconic presence on the GMAT club forums has been invaluable to this community. As you are about to see from this guide, the man is a legend, and I am truly honored to have met him in person. (On the right, Rhyme's profile at publication date)


rhyme

---

offline

GMAT Club Legend

○○○○○○○



**Joined:** Wed Apr 05, 2006  
**Posts:** 5749  
**Location:** Washington, DC  
**Concentration:** Finance, Entrepreneurship, Strategic Management, Managerial and Organizational Behavior  
**Schools:** 2009 Booth FT Graduate, Highest Honors, Top 5% of class  
**Affiliations:** HHonors Diamond, BGS Honor Society  
**Followers:** 68  
**Kudos (?)**: 980 (2), given: 5

Truly Yours,

BB, Founder of GMAT Club

## FOREWORD

---

First of all, I would like to welcome you to GMAT Club, the largest MBA community of Business School applicants, current business school students, and alumni. GMAT Club is regularly visited by 180,000 unique monthly visitors who generate close to 3,000,000 page views. We are not an admissions consulting company nor do we provide any admissions related services. However, we do provide things that you won't find anywhere else and best of all – they are all free!

- GMAT Club is an **information resource** and whether you are just starting your journey or about to apply, I guarantee that you will find a wealth of information here to help you along in your business school research and application process.
- GMAT Club is a **support network** that enables you to connect with people who have gone or are currently going through the same process. Applying to MBA programs is a very difficult and stressful process but together we have a greater chance to get the most out of it (and also have a greater chance to remain sane by the end).
- GMAT Club is a **community well**. You are welcome to draw knowledge from it whenever you need it, but the well stays full through those who contribute back.

Again Truly Yours,

BB, Founder of GMAT Club

## GMAT CLUB HISTORY (AN UNTOLD STORY)

---

GMAT Club has very humble origins – it was not ceded with VC money or started by a large publishing conglomerate – it was started by one person looking to help others on what often is a lonely journey.

On Feb 12, 2002, I walked out of a Pearson Test center holding a GMAT score print out that read 750 (q49, v42). I kept re-reading this 3-line document over and over. 99<sup>th</sup> percentile was not a score I expected. Looking back, it probably makes sense - I spent 3.5 months of my life buried in books without any breaks or weekends studying math, grammar, vocabulary, reading fiction books and taking tests. I literally did very little except work and study for the GMAT (I did sleep and eat from time to time). I even rescheduled my office hours so that I could study early in the morning when my mind was still fresh. Now, after all the effort and having achieved the highest ranking of 99<sup>th</sup> percentile, how was I just supposed to throw away all that knowledge, notes, and time I invested? What else could I do? (Remember, this is early 2002 – there was no Blogs or Google Ads.) That's when the idea was born.

However, the concept was brought to life during a hard period of my life. Having relocated from Eastern Europe, I was a first year MBA student in Los Angeles, CA (talk about culture shock). I was in a new place, with no friends, and very little money to help me fit into the lifestyle. In addition, the first semester was not challenging and I was rethinking the whole MBA plan and my school selection. It was depressing or as Dickens put it - "It was the worst of times and it was the best of times." GMAT Club opened its doors in December '02. I literally cobbled it together during my winter break with the purpose of sharing my MBA experience and helping people take advantage of both my mistakes and successes. Most of all, I also wanted to encourage others to share their experiences. From the beginning it was designed with the motto we have today: "Contributing to Each Other's Learning"

It turned out to be the challenge and the connection I needed. GMAT Club has given me an opportunity to meet many fantastic and brilliant people – the business elite of the world economy. A few months after our launch, GMAC found the site and wrote a very nice article ([which you can find here](#)), which has helped. However, the website would not get anywhere without the countless contributors and members who were and are truly amazing (you know who you are) and have invested years of their time to make GMAT Club what it is today. The power and value of GMAT Club is in its members and I encourage you to jump in – to take and to give.

As for me, 8 years later, I am spending my time between GMAT Club, a full time job, and my 2 year old son (and his mother who to my surprise is tolerating me). Sometimes travel gets a bit rough (I fly 100,000+ miles per year), but I am still actively involved in the community. The best way to contact me is through the PM on GMAT Club.

