



Setting a Score Target

By now, you already know that your GRE score is an important component of your graduate school applications.

This leads most people to this important question: **how high does your GRE score need to be?**

Having a concrete target GRE score is really important. It gives us a goal to aim for and helps us track our progress during our study time.

Your score target needs to be different from everyone else's, because you have different goals from them. You need your own score target to aim for, based on data.

In this guide, we'll teach you how to research what your score target needs to be **when most of your programs do not report GRE score information.**

Instructions

Your GRE score target really depends on what schools **you** want to apply to. We've created this worksheet to guide you through the process **when most of your programs do not report GRE score information.** I highly recommend you print out the next page before going further.



GRE Score Target Worksheet

School Name	Ranking	Selectivity	Verbal Score	Quant Score
Goal Score	Top Score in Each Column			

My GRE Score Target

Verbal: _____ Quant: _____



Step 1: List Your Schools

The first thing to do is list your programs of interest along the left side of the chart.

Step 2: Check Program Rankings and Selectivity

This first thing to do is check the program rankings for the programs you are interested in at places like *US News*, and also look up the acceptance rate if available. The higher the program ranking and the lower the program acceptance rate compared to other programs in the discipline, the steeper the competition to get in is going to be. So assume that you will need a perfect or near-perfect score on the most relevant section to get into the top programs in a given discipline (a possible exception being those programs that require a portfolio, audition, etc).

Some fields (like engineering and education) even have GRE averages or ranges of admitted students published in *US News*.

Note down the ranking /selectivity of all of the programs you are interested in. Note down whether it's very selective, selective, average, or less selective. It's hard to give a hard guideline as to what ranking corresponds to these designations exactly, because different disciplines have different numbers of programs—the playing field is very different in a discipline with 20 ranked graduate programs versus one with 100 ranked graduate programs. As a pretty loose guideline, you can consider the top 10% of ranked programs most competitive, the top 30% of ranked selective, the top 60% of ranked programs average, and the rest less selective (you can consider programs where the ranking is not published or unranked less selective).

Step 3: Check Your Score Distribution for Applicants in Your Field

So, you've noted down the selectivity of you desired programs. Next, you'll want to check the [ETS data for prospective graduate students in your area](#). The linked document includes score distributions on Verbal, Quant, and Analytical Writing scores for test-takers who stated they were interested in pursuing specific fields.



PrepScholar.com | GRE Online Prep

Using this document, you can look up the score distribution for students in your prospective graduate area.

A very competitive score for a given discipline would be within the top 5% of applicants (remember, this is applicants, not people who've been accepted). A competitive score would be in the top 20%. An average score would be in the top 40%. A less competitive score would be anything below the 50% mark.

Step 4: Set Goal Score

Now, we need to **align this information with the selectivity rankings we had for our schools**. You'll need a very competitive score for the most selective schools, a competitive score for selective schools, an average score for average schools, and a less competitive score for less competitive schools.

Returning to your chart, note down the appropriate score benchmarks for Verbal and Quant. To get a preliminary goal score, **take the top score from each column in your chart**. This should put you very comfortably in the appropriate score range for all of your given schools.

Note that this is just a rough estimate.