

Having been involved in the GMAT test prep arena for quite some time, I have taught a variety of students who have different ways of thinking through scenarios. Just like there are many ways to build a house, there is not one correct way to solve a problem. What I have discovered is that those who are masters in engineering and finance are not necessarily the higher scoring candidates on the math sections of the GMAT.

Surprisingly, many liberal arts majors (particularly philosophy majors), those who adamantly claim that they hate math, are incredibly adept on the quantitative questions. Why? They think. They look for patterns. They use logic. They holistically evaluate a scenario. They do not necessarily think of a formula or worry about setting up an algebraic equation. They are more concerned with understanding a situation and less concerned with the mechanical nuances.

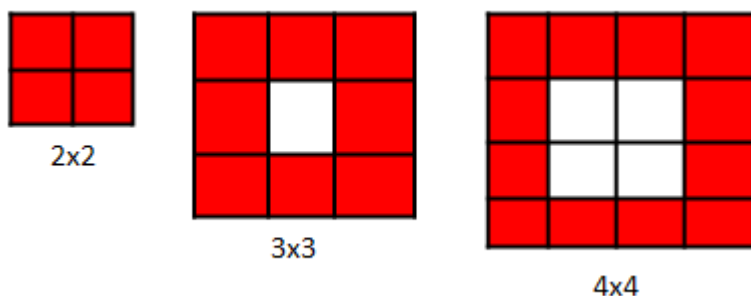
Keep in mind the makeup of a business school class. It is not filled exclusively with finance and economics students. There are those who come from marketing and not-for-profit backgrounds. While they may not be well-versed in formalized math, they are highly capable of thinking analytically. They see the bigger picture. If the GMAT was slanted to pure math, then these candidates may be at a disadvantage. The makers of the GMAT have designed the test for thinkers, not exclusively for those who are adept in manipulating tedious mechanics.

To be successful on the GMAT, you need to be strategic. The following problem illustrates the critical thinking skills required for many of the math questions:

On a square game board that is divided into n rows of n squares each, k of these squares lie along the boundary of the game board. Which of the following is a possible value of k ?

- (A) 10
- (B) 25
- (C) 34
- (D) 42
- (E) 52

While one can figure out some sort of algebraic expression, it will take some thinking...and time. However, one could illustrate a few scenarios and try to decipher a pattern:



Notice that the 2×2 board has 4 squares along its boundary. The 3×3 board has 8 squares along its boundary. The 4×4 board has 12 squares along its boundary. What do you notice about the numbers 4, 8 and 12? You should see that they are multiples of 4. The only answer choice that is a multiple of 4 is (E) 52.

I am not saying that one does not need to know particular mathematical formulas and principles. What I am saying is that knowing specific laws and solving questions algebraically are not necessarily the most efficient components to attacking problems, particularly when one is under a time constraint.

So learn to be flexible and less myopic. Open your mind to strategic alternatives for evaluating a given situation. This is the key to performing well on the GMAT. With practice, you will strengthen this valuable and necessary skill set.