Good Luck and I look forward to seeing you at GMAT Club,

BB

GMAT Club Founder



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR .....	1
FOREWORD .....	2
GMAT CLUB HISTORY (AN UNTOLD STORY) .....	3
IN RHYME’S OWN WORDS - INTRODUCTION .....	8
<b>PART I: THE GMAT .....</b>	<b>9</b>
HEY, WHAT GIVES! THE AVERAGE SCORES AT SCHOOLS JUST KEEP INCREASING EVERY YEAR! WHAT’S GOING ON? .....	10
WHAT GMAT SCORE DO I NEED TO GET INTO SCHOOL X? .....	12
I’VE HEARD THAT QUANT MATTERS MORE THAN VERBAL, IS THIS TRUE? .....	15
IS A 40Q/40V SPLIT OR AN 80TH PERCENTILE MINIMUM (IN BOTH SECTIONS) A MUST FOR TOP SCHOOLS? .....	16
I’VE HEARD THE FIRST TEN QUESTIONS MATTER MORE THAN THE OTHERS, TRUE? .....	17
WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON’T FINISH A SECTION OF THE GMAT? .....	18
CAN I SKIP THE AWA OR JUST WRITE GIBBERISH? .....	19
WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO ACE THE AWA? .....	20
HOW MANY TIMES CAN I TAKE THE GMAT BEFORE I’VE OVERDONE IT? .....	28
SHOULD I RETAKE THE GMAT? .....	28
STUDYING TIPS .....	30
HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO PREPARE? .....	30
OK, I’M NEW TO THIS WHOLE GMAT THING. HOW SHOULD I PREPARE? .....	31
THIS LOOKS LIKE AN EXPENSIVE ENDEAVOR. HOW MUCH IS THIS GMAT AND APPLICATION BUSINESS GOING TO RUN ME? .....	33
<b>PART II: PRE-APPLICATION RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>34</b>
UNDERGRADUATE GPA .....	35
I HAVE A LOW UNDERGRADUATE GPA, HOW DO I EXPLAIN IT? .....	35
I HAVE A GOOD GPA BUT I GOT A BAD GRADE IN ONE CLASS, DO I TALK ABOUT IT? .....	37
I HAVE A STRONG GRADUATE GPA BUT A WEAK UNDERGRADUATE GPA, WHAT DO I DO? .....	37
MY UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOL ISN’T KNOWN FOR GOOD ACADEMICS, BUT I HAVE A 4.0 AM I OK? / MY UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOL GRADES REALLY HARD, I HAVE A 3.0, BUT THAT’S REALLY GOOD FOR MY SCHOOL, AM I OK? .....	38
I WANT TO BUILD AN ALTERNATIVE TRANSCRIPT, WHAT DO I DO? .....	39
WORK EXPERIENCE AND CAREER .....	41
I COME FROM A NON-TRADITIONAL BACKGROUND, AM I SCREWED OR I COME FROM A TRADITIONAL BACKGROUND, I’M NOT UNIQUE, AM I SCREWED? .....	41
I ONLY HAVE A FEW MONTHS OF WORK EXPERIENCE (OR NONE AT ALL), SHOULD I APPLY? .....	42
I HAVE A GAP IN EMPLOYMENT, NOW WHAT? .....	43
I HEARD THAT THERE ARE POST-MBA TARGET QUOTAS – E.G. ONLY 20% OF THOSE ADMITTED CAN WANT TO GO INTO BANKING, IS THIS TRUE? .....	45
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND CERTIFICATIONS .....	46
MY EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ARE, IN THE PARLANCE OF ECONOMICS, “SUB-OPTIMAL”, DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS FOR ME? .....	46
I HAVE A CPA OR CFA OR OTHER DESIGNATION, DOES THAT HELP? .....	48
SCHOOL SELECTION AND RESEARCH .....	49

HOW DO I PICK WHICH SCHOOLS TO APPLY TO? .....	49
HOW MANY SCHOOLS CAN YOU APPLY TO PER ROUND? .....	53
HOW MANY SCHOOLS SHOULD I APPLY TO? .....	53
HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO WRITE A SOLID SET OF ESSAYS? .....	55
CAN I WORK ON SEVERAL APPLICATIONS AT ONCE? .....	56
SHOULD I APPLY IN R1 / R2 / R3? .....	57
<i>Visiting Schools</i> .....	59
DOES IT MATTER IF I VISIT A SCHOOL? .....	59
I'M VISITING A CAMPUS, WHAT DO I WEAR? .....	60
I'M VISITING A CAMPUS, WHAT DO I DO? .....	60
I'VE ALREADY VISITED A SCHOOL, DOES VISITING TWICE HELP? .....	61
I PLAN ON GOING TO CAMPUS AND ASKING TO TALK TO AN ADMISSIONS DIRECTOR ABOUT MY APPLICATION. HOW SUCCESSFUL WILL I BE? ..	62
HOW DO I FIND AND CONTACT CURRENT STUDENTS? .....	63
<i>Part-time MBA Questions</i> .....	65
PART TIME VS FULL TIME, A DIFFICULT DECISION .....	65
I'VE HEARD PART TIME PROGRAMS ARE EASIER TO GET INTO, IS THAT TRUE? .....	67
<b>PART III: THE APPLICATION</b> .....	<b>68</b>
ESSAYS .....	69
WHAT ARE THE BEST BOOKS FOR ESSAY WRITING? .....	69
HOW SOON CAN I START WRITING MY ESSAYS? .....	70
CAN I GO OVER THE WORD LIMIT ON ESSAYS? .....	70
SHOULD I MENTION SPECIFIC CLASSES, PROFESSORS OR STUDENTS IN MY ESSAYS? .....	71
IS THE OPTIONAL ESSAY TRULY OPTIONAL? .....	72
I WAS EXPELLED, PLACED ON PROBATION, SUSPENDED OR OTHERWISE HAD SOME BLACK MARK ON MY UNDERGRAD DAYS, DO I SAY ANYTHING?	
.....	73
I MADE A MISTAKE ON MY APPLICATION, DO I CONTACT THE SCHOOL? .....	74
SHOULD I INCLUDE MY BONUS IN MY SALARY ON THE FORM? .....	75
CAN I RE-USE ESSAYS? .....	75
RESUME .....	76
MUST MY RESUME BE 1 PAGE? .....	76
HOW SHOULD MY RESUME BE FORMATTED? .....	76
WHERE CAN I FIND QUALITY SAMPLE RESUMES? .....	77
RECOMMENDATIONS .....	79
WHEN SHOULD I ASK MY RECOMMENDERS TO WRITE A LETTER? .....	79
HOW DO I PREPARE MY RECOMMENDERS? .....	80
WHO SHOULD WRITE MY RECOMMENDATIONS? .....	81
WHAT SHOULD I GET MY RECOMMENDER AS A GIFT? .....	84
MY RECOMMENDER ASKED ME TO WRITE MY OWN LETTER, WHAT DO I DO? .....	84
MY RECOMMENDER CLAIMS HE NEEDS TO ASK HR IF HE CAN WRITE A RECOMMENDATION, IS HE BEING TRUTHFUL? .....	85
SHOULD I WAIVE THE RIGHT TO SEE MY LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION? .....	85
MY RECOMMENDATIONS ARE LATE, WHAT DO I DO? .....	86
<b>PART IV: THE INTERVIEW</b> .....	<b>87</b>



