

KAPLAN RESEARCH SERIES

Best Practices: Achieving a 700+ on the GMAT



Kaplan has been teaching the GMAT for over 40 years and has worked with tens of thousands of young professionals and college students as they prepare for the GMAT. We have amassed more student performance data than any other GMAT prep provider, and we use this information – in addition to what we see in the classroom – to constantly perfect techniques, pedagogy, teacher training, and out-of-class study resources so test takers can achieve the GMAT score they want. Kaplan’s Best Practices for achieving 700+ on the GMAT incorporate Kaplan’s learnings of what works – and what doesn’t – when it comes to advanced GMAT prep.

Kaplan’s Best Practices for Achieving a 700+

1. Start at the right place
2. Focus on “high value” areas
3. Increase efficiency
4. Improve stamina and execution
5. Distinguish drills from realistic practice
6. Seek expertise

Learn the right content & strategies

For the most part, the GMAT covers material that you’ve already learned once – way back in high school and even junior high. It is material that with the right review, you can master. Moreover, the overall body of knowledge required by the test is small, as is the scope of subjects you may not have seen before (e.g., combinatorics). However, what makes the GMAT such a challenge for test takers is that the focus of the GMAT is not just raw quantitative and verbal knowledge, but also critical thinking skills and test performance skills such as time management, prioritization, and decision making under pressure. To succeed well on the exam, test takers need to learn much more than the content – you need to learn how to approach GMAT-style questions and how to answer them quickly and accurately.

- Best Practice #1: Start at the right place. Contrary to public belief, where you start does not determine where you’ll end up. In other words, if you score in the 500s or even in the 400s on the first GMAT you take, it does not mean that you cannot score 700+ on the actual GMAT. Likewise, if you score in the mid-600s on your first GMAT, you will not necessarily score above a 700 on the actual GMAT. Kaplan has seen that students need to follow a curriculum and study plan that is most appropriate for their starting level and their studying needs. For example, test takers who are intimidated by the quantitative section would benefit from ample review of the math basics. Strong test takers who want to increase their scores significantly need to surround themselves with qualified high-achieving test takers who can help motivate one another. Test takers who work best one-on-one should work with a personal tutor or coach. Knowing what your general study preferences and your areas of strengths and weaknesses before you start your prep will help ensure that you follow a study plan that meets your specific needs and makes a 700+ score possible.
- Best Practice #2: Focus on the “high value” areas. Not all GMAT topics and questions are created equal for each individual. You need to know where exactly to focus your attention to get the extra edge on the exam. As Kaplan students progress through the curriculum and learn the content & strategies, students find that they master some areas faster than others, and these areas will vary from person to person. Kaplan has seen that the more that a student knows about his or her individual performance and the more guidance that student receives based on that performance, the better prepared the student is to score high on the actual GMAT. Your goal should be to have a dashboard-view

clarity at all times of where you stand in the various areas of GMAT prep and where you need to focus extra attention to shore up weaker areas and exploit stronger ones.

Follow an appropriate study plan

You have a finite amount time to prepare for the GMAT, and vast opportunities for preparation. As in business, assessing these tradeoffs and forming a personalized strategy for GMAT study is an essential part of getting maximum results. You have to be prepared for a range of question topics and types, at various levels of difficulty. If we had all the time in the world, then perhaps everyone would follow the exact same path to mastery: everyone would learn absolutely everything. Given the limitations of time and each individual's background, every GMAT student needs to follow a strategy that will maximize results, given his or her needs and study preferences.

- **Best Practice #3:** Use test strategies to increase efficiency, not just accuracy. Kaplan has seen that having the raw quantitative and verbal knowledge necessary to answer any question you may see on the GMAT is not enough to score high on the exam. High GMAT results require advanced time management skills where efficiency is critical. The test taker – not the computer – decides how much time to spend on each question. Since the test is computer-based, each time you answer a question, you do not know what question is coming next (the computer doesn't even know, in fact, until you've answered the question). Therefore, it is not possible to look at all the questions that you'll need to answer and decide how to allocate your time. Getting through each question as quickly – and accurately – as possible is important so that you don't back yourself into a corner and run out of time for future questions. What many test takers don't realize when first preparing for the GMAT is that to solve questions most efficiently, there are time-saving strategies that can eliminate much of the raw quantitative or verbal processing that could be done to answer a question. Learning and applying these strategies – such as familiarizing yourself with the question types, using logic and common sense to rule out possible answers – allow you to save valuable time on questions so that you can save them for more difficult questions as needed.
- **Best Practice #4:** Incorporate different methods to improve your stamina, confidence, and execution. Practicing full length GMATs throughout your studying is a must. These will help you understand the adaptive nature of the exam and apply what you've learned. However, you need to supplement your practice with targeted sessions. Think of it similar to football: when practicing, athletes do not simply play practice games. They lift weights, they sprint, they practice one set of plays over and over again – and they also play practice games. This is so that they can concentrate on building skills in a certain area one at a time instead of trying to tackle all of those skills at once during a game. Practicing for the GMAT is no different. Make sure that you take timed tests focused on certain topics, that you take section tests, and that you review what you've done to ensure that you are solving problems in the most efficient way. And, make sure that you perform CATs periodically throughout your studying to apply all that you've learned.

Practice to perfection

The GMAT is designed to thwart the efforts of test takers to raise their scores by cramming. Mastering the set of skills for GMAT performance requires learning, practice, and review. Much of what you learn will be with a guide (in a prep classroom, for example); most of your practice and review will be done on your own, unguided. The best practice and review plan will give you

many rehearsals of material. Not only will these rehearsals improve your accuracy and stamina, but they will also increase your ability to recognize types of questions, to quickly determine an approach, and to strategically avoid roadblocks when stuck.

- **Best Practice #5: Distinguish drills from realistic practice.** Planning for unknown factors taxes brain power and heightens stress. That is why the more you know about the GMAT, the more relaxed you will be on final test day. The more relaxed you are, the more brain power you will be able to dedicate to the questions on the GMAT. Practice CATs are one way to increase a student's comfort level with the exam. However, practice CATs on your computer are not enough. You want to get as close to taking the real exam as possible, and ideally without having to report actual scores to your schools. Consider experiencing test day conditions in advance by taking a practice exam onsite at an actual GMAT testing center. This way, you'll have no unknown factors on test day allowing you to dedicate all your brain power to answering the questions on the exam accurately and efficiently.
- **Best Practice #6: Tap sources of expertise in test preparation and the GMAT itself.** To master the strategies and content, the highest GMAT scorers need a comprehensive understanding of the test – an understanding that can be difficult to build without learning from someone who knows both the ins and outs of the exam and teaches using proven pedagogical approaches. As in other domains, the GMAT teachers that help test takers achieve the most are the ones that have both expertise in the topic and ability to coach and push. Similar to professional sports, with every excellent player, there is an excellent coach behind that player. No doubt that coach is an expert in the rules and intricacies of the game, but the coach's real skills are motivating, eliciting, guiding, and supporting. Having domain expertise is simply not sufficient to be able to teach; having sufficient teaching experience and training on top of that domain expertise is critical.