GRE vocabulary: what the exam asks and how to prepare

Tilmashq

One-page cheat sheet · who needs the GRE, how it differs from IELTS, a vocabulary plan

> **IELTS tests whether you can study in English. The GRE tests how you reason — your English is taken for granted.**

Who needs the GRE

- GRE General Test = admission exam for **master's and doctoral** programmes.
- Asked most often by universities in the **US and Canada**, especially engineering, economics and science.
- Sometimes Europe: some master's programmes in Germany ask applicants whose bachelor's is from outside the European Higher Education Area.
- Required / "recommended" / dropped — differs by programme. **Check your programme's page**, not the university's general site.

GRE vs IELTS

	IELTS	GRE
Tests	whether you can study in English	how you reason
English	is what is assessed	taken for granted
Vocabulary	common academic	far rarer: obdurate, perfunctory, garrulous are ordinary
Length	—	about two hours, three parts

The three parts of the GRE

Part	What it is	Where people lose marks
Analytical Writing	One essay arguing a position on a debatable claim	—
Verbal Reasoning	Reading and fill-in-the-blank sentences	The main difficulty: vocabulary far rarer than in IELTS
Quantitative Reasoning	School maths: arithmetic, algebra, geometry, data	The maths is in English: one misread word and a correctly solved problem is marked wrong

Three word lists you need

List	Examples	What for
Maths terms	product, factor, quotient, remainder, integer, inclusive, median, "between 1 and 10 inclusive"	Not to lose Quant marks on understanding the question
Verbal words	obscure, superficial, obstinate, ambivalent, obdurate, perfunctory, garrulous	The blanks and reading
Roots	trans-, bene-, pli, loqu, -ous (bene- "well" + vol "will" → benevolent)	Guess words that are on no list

A working plan

1. **Maths terms first if Quant is ahead.** Shortest list, quickest win (about a week of metro rides). Learn new words, then reverse recall.
2. **Roots alongside.** Roots do not teach a word — they teach you to take words apart. Best together with Verbal words: meet *benevolent*, and next to it bene- "well" and vol "will".
3. **Then Verbal words** — the largest list. Reverse recall matters most: in the blanks you do not recognise a word, you **choose it to fit the meaning** of the sentence — closer to recall than to recognition.
4. **Spell it once a week** for maths terms and Verbal words. Roots do not need spelling — recognising them is enough.
5. **Keep IELTS vocabulary** if IELTS is still ahead: mix freely, e.g. Academic in the morning, GRE in the evening.

Common mistakes

✗	✓
Checking the university's general site	Check your programme's page
"The maths is easy, I'll skip the terms"	Learn quotient, remainder, inclusive…
Only recognising GRE words	Practise recall: pick the word for the meaning
Just flipping cards	Follow a plan: maths → roots + words → spelling

Keep in mind

- No list of "all GRE words" exists — aim for common vocabulary and the main roots.
- Vocabulary is the foundation, but you also need practice with real Verbal tasks and Quant problems from other materials.
- Tilmashq covers words only: GRE Math (83), GRE Vocab (207), GRE Roots (78), offline.