FAQ .....	88
WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW ALL ABOUT? .....	88
I SUBMITTED MY APPLICATION ON DATE X, BUT SOMEONE GOT THE INTERVIEW ON DATE Y, AND THEY SUBMITTED AFTER I DID. THEREFORE, I AM WAITLISTED / DINGED / OTHERWISE DOOMED IN SOME WAY. ....	93
DOES IT MATTER IF MY INTERVIEW IS ON CAMPUS OR WITH AN ALUMNUS?.....	95
I DON'T WORK IN A JOB WHERE SUITS ARE THE NORM, I NEED A SUIT FOR AN INTERVIEW, WHAT DO I BUY? .....	97
I BOMBED MY INTERVIEW, AM I DEAD? .....	98
PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW .....	100
WHAT ARE SOME COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS?.....	100
WHAT SHOULD I ASK MY INTERVIEWER?.....	103
WHAT IF I'M ASKED WHERE ELSE I'M APPLYING? .....	104
AFTER THE INTERVIEW .....	105
SHOULD I SEND THANK YOU NOTES TO MY INTERVIEWER? .....	105
MY INTERVIEW DIDN'T GO SO WELL, CAN I TRY TO "FIX" THIS IN A THANK YOU NOTE TO THE INTERVIEWER, MAYBE CLARIFYING A POINT OR APOLOGIZING FOR MY POOR EYE CONTACT? .....	107
I SENT MY INTERVIEWER A THANK YOU NOTE, BUT HE OR SHE DIDN'T REPLY. AM I DOOMED? .....	107
MY INTERVIEW DID REPLY TO MY THANK YOU! THIS IS THE COOLEST THING SINCE SLICED BREAD! DO I REPLY BACK? .....	107
MY INTERVIEWER WAS LATE, RUDE, OBNOXIOUS, SEXIST, RACIST, FOUL MOUTHED, TRIED TO HIT ON ME, YELLED AT ME, HUNG OFFENSIVE PHOTOS ON HIS WALL, FORCED ME TO BUY A HEALTH INSURANCE POLICY FROM HIS FIRM AND MADE ME CRY. DO I TELL THE SCHOOL? .....	108
<b>PART V: YOU'RE IN! NOW WHAT?.....</b>	<b>110</b>
I'VE GOT \$X FROM SCHOOL A, HOW DO I TELL SCHOOL B? .....	111
WHAT GOES INTO A BACKGROUND CHECK? .....	112
CAN I GET A PRE-MBA INTERNSHIP? .....	114
HOW DO I CALCULATE MY ROI FOR GOING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?.....	115
<b>SOME THOUGHTS BY NINK, A SECOND YEAR STUDENT AT YALE SOM.....</b>	<b>116</b>
SHOULD YOU STOP WORKING TO YOUR BEST ABILITIES AT WORK? SHOULD YOU BURN THE BRIDGE AND FIRE AWAY THAT EMAIL TO THE ENTIRE COMPANY (EXPLAINING HOW MUCH THEY SUCK?) .....	116
SHOULD YOU QUIT YOUR JOB EARLY AND EITHER TAKE A VACATION OR DO SOMETHING ELSE BEFORE SCHOOL? .....	116
SHOULD YOU GET AN EARLY START BY READING VARIOUS TEXTBOOKS, ETC? .....	116
WHAT ABOUT MY CURRENT BOY/GIRL FRIEND OR SIGNIFICANT OTHER? .....	117
FINALLY - MANAGE YOUR FUTURE EXPECTATIONS NOW WHAT CAN MBA DO FOR YOU?.....	118
FINAL WORDS OF WISDOM:.....	119

## IN RHYME'S OWN WORDS - INTRODUCTION

---

This was largely conceived in light of what I perceived as a gap in the admissions literature. Those of you who have read Paul Bodine or Richard Montauk's excellent books (and if you haven't, I highly recommend them both) may have felt much like how I did when I first read them: a little discouraged. The books profile candidates that are so clearly extraordinary that it nearly seems impossible for them not to be admitted to top programs. Not all of us have climbed mountains in Nepal, spent three years as assistant to a CEO, completed two international rotations with Goldman Sachs, did a quick stint at Bain and then, sometime in-between all that, joined the peace corps, saved a few dolphins from captivity, cured cancer, invented perpetual motion and learned to skydive. What about everyone else in the world – those who had *reasonable* careers, some stellar moments, a few missteps and a couple of lucky or unlucky breaks? Where do the *normal* people turn to?

