ETS

GRE

GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATIONS®

Introduction to the
Verbal Reasoning Measure

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This document describes the types of questions contained in the Verbal Reasoning sections, gives you strategies for answering them, and presents some worked examples.

Purpose and Format of the Verbal Reasoning Section

The Verbal Reasoning section of the GRE measures your ability to analyze and evaluate written material and synthesize information obtained from it, to analyze relationships among component parts of sentences, and to recognize relationships among words and concepts.

Verbal Reasoning questions appear in several formats, each of which is discussed in detail below. About half of the section requires you to read passages and answer questions on those passages. The other half requires you to read, interpret, and complete existing sentences, groups of sentences,

or paragraphs. All of the questions are multiple choice, with the number of choices varying, depending on the type of question.

Verbal Reasoning Question Types

The GRE Verbal Reasoning section contains three types of questions: Reading Comprehension, Text Completion, and Sentence Equivalence. In this section you will study each of these question types one by one, and you'll learn valuable strategies for answering each type.

Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension questions are designed to test a wide range of abilities required to read and understand the kinds of prose commonly encountered in graduate school. Those abilities include:

- understanding the meaning of individual words
- understanding the meaning of individual sentences

- understanding the meaning of paragraphs and larger bodies of text
- distinguishing between minor and major points
- summarizing a passage
- drawing conclusions from the information provided
- reasoning from incomplete data, inferring missing information
- understanding the structure of a text, how the parts relate to one another
- identifying the author's perspective
- identifying the author's assumptions
- analyzing a text and reaching conclusions about it
- identifying strengths and weaknesses
- developing and considering alternative explanations

As this list implies, reading and understanding a piece of text requires far more than a passive understanding of the words and sentences it contains—it requires active engagement with the text, asking questions, formulating and evaluating

hypotheses, and reflecting on the relationship of the particular text to other texts and information.

Each Reading Comprehension question is based on a passage, which may range in length from one paragraph to several paragraphs. The test contains twelve to fifteen passages; the majority of the passages in the test are one paragraph in length, and only one or two are several paragraphs long. Passages are drawn from the physical sciences, the biological sciences, the social sciences, the arts and humanities, and everyday topics, and are based on material found in books and periodicals, both academic and nonacademic.

Typically, about half of the questions on the test will be based on passages, and the number of questions based on a given passage can range from one to six. Questions can cover any of the topics listed above, from the meaning of a particular word to assessing evidence that might support or weaken points made in the passage.

General Advice for Reading Comprehension Questions

- Reading passages are drawn from many different disciplines and sources, so you may encounter material with which you are not familiar. Do not be discouraged when this happens; all the questions can be answered on the basis of the information provided in the passage, and you are not expected to rely on any outside knowledge. If, however, you encounter a passage that seems particularly hard or unfamiliar, you may want to save it for last.

- Read and analyze the passage carefully before trying to answer any of the questions, and pay attention to clues that help you understand less explicit aspects of the passage.
  - Try to distinguish main ideas from supporting ideas or evidence.

- o Try to distinguish ideas that the author is advancing from those he or she is merely reporting.
- o Similarly, try to distinguish ideas that the author is strongly committed to from those he or she advances as hypothetical or speculative.
- o Try to identify the main transitions from one idea to the next.
- o Try to identify the relationship between different ideas.

  For example:

  - Are they contrasting? Are they consistent?
  - Does one support the other?
  - Does one spell another out in greater detail?
  - Does one apply another to a particular circumstance?

- Read each question carefully and be certain that you understand exactly what is being asked.

- Answer each question on the basis of the information provided in the passage and do not rely on outside knowledge. Sometimes your own views or opinions may conflict with those presented in a passage; if this happens, take special care to work within the context provided by the passage. You should not expect to agree with everything you encounter in the reading passages.

Multiple-Choice—Select One

Description: These are the traditional multiple-choice questions with five answer choices of which you must select one.

Tips for Answering Single Selection Multiple-Choice Questions

- Read *all* the answer choices before making your selection, even if you think you know what the answer is in advance.
- The correct answer is the one that most accurately and most completely answers the question posed; be careful not to be misled by answer choices that are only partially true or only partially answer the question. Be careful also not to pick an answer choice simply because it is a true statement.
- When the question is a vocabulary question about a word in the passage, be sure that the answer choice you select correctly represents the way the word is being used in the passage. Many words have quite different meanings in different contexts.

Multiple-Choice—Select One or More

<u>Description:</u> These provide three answer choices and ask you to select all that are correct; one, two, or all three of the answer choices may be correct. To gain credit for these questions, you must select all the correct answers, and only those; there is no credit for partially correct answers.

