

## Doing Well on GRE Essays

These strategies, tips, samples, and examples are taken directly from Princeton Review's *Cracking the New GRE*, 2012 Edition.

- Size matters: the number-one common element in successful GRE essays is length.
- Read directions and prompts carefully and make notes, especially of key terms.
- Think, organize (follow a template), write, proofread in last 1-2 minutes.

### The Issue Essay

- You present an opinion in response to a “general interest” statement, such as “True Beauty is found not in the exceptional but in the commonplace,” “Genius is nothing more than another term for obsession,” or “The proper role of education is to teach facts, not morals.”
- There is no correct answer—all that matters is your making a persuasive case, and specific examples are key.
- **Think:**
  - Identify key terms in prompt: true beauty, exceptional, commonplace, e.g.
  - Consider the opposing viewpoint: true beauty is found in the exceptional, not the commonplace
  - List *specific* examples:
    - Commonplace: sunset behind a ridge, a yellow rose, a live oak tree
    - Exceptional: Leonardo DaVinci's *Mona Lisa*, Niagara Falls, the Notre Dame cathedral
  - Choose the viewpoint easiest to argue, the side you have strongest examples for.
- Develop thesis, such as “While certain commonplace natural objects are examples of beauty, true beauty is most often found in rare, exceptional cases.”
- **Organize:** Introduction, opposing viewpoint, your views, conclusion
- **Write:**
  - Introduction: establish topic, acknowledge both sides of the issue, end with thesis. Good to open with literal question the essay addresses, a famous quote, fact or statistic, brief anecdote, or definition.
  - First body ¶ should elaborate the opposing viewpoint, with effective examples.
  - One or two body ¶'s elaborating your own view, with very specific examples
    - All body ¶'s: state main point, give two examples, at least, explain how examples support main point. Depth is more important than breadth—avoid simply listing many examples, explain the examples you give in detail.
  - Conclusion, summarizing, restating thesis, and if possible saying why topic as a whole is important or of interest.
- Proofread in last two minutes.

Sample issue essay questions from ETS:

[https://www.ets.org/gre/revised\\_general/prepare/analytical\\_writing/issue/pool](https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/analytical_writing/issue/pool)

## Analysis of Argument Essay

- Do not give your opinion on the issue or argue against the view expressed in the prompt. Instead, *critique* or *criticize* the argument, pointing out its weaknesses and flaws in logic.
- Practice the process of analyzing sample arguments, such as “My car broke down yesterday, and I need a car to get to work. Therefore, I should buy a new car.”
  - Conclusion: I should buy a new car—often indicated with words such as therefore, so, thus, clearly.
  - Stated premises: My car broke down, I need a car to get to work.
  - Unstated assumptions: I can get to work only in a car of my own, my car cannot be fixed
    - Find assumptions by asking questions—such as why can’t the car be fixed, are there other methods of transportation available, is there another way to get a car (rental, borrowing)?
- **Think:** To critique the argument, poke holes in it by examining and questioning the assumptions. Look for gaps in the reasoning.
- Sample topic: “A new medical test that allows the early detection of a particular disease will prevent the deaths of people all over the world who would otherwise die from the disease. The test has been extremely effective in allowing doctors to diagnose the disease six months to a year before it would have been spotted by conventional means. As soon as we can institute this test as routine procedure in hospitals around the world, the death rate from this disease will plummet.”
  - Conclusion: A new medical test that allows the early detection of a particular disease will prevent the deaths of people all over the world who would otherwise die from the disease
  - Premises, evidence supporting the conclusion: The test has been extremely effective in allowing doctors to diagnose the disease six months to a year before it would have been spotted by conventional means.
  - Questioning assumptions, finding holes in the reasoning:
    - Does early detection necessarily lead to survival? Is the disease curable?
    - Is the test widely available and affordable? Does it require technology not available “around the world”?
    - Does it require specialists to interpret the test? Will doctors interpret the tests correctly?
    - Will patients ignore the need for treatment?
- **Organize:** Restate argument, attack argument in three different ways, summarize and note how argument could be strengthened.
- **Write,** following template such as:
  - The argument that\_\_\_\_\_ is not entirely convincing, since it ignores certain crucial assumptions.
  - First, the argument assumes that\_\_\_\_\_.
  - Secondly, the argument never addresses\_\_\_\_\_.
  - Finally, the argument omits\_\_\_\_\_.
  - Thus, the argument is not completely sound because it fails to\_\_\_\_\_. The argument could be strengthened by\_\_\_\_\_.

Sample argument analysis topics from ETS:

[https://www.ets.org/gre/revised\\_general/prepare/analytical\\_writing/argument/pool](https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/analytical_writing/argument/pool)