In my search for answers I stumbled on various websites, many of which seemed filled with little more than internet trolls, spreading *tremendous* amounts of misinformation. I eventually joined gmatclub.com, which over the course of the last four years, has grown into a tremendous resource for aspiring MBAs. Over that period, hundreds of individuals from across the globe have contributed to a wonderful community resource: providing transcripts of admissions conversations, one-on-one advice, sharing their essay strategies, reviewing each other's work, etc. This book is a collection of those efforts – much of what is in here isn't mine – and credit really goes to the thousands that have participated in the community over the years. It is my hope this collection will provide clarity in what is all too often a maddening process.

# PART I: The GMAT

## HEY, WHAT GIVES! THE AVERAGE SCORES AT SCHOOLS JUST KEEP INCREASING EVERY YEAR! WHAT'S GOING ON?

---

Two reasons: The first relates to rankings and perceived exclusivity. Schools know that average GMAT score plays a meaningful role in the final rankings published by BusinessWeek and others - and that candidates (and recruiters) also pay attention to rankings. Candidates in particular seem to place ungodly weights on ranking results. It should come as no surprise then that the top 10 schools have all seen average GMAT scores increase over the years. Indeed, some schools are quite “open” about intentionally attempting to increase their average GMAT score.

For instance, one candidate I remember from 2006 applied to a school (which shall remain nameless) for their two year program. He was contacted before the decision date and asked if he would be interested in their accelerated 1-year program, given his “extraordinary background and strong set of skills”. He thanked the school and politely explained his preference for a traditional two year program. He fully expected that if the school thought him such a strong candidate so as to personally invite him to apply for an *accelerated* 1-year MBA, surely he must be good enough for a *slower* two year program. Imagine his surprise when he was waitlisted. Further conversations with the school offered him two choices – immediate admission to their one year program (with a nice scholarship to boot) or, if he retook the GMAT and scored above a certain level, admission to the two year program. The school openly explained to him that they were trying to increase their average for the purposes of rankings. It doesn't get much more blunt than that! In a truly perverse mind game, one might even argue your odds of admission with a low GMAT score are *better* at a top 5 school than at a top 10 school which might be (by comparison) hyper sensitive to their average.

Similarly, the (perceived) fat-cat salaries of MBAs have drawn a number of new applicants – particularly those interested in US universities. Consider this: the number of score reports sent to US schools by examinees that tested in India increased 161% from 2004 to 2008. Examinees in China: A 256% increase over the same period. Of course, recessions also seem to play with graduate applications. LSAT examinations rose by 20% in October 2009 compared to October 2008 – setting an all-time high. GRE exams rose 13% in 2009, also setting another record. Cornell University Law School reported a 44% increase in applications. The same thing happened in 2002 – Wharton, for instance, hired

an additional 15 people that year just to read applications. In fact, GMAT test taking has spiked with each recession since 1980.

All this competition leads to higher average scores. For example, at Stern, the average GMAT score in the early 90s was around 610. Now, it's pushing past 700. That's making the percentiles tougher to hit too – for example, a 750 is now the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile when just a few years ago it was the 99<sup>th</sup>.

People routinely claim that “this year” is worse than “last year”, no matter what year we are talking about. There's *some* truth to that – but not entirely. In 2009 for instance, 36% of schools surveyed by GMAC reported flat or declining application volume for their full time 2 year programs. Part time programs were split almost evenly – 58% reporting flat or decreased volume. Nevertheless, overall, two year programs reported an average of a 21% increase in the number of applications. All of this should be taken with a grain of salt – GMAC's data set includes a number of schools that are likely not on the reader's radar. For example, the average acceptance rate according to GMAC's data set is 41%, so the set clearly includes a large number of “lower-ranked” programs as well.

## WHAT GMAT SCORE DO I NEED TO GET INTO SCHOOL X?

---

Well, that's the million dollar question, isn't it? How much does the GMAT matter? Is there really a magical cutoff? Let me start with some simple data from Kellogg's admission documents. In 2005, I noticed that Kellogg had published GMAT distributions for enrolled students, as well as the percentages of applicants in each section. For instance, Kellogg stated that 16% of their enrolled students were in the 750-800 GMAT range, while 11% of the applicants were in that range. By comparison, 9% of enrolled students had "Up to 640", although this represented 20% of the applicant pool. It dawned on me – if I know how many people applied by GMAT score and I know how many people attended, and I know, roughly, Kellogg's yield, can I tease out the odds of admission based on GMAT score?

Indeed you can. At the time, there were (according to the document) 652 students enrolled. If we know that those with less than a 640 made up 9% of that class, then, approximately 59 students in the class had this score. If then, you take Kellogg's historical yield – say 57% - and apply it to this figure, you can then surmise that there must have been approximately 103 individuals accepted. Kellogg also published the total number of applicants: 4449. Therefore, if we know that 20% of the applicant pool had less than a 640, then roughly 890 applicants with scores less than 640 applied. Of those 640, 103 were admitted and 59 accepted. We can now estimate the actual odds of admission by GMAT score. Extrapolating the above logic (and utilizing other data from Kellogg's documents), we find:

<=640: 12%

650-690: 23%

700-740: 31%

750-800: 37%

Not too shocking of course, but interesting nonetheless. Astute readers will note that this is, if anything, conservative, as it stands to reason that someone with a 600 GMAT is *more* likely to accept an offer from Kellogg than someone with a 780 GMAT – based on nothing more than the fact that the 780 GMAT individual is likely to have more admits than the individual who scores 600. If then, you believe the yield to be different across GMAT scores, the impact becomes even more markedly obvious.