Tips for Answering Multiple Selection Multiple-Choice Questions

- Evaluate each answer choice separately on its own merits; when evaluating one answer choice, do not take the others into account.
- A correct answer choice accurately and completely answers the question posed; be careful not to be misled by answer choices that are only partially true or only partially answer the question. Be careful also not to pick an answer choice simply because it is a true statement.
- Do not be disturbed if you think all three answer choices are correct, since questions of this type can have three correct answer choices.

Select-in-Passage

Description. The question asks you to select the sentence in the passage that meets a certain description.

Standard Computer-Based Version

In the standard computer-based version of the test, to answer the question, choose one of the sentences and click on it; clicking anywhere on a sentence will highlight it. In longer passages, the question will usually apply to only one or two specified paragraphs, marked by an arrow (➡); clicking on a sentence elsewhere in the passage will not highlight it.

Print, Audio, and Braille Editions

In these editions for shorter passages, the passage will be followed by a lettered listing of each sentence in the passage, in the order presented in the passage. Select the letter of the sentence you have selected. In longer passages, the question will usually apply to only one or two specified paragraphs. The listing of sentences from which to choose will be preceded by an indication

of the portion of the passage from which the sentences have been taken.

Voiced Edition

The presentation details for select-in-passage questions have not been finalized. When the practice voiced edition of the Revised GRE is released, the included tutorial will explain how to select and indicate your answers to questions of this type.

Tips for Answering Select-In-Passage Questions

- Be careful to evaluate each of the relevant sentences in the passage separately before selecting your answer. Do not evaluate any sentences that are outside the paragraphs under consideration.
- A correct answer choice must accurately match the description given in the question; do not select a sentence if the description only partially applies. Note that the description need not be complete; that is, there may be aspects of the sentence that are not fully described in the question.

Example Set: Reading Comprehension

<u>Questions 1-3 are based on the following passage:</u>

Reviving the practice of using elements of popular music in classical composition, an approach that had been in hibernation in the United States during the 1960s, composer Philip Glass (born 1937) embraced the ethos of popular music without imitating it. Glass based two symphonies on music by rock musicians David Bowie and Brian Eno, but the symphonies' sound is distinctively his. Popular elements do not appear out of place in Glass's classical music, which from its early days has shared certain harmonies and rhythms with rock music. Yet this use of popular elements has not made Glass a composer of popular music. His music is not a version of popular music packaged to attract classical listeners; it is high art for listeners steeped in rock rather than the classics.

The passage is repeated below, with the sentences numbered for convenience of reference. In the test itself, the sentences are not numbered.

(1) Reviving the practice of using elements of popular music in classical composition, an approach that had been in hibernation in the United States during the 1960s, composer Philip Glass (born 1937) embraced the ethos of popular music without imitating it. **(2)** Glass based two symphonies on music by rock musicians David Bowie and Brian Eno, but the symphonies' sound is distinctively his. **(3)** Popular elements do not appear out of place in Glass's classical music, which from its early days has shared certain harmonies and rhythms with rock music. **(4)** Yet this use of popular elements has not made Glass a composer of popular music. **(5)** His music is not a version of popular music packaged to attract classical listeners; it is high art for listeners steeped in rock rather than the classics.

1. **Consider each of the three choices separately and select all that apply.**

The passage suggests that Glass's work displays which of the following qualities?

A. A return to the use of popular music in classical compositions
B. An attempt to elevate rock music to an artistic status more closely approximating that of classical music
C. A long-standing tendency to incorporate elements from two apparently disparate musical styles

2. The passage addresses which of the following issues related to Glass's use of popular elements in his classical compositions?

A. How it is regarded by listeners who prefer rock to the classics
B. How it has affected the commercial success of Glass's music

C. Whether it has contributed to a revival of interest among other composers in using popular elements in their compositions

D. Whether it has had a detrimental effect on Glass's reputation as a composer of classical music

E. Whether it has caused certain of Glass's works to be derivative in quality

3. Select the sentence that distinguishes two ways of integrating rock and classical music.

Explanation for Reading Comprehension Questions

The passage describes in general terms how Philip Glass uses popular music in his classical compositions and explores how Glass can do this without being imitative. Note that there are no opposing views discussed; the author is simply presenting his or her views.

To answer the first question, it is important to assess each answer choice independently. Since

the passage says that Glass revived the use of popular music in classical compositions, answer choice A is clearly correct. On the other hand, the passage also denies that Glass composes popular music or packages it in a way to elevate its status, so answer choice B is incorrect. Finally, since Glass's style has always mixed elements of rock with classical elements, answer choice C is correct.