Although the estimated yields below are essentially made up – they illustrate just how powerful the GMAT might be in the admissions process.

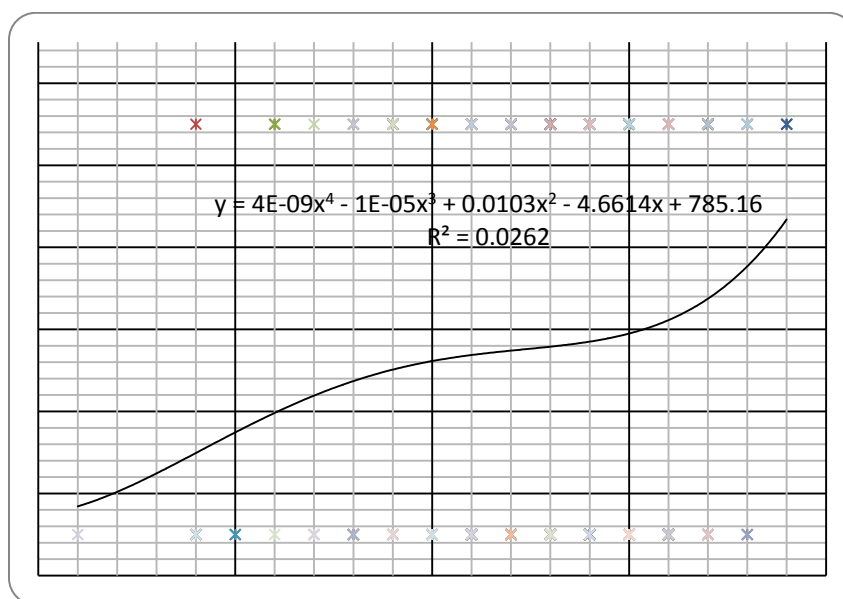
<= 640, assuming a yield of 90% equates to an admit rate of 7%

650-690, assuming a yield of 75% equates to an admit rate of 17%

700-740, assuming a yield of 50% equates to an admit rate of 33.5%

750-800, assuming a yield of 40% equates to an admit rate of 52%

There are various issues with this analysis, and it is by no means perfect, but it is at least *somewhat* indicative. Without walking through the entire data set here, I took another look the same question based on information from admissions411.com, this time looking at multiple schools in the top 10. Here's the upshot of that analysis:



The y-axis represents likelihood of admission as a percentage, the bottom axis GMAT score. Now, before you go reading too much into this graph and trying to pluck your own number off it, let me point out that the data set suffered from numerous problems. First, it's likely overstating the odds of admission (fewer people go back to the site to tell the world they weren't admitted than those who were), it's possible the data is reflecting more than just GMAT score (e.g. those who score highly are generally those who have been preparing for longer, and are therefore more likely to generate quality essays, have recommendations that

have been in the pipe etc.), the data is self-reported (there's some incentive to lie), etc. So why show it if it has all these problems? Whatever shortcomings the analysis had, I still think it's better than no analysis. Take it for what it is worth: directional, maybe a little interesting, and requiring a dose of salt.

The point is this: Yes, GMAT matters, sadly, no, there is no magical figure. Individuals who tell you that school X requires a score of Y, are, more often than not, wrong. In fact, they usually quote something around the mean, which, by definition, half the admitted population didn't score. The most often cited magic figure? 700 – but recall my prior point: if 700 is the mean at a school, then, *by definition*, 50% of the students scored below 700. Doesn't seem quite so magical now, does it?

If you find this answer disappointing, you are not alone. It would be nice to know that a score of X will gain you admission, but frankly, this just isn't true. So if we can't answer this question, can we answer the next most common? Should you retake the GMAT?

## I'VE HEARD THAT QUANT MATTERS MORE THAN VERBAL, IS THIS TRUE?

---

It depends a bit on what one means by “matters”. If the question is whether or not quant is more or less predictive of your expected performance in graduate school programs, the literature is mixed. Virtually any study conducted in the last twenty years agrees that undergraduate GPA and total GMAT score are predictive of overall MBA performance, but at least one study suggested that the verbal score, not a quant score, better differentiates high performers. (For the truly curious reader with lots of spare time, see Wright, R. and Palmer, J. (1997). Examining performance predictors for differentially successful MBA students. *College Student Journal*; Jun 97, Vol. 31 Issue 2, p 276-82.)

Odds are however, most people really mean to ask whether or not one is weighted more heavily in the application decision process. Although Admissions offices typically respond to such queries with poetic yarns about “holistic” approaches and “no cutoffs”, there’s at least *some* anecdotal evidence that there is such a bias. For instance, Sally Jaeger (Assistant Dean at Tuck) has publicly stated as much. If you google her name and a few key words, you’ll find various statements, but the clearest I think came from an interview she conducted in June of 2008 with EssayEdge. In it, she flatly states: *“We focus more on the quantitative side of the GMAT because our program, particularly during the first year, is extremely quantitative in nature.”*

There is however some truth to the other side of the coin as well – there are no “hard” cutoffs. By themselves GMAT scores just don’t tell enough of a story. A weak quant score can be mitigated by any number of other factors: A strong undergraduate performance in math intensive courses, a high mathematical job, a strong alternative transcript, etc. It is this combination that truly provides more of a picture of where a candidate falls.

The bottom line is that you should evaluate your GMAT score in conjunction with the rest of your application, because, quite simply, so will admissions.

## IS A 40Q/40V SPLIT OR AN 80TH PERCENTILE MINIMUM (IN BOTH SECTIONS) A MUST FOR TOP SCHOOLS?

---

Similar to the pseudo-truth that quant scores are more important than verbal, this claim tends to live on. Those of you who have had too many cups of coffee may have noticed that a 40Q/40V split *isn't* even – a 40Q is roughly 60<sup>th</sup> percentile while a 40V is closer to the 90<sup>th</sup>. Setting aside the fact that people who call this an even split are just flat out wrong, let's address the myth that there's some magical "balanced" score at the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile.

The short answer is that there is no such mythical "balanced score", but any particularly weak performances (<60%) in either of the sections are likely to invite some scrutiny. The importance of the "imbalance" is only meaningful in the context of the rest of an application. A weak verbal score is mitigated by strong essays, a quality interview, etc. Similarly, a weak math score is mitigated by alternative transcripts, undergraduate coursework, etc. Keep in mind that an imbalanced score doesn't mean a "bad" score – a 99<sup>th</sup> percentile in the verbal section and an 80<sup>th</sup> in the math will still combine to a 700+ score – while both the verbal and math raw scores are respectable.

In other words, focus not on the relative difference (the spread between the two areas) but rather on each section's individual performance.

## I'VE HEARD THE FIRST TEN QUESTIONS MATTER MORE THAN THE OTHERS, TRUE?

---

NO. This is a myth that needs to be eradicated. I don't know why it continues to thrive! I am not going to attempt to explain how adaptive exams work here – both because it's boring and because I'm not an adaptive exam designer or engineer. I will however, try to convince you that the ten-question rule is a myth.

First, please feel free to visit <http://echo.edres.org/scripts/cat/>. This site discusses, in mind-numbing, advil-popping detail, every aspect of how adaptive exams work. Those of you with the inclination and mathematical prowess will find everything you need there to fully convince yourself. Those of you without, I encourage you to visit the site and try the demo anyway – it will show you what happens behind the scenes as you take an adaptive test and may be enough to convince you. Second, GMAC themselves has indicated that this is a myth themselves! Finally, consider the logic behind the arguments that the first ten matter more. The argument usually goes something like this: *“If Bob and Mary both start with a 600, and Bob gets the first three right, then Bob will have a 650. If Mary gets the first three wrong she will have a 550. Now Mary has dug herself into a hole and she'll have to fight to get out – she needs to get six right in a row to get to 650! Bob just needs to keep cruising along getting one or two right and one or two wrong and he's done!”* The problems should be obvious. First, why would Mary be any less likely to get six right in a row than Bob would be to get six wrong? If anything, isn't Bob *more* likely to get six wrong simply because Bob is getting harder questions? Couldn't Mary get to 650 by also getting a few right and a few wrong? Doesn't the above argument essentially hinge on the idea that Bob is penalized less for wrong answers than Mary is, or that Mary somehow doesn't have enough 'time' to catch up? Finally, if you've read the webpage I linked, you'll realize that the only way Mary ends up being 'cheated' is if, somehow, over the next 30 odd questions, the computer can't figure out she's actually at a '650' level.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T FINISH A SECTION OF THE GMAT?

---

There's a version of this question that's a bit of a myth as well – “Leaving questions blank is better than getting them wrong”. That's not true. In fact, the opposite is the case - you get penalized *more* heavily for leaving it blank than getting it wrong.

Don't take my word for it – take GMAC's. In a 2007 presentation at the Test Prep Summit in NYC, they showed how combined percentile rankings changed based on the number of missed items. An individual who would have scored in the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile with zero unanswered questions drops to around the 55<sup>th</sup> percentile with just five questions left unanswered! (Each missed question is worth 3 percentile points of that section's score, not total GMAT score but that's still a considerable set back). In other words, even if you have to guess – do it and finish the test. Also, it is recommended that you pick a random answer on the last question while you are working on it so that in case you don't confirm it before the clock runs out, you at least “answered” the question, even if incorrectly.



## CAN I SKIP THE AWA OR JUST WRITE GIBBERISH?

---

For those unfamiliar with the AWA, it is the writing assessment portion at the beginning of the GMAT exam. As for skipping it: Please don't. Some people are tempted to do this in an effort to shorten the exam (and enter the subsequent portions) more relaxed, but the AWA is reported on your final exams sheets. Schools can see you've done this, and while the degree to which they might care is arguable, it certainly isn't a warm start. Some schools have also stated that they do read the AWA, while others have indicated they use it to compare writing samples with essays (e.g. if your essays are fabulous but you scored in the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile on verbal, they might take a look at your AWA). Just practice at home until you find yourself capable of concentrating for that long. As for writing junk, don't do that either. Yes, it is graded by computer, but it also graded by a human (the scores are then averaged, but if they differ too much, then a second human reads and the two human scores are averaged). Bottom line: Gibberish won't work.