Turning to the second question, one of the important points that the passage makes is that when Glass uses popular elements in his music, the result is very much his own creation (it is "distinctively his"). In other words, the music is far from being derivative. Thus one issue that the passage addresses is the one referred to in answer choice E—it answers it in the negative. The passage does not discuss the impact of Glass's use of popular elements on listeners, on the commercial success of his music, on other composers, nor on Glass's reputation, so none of choices A through D is correct.

Finally, almost every sentence in the passage refers to incorporating rock music in classical compositions, but only the last sentence distinguishes two ways of doing so. It distinguishes between writing rock music in a way that will make it attractive to classical listeners and writing classical music that will be attractive to listeners familiar with rock. Thus the last sentence is the correct answer.

Text Completion Questions

As mentioned above, skilled readers do not simply absorb the information presented on the page; instead, they maintain a constant attitude of interpretation and evaluation, reasoning from what they have read so far to create a picture of the whole and revising that picture as they go. Text Completion questions test this ability by omitting crucial words from short passages and asking the test taker to use the remaining information in the passage as a basis for selecting words or short phrases to fill the blanks and create a coherent, meaningful whole.

Text Completion Question Structure

- Passage composed of one to five sentences
- One to three blanks
- Three answer choices per blank (five answer choices in the case of a single blank)
- The answer choices for different blanks function independently; that is, selecting one answer choice for one blank does not affect what answer choices you can select for another blank
- Single correct answer, consisting of one choice for each blank; no credit for partially correct answers

Tips for Answering Text Completion Questions

Try to analyze the passage in the following way:

- Read through the passage to get an overall sense of it.
- Identify words or phrases that seem particularly significant, either because they emphasize the structure of the passage (words like "although" or "moreover") or because they are central to understanding what the passage is about.
- Try to fill in the blanks with words or phrases that seem to you to fit and then see if similar words are offered among the answer choices.
- Do not assume that the first blank is the one that should be filled first; perhaps one of the other blanks is easier to fill first. Select your choice for that blank, and then see whether you can complete another blank. If none of the choices for the other blank seem to make sense, go back and reconsider your first selection.

- When you have made your selection for each blank, check to make sure that the passage is logically, grammatically, and stylistically coherent.

Directions: **For each blank select one entry from the corresponding column of choices. Fill all blanks in the way that best completes the text.**

Text Completion Example 1

This question has **three** blanks:

It is refreshing to read a book about our planet by an author who does not allow facts to be (i)_____ by politics: well aware of the political disputes about the effects of human activities on climate and biodiversity, this author does not permit them to (ii)_____ his comprehensive description of what we know about our biosphere. He emphasizes the enormous gaps in our knowledge, the sparseness of our observations, and the (iii)_____, calling attention to the many aspects of planetary

evolution that must be better understood before we can accurately diagnose the condition of our planet.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
A. overshadowed	D. enhance	G. plausibility of our hypotheses
B. invalidated	E. obscure	H. certainty of our entitlement
C. illuminated	F. underscore	I. superficiality of our theories

Explanation for Text Completion Example 1

(Note: This example of a Text Completion question with three blanks is somewhat longer than the three-blank questions that will appear in alternate-format tests.)

The overall tone of the passage is clearly complimentary. To understand what the author of the book is being complimented on, it is useful to focus on the second blank. Here, we must

determine what word would indicate something that the author is praised for not permitting. The only answer choice that fits the case is "obscure" (choice E), since enhancing and underscoring are generally good things to do, not things one should refrain from doing. Choosing "obscure" clarifies the choice for the first blank; the only choice that fits well with "obscure" is "overshadowed" (choice A). Notice that trying to fill blank (i) without filling blank (ii) first is very hard—each choice has at least some initial plausibility.

Since the third blank requires a phrase that matches "enormous gaps" and "sparseness of our observations," the best choice is "superficiality of our theories" (choice I). Thus the correct choices for the three blanks are **overshadowed**, **obscure**, and **superficiality of our theories** (choices A, E, and I). The correct completed text is:

It is refreshing to read a book about our planet by an author who does not allow facts to be

overshadowed by politics: well aware of the political disputes about the effects of human activities on climate and biodiversity, this author does not permit them to **obscure** his comprehensive description of what we know about our biosphere. He emphasizes the enormous gaps in our knowledge, the sparseness of our observations, and the **superficiality of our theories**, calling attention to the many aspects of planetary evolution that must be better understood before we can accurately diagnose the condition of our planet.