GMAC publishes all of the AWA topics for their essays and you are welcome to [download and practice with a few here](#).

There is also an official tool (automated) from the GMAC that can help you evaluate your essay using the same methodology as it would on the real GMAT. See some of the [experiences with GMAT Write here](#).

## WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO ACE THE AWA?

---

The AWA section usually does not require much preparation. Almost everyone gets at least 4.0 but it is rather hard to get the full 6.0 score. Here is a guide to AWA 6.0 from Chineseburnt, one of the GMAT Club Members. His recommendation is to use a template and it has worked for thousands of test-takers. Chances are, it will work for you too! The full thread can be found here:

### Argument Essay Template

#### Introduction:

- The argument claims that ....(restate)
- Stated in this way the argument:
  - manipulates facts and conveys a distorted view of the situation
  - reveals examples of leap of faith, poor reasoning and ill-defined terminology
  - fails to mention several key factors, on the basis of which it could be evaluated
- The conclusion of the argument relies on assumptions for which there is no clear evidence. Hence, the argument is weak/unconvincing and has several flaws.

#### 1st Paragraph:

- First, the argument readily assumes that.....
- This statement is a stretch....
- For example,...
- Clearly,...
- The argument could have been much clearer if it explicitly stated that...

#### 2nd Paragraph:

- Second, the argument claims that....
- This is again a very weak and unsupported claim as the argument does not demonstrate any correlation between....and...
- To illustrate,...

- While,...
- However,...indeed....
- In fact, it is not at all clear...rather....
- If the argument had provided evidence that.....then the argument would have been a lot more convincing.

### **3rd Paragraph:**

- Finally,... (pose some questions for the argument).....Without convincing answers to these questions, one is left with the impression that the claim is more of a wishful thinking rather than substantive evidence.

### **Conclusion:**

- In conclusion, the argument is flawed for the above-mentioned reasons and is therefore unconvincing. It could be considerably strengthened if the author clearly mentioned all the relevant facts....
- In order to assess the merits of a certain situation/decision, it is essential to have full knowledge of all contributing factors. In this particular case....
- Without this information, the argument remains unsubstantiated and open to debate.

## **Issue Essay Template**

### **Introduction:**

- Many/some people think that....Others.....(restate)
- The issue is a controversial one but a closer examination reveals that....(take a position)...for several reasons.

### **1st Paragraph**

- One reason is that/for...
- For example,...
- Furthermore,...

- Clearly,...

### 2nd Paragraph

- Another reason is that/for...
- To illustrate,...
- As a result,...

### 3rd Paragraph

- Perhaps the best reason is (that)....
- Specifically,...
- Moreover/In addition....
- In fact,....
- Therefore,....

### Conclusion:

- In summary, while there are arguments to be made for both sides, it is clear that there are greater advantages to....(repeat the reasons).
- Certainly,.....outweigh.....
- Hence,....(re-affirm your position)

## Analysis of an Argument Essay Example:

### ESSAY QUESTION:

*The following appeared in the editorial section of a national news magazine:*

*"The rating system for electronic games is similar to the movie rating system in that it provides consumers with a quick reference so that they can determine if the subject matter and contents are appropriate. This electronic game rating system is not working because it is self regulated and the fines for violating the rating system are nominal. As a result an independent body should oversee the game industry and companies that knowingly violate the rating system should be prohibited from releasing a game for two years."*

*Discuss how well reasoned you find this argument. Point out flaws in the argument's logic and analyze the argument's underlying assumptions. In addition, evaluate how supporting evidence is used and what evidence might counter the argument's conclusion. You may also discuss what additional evidence could be used to strengthen the argument or what changes would make the argument more logically sound.*

### **YOUR RESPONSE:**

The argument claims that the electronic games rating system, although similar to the movie rating system, is not working because it is self regulated and violation fines are nominal. Hence, the gaming rating system should be overseen by an independent body. Stated in this way the argument fails to mention several key factors, on the basis of which it could be evaluated. The conclusion relies on assumptions, for which there is no clear evidence. Therefore, the argument is rather weak, unconvincing, and has several flaws.

First, the argument readily assumes that because the electronic game rating system is self regulated, it is not working well. This statement is a stretch and not substantiated in any way. There are numerous examples in other areas of business or commerce, where the entities are self regulated and rather successful. For instance, FIA, the Formula1 racing organization is self regulated. Yet, the sport is very popular and successful, drawing millions of spectators around the world each year. Tickets are rather expensive, races are shown on pay-per-view, and nearly all drivers are paid very well. Another example is the paralleled movie rating system that the argument mentions. The author fails to clarify whether it is working well, but it is clear that the movie rating system is pretty well received by people, who often base their decisions to go see a movie with kids or not on the movie rating. It has never been a case when someone would feel cheated by the movie rating and express disappointment afterwards. Since the movie rating system is also self regulated, it follows that this regulatory method is working pretty well and it is not obvious how it can be the reason for the poor electronic game rating system. The argument would have been much clearer if it explicitly gave examples of how the self regulatory system led to bad ratings and customer dissatisfaction.

Second, the argument claims that any violation fees for bad electronic game

ratings are nominal. It thus suggests that this is yet another reason for the rating system not working. This is again a very weak and unsupported claim as the argument does not demonstrate any correlation between the monetary amount of the fines and the quality of the electronic game rating system. In fact, the argument does not even draw a parallel with the mentioned movie rating system and its violation fines. If any such correlation had been shown for the movie rating system, which supposedly works well, then the author would have sounded a bit more convincing. In addition, if the argument provided evidence that low violation fines lead to electronic game manufacturers to ignore any regulations with respect to the game rating system, the argument could have been strengthened even further.

Finally, the argument concludes that an independent body should oversee the game industry and companies that violate the rating system, should be punished. From this statement again, it is not at all clear how an independent regulatory body can do a better job than a self regulated one. Without supporting evidence and examples from other businesses where independent regulatory bodies have done a great job, one is left with the impression that the claim is more of a wishful thinking rather than substantive evidence. As a result, this conclusion has no legs to stand on.

In summary, the argument is flawed and therefore unconvincing. It could be considerably strengthened if the author clearly mentioned all the relevant facts. In order to assess the merits of a certain situation, it is essential to have full knowledge of all contributing factors.

## Analysis of an Issue Essay Example:

### ESSAY QUESTION:

*“Poor health and high stress levels diminish the productivity of today’s office workers. In order to maximize profits, companies need to provide white-collar employees with free exercise facilities and free wellness classes.”*

*In your opinion, how accurate is the view expressed above? Use reasons and/or examples from your own experience, observations, or reading to develop your position.*



**YOUR RESPONSE:**

Some people think that productivity at work could be increased if workers are provided with free exercise facilities and wellness classes, as this will improve the workers health and diminish the level of stress in the office. Other people support the claim that people should manage their own health and stress level outside the work space. The issue is a controversial one but a closer examination reveals that companies that promote healthy living among their employees are indeed more productive.

One reason is that people often do not find the motivation or the energy to go to a wellness class and exercise outside of work. Most people are usually very tired by the end of the work day and have other family duties or priorities to worry about. For example, doing grocery shopping, cooking, picking up the kids from practice, etc. Therefore, it is very difficult for such people to make time for exercising and maintain healthy habits. As a result, the stress from a long day of work at the office gets carried over to the next day and the pattern repeats. Eventually, the health of those people worsens and their productivity on the job diminishes.

Another reason is that people often find it attractive to do what their friends or colleagues do. For instance, if five colleagues of a worker join a pilates class and are happy about it, they then tend to recommend it to the worker in question and she will eventually join the class. Contagious behavior such as this can be very easily achieved on the job if pilates classes are offered, because then the discovery of the opportunity and the motivation to join are easily found. Hence, exercising at work becomes a very comfortable activity easily fit into a schedule and promotes the health and happiness of the employees. They not only feel better health-wise after exercise, but also strengthen relationships with co-workers by doing activities together. In a way, this whole experience can be viewed as team building. Consequently, workers are more energized, alert and therefore productive in their jobs.

Perhaps the best reason is that by providing free exercise facilities and wellness classes companies improve their image and become attractive places to be at for future employees. Not only can such companies attract more viable candidates for new openings, but they can also retain longer the employees they already have. To illustrate this point, let us take Google for example. The company was recently ranked as the best one to work at. One of the main criteria for achieving this rank was the fact that the company takes very good care of its employees in terms of encouraging healthy living. There

are numerous sports facilities on the Google campus which people are encouraged to use. Those include gyms, swimming pools, volleyball courts, massage chairs, etc. Personal trainers are also available for free for anyone that needs them. There is also a health center facility on site. With that kind of environment it is difficult to not take advantage and live a healthy living, resulting in better productivity on the job.

In summary, while there are arguments to be made for both sides of the issue, it is clear that there are much greater advantages for companies to provide their workers with free health facilities and classes. Workers find it not only much easier to take advantage of such opportunities on site, but also are much more motivated to do so there. Participating in sports activities improves the workers' mood, desire to work hard, keeps them healthy, and creates a bond among workers. As a result, this translates to a better productivity of the workers and ultimately to maximized profits for the company.

**Final tips:**

- During the tutorial type in a few sentences in the mock essay window to get used to the keyboard.
- Again during the tutorial, jot down on your notebook the basic structure of your essays or the opening sentences in case you get too nervous and forget them when the clock starts ticking.
- Write as much as you can. Try to write at least 500 words per essay.
- Always have the e-rater in mind as your potential reviewer. Remember that the human rater will make every effort to grade just like the e-rater. In that sense, keep your structure and volume in mind over actual quality/content.
- Be careful of spelling mistakes. Double check words that you normally know you misspell (e.g. exercise). Try to finish 2-3 minutes before time is up so you can slowly re-read your essay for the purposes of spell checking. Do not reorganize/delete sentences/paragraphs with less than 2 min left.
- No matter how great you thought your essays went, try to stay humble and focused - remember this was just a warm-up and the real stuff hasn't started yet!

## Structural Words (should be all over the essays)

1. Supporting examples - for example, to illustrate, for instance, because, specifically
2. Additional support - furthermore, in addition, similarly, just as, also, as a result, moreover
3. Importance - surely, truly, undoubtedly, clearly, in fact, most importantly
4. Contrast - on the contrary, yet, despite, rather, instead, however, although, while
5. Decide against - one cannot deny that, it could be argued that, granted, admittedly
6. Concluding - therefore, in summary, consequently, hence, in conclusion, ultimately, in closing