Text Completion Example 2

This question has **two** blanks:

Vain and prone to violence, Caravaggio could not handle success: the more his _____ as an artist increased, the more _____ his life became.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
A. temperance	D. tumultuous
B. notoriety	E. providential
C. eminence	F. dispassionate

Explanation for Text Completion Example 2

In this sentence, what follows the colon must explain or spell out what precedes it. So, roughly, what the second part must say is that as Caravaggio became more successful, his life got more out of control. When one looks for words to fill the blanks, it becomes clear that "tumultuous" (choice D) is the best fit for blank (ii), since neither of the other choices suggests being out of control. And for blank (i), the best choice is "eminence" (choice C), since to increase in eminence is a consequence of becoming more successful. It is true that Caravaggio might also increase in notoriety, but an increase in notoriety as an artist is not as clear a sign of success as an increase in eminence.

Thus the correct answer is **eminence** and **tumultuous** (choices C and D). The correct completed text is:

Vain and prone to violence, Caravaggio could not handle success: the more his **eminence** as an artist increased, the more **tumultuous** his life became.

Text Completion Example 3

This question has **one** blank:

In parts of the Arctic, the land grades into the landfast ice so _____ that you can walk off the coast and not know you are over the hidden sea.

A. permanently
B. imperceptibly
C. irregularly
D. precariously
E. relentlessly

Explanation for Text Completion Example 3

The word that fills the blank has to characterize how the land grades into the ice in a way that explains how you can walk off the coast and over the sea without knowing it. The word that does that is "imperceptibly" (choice B); if the land grades imperceptibly into the ice, you might well not know that you had left the land. Describing the shift from land to ice as permanent, irregular, precarious, or relentless would not help to explain how you would fail to know.

The correct completed text is:

In parts of the Arctic, the land grades into the landfast ice so **imperceptibly** that you can walk off the coast and not know you are over the hidden sea.

Sentence Equivalence Questions

Like Text Completion questions, Sentence Equivalence questions test the ability to reach a conclusion about how a passage should be completed on the basis of partial information, but to a greater extent, they focus on the meaning of the completed whole. Sentence Equivalence questions consist of a single sentence with just one blank, and they ask you to find two choices that both lead to a complete, coherent sentence and that produce sentences that mean the same thing.

Sentence Equivalence Question Structure

Each Sentence Equivalence question consists of:
- a single sentence
- one blank
- six answer choices

Each question of this type requires you to select two of the answer choices; there is no credit for partially correct answers.

Tips for Answering Sentence Equivalence Questions

Do not simply look among the answer choices for two words that mean the same thing. This can be misleading for two reasons. First, the answer choices may contain pairs of words that mean the same thing but do not fit coherently into the sentence, and thus do not constitute a correct answer. Second, the pair of words that do constitute the correct answer may not mean exactly the same thing, since all that matters is that the resultant sentences mean the same thing.

- Read the sentence to get an overall sense of it.
- Identify words or phrases that seem particularly significant, either because they emphasize the structure of the sentence (words like "although" or "moreover") or because they are central to understanding what the sentence is about.
- Try to fill in the blank with a word that seems to you to fit and then see if two similar words are offered among the answer choices. If you find some word that is similar to what you are expecting but cannot find a second one, do not become fixated on your interpretation; instead, see whether there are other

words among the answer choices that can be used to fill the blank coherently.

- When you have selected your pair of answer choices for the blank, check to make sure that each one produces a sentence that is logically, grammatically, and stylistically coherent, and that the two sentences mean the same thing.

Directions: Select the <u>two</u> answer choices that, when used to complete the sentence, fit the meaning of the sentence as a whole and produce completed sentences that are alike in meaning.

Sentence Equivalence Example 1

Although it does contain some pioneering ideas, one would hardly characterize the work as _____.

A. orthodox
B. eccentric
C. original
D. trifling
E. conventional
F. innovative

Explanation for Sentence Equivalence Example 1

The word "Although" is a crucial signpost here. The work contains some pioneering ideas, but apparently it is not overall a pioneering work. Thus the two words that could fill the blank appropriately are "original" (choice C) and "innovative" (choice F). Note that "orthodox" (choice A) and "conventional" (choice E) are two words that are very similar in meaning, but neither one completes the sentence sensibly.

Sentence Equivalence Example 2

It was her view that the country's problems had been _____ by foreign technocrats, so that to ask for such assistance again would be counterproductive.

A. ameliorated
B. ascertained
C. diagnosed
D. exacerbated
E. overlooked
F. worsened

Explanation for Sentence Equivalence Example 2

The sentence relates a piece of reasoning, as indicated by the presence of "so that": asking for the assistance of foreign technocrats would be counterproductive because of the effects such technocrats have had already. This means that the technocrats must have had bad effects; that is, they must have "exacerbated" (choice D) or "worsened" (choice F) the country's problems.