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GMAT: Just get it over the net

[Orientations](#) *Betsy Massar - 07.29.2009*

The GMAT – short for the Graduate Management Admissions Test – is tough, even for the best test-takers. And, like it or not, the GMAT is required by nearly every graduate business school.*

A number of very good test-prep companies offer materials, classes and/or one-on-one coaching. I strongly urge you to take advantage of their offerings, and I have great news for you: As the potential client, you are in the driver's seat.

You are the Customer.

Kaplan, Manhattan GMAT, Princeton Review, Veritas, and the super-tutors at Inspirica are just some of your options. There are other specialized companies in different locales (India sports a slew of cool tutoring programs), and you can find freelance consultants in most major cities. Because the test and its outcome (not to mention the financial and time commitment) are so important, you should put on your consumer hat and look for the best deal for you.

Finding the Right Trainer

Each teacher is different: While most training programs hire only those with near perfect scores, some tutors suit you more than others.

If you are only a fair at standardized tests, you might want a teacher who is less like an off-the-charts rocket scientist, and more like an approachable mentor.

You may want the people who develop the tests to have gotten close to an 800. But it isn't clear that the instructor or personal tutor needs to be a genius.

I recommend attending a number of free seminars, and even if you are in a major city with lots of test schools, go online and see how a virtual course works. You are the consumer. You have a choice: Not every teacher is the right fit for you. Remember, test companies are businesses competing with each other. It is their job to tell you why you should work with them. You are the client, and you have every right to find an instructor and a course structure that fits your style and your needs.

You have to find a teacher that speaks your language. Someone that understands your goals. Remember, you don't need to get in the 99th percentile. In fact, you may not need to break a 700.

Just Get it Over the Net

Schools publish average scores, but as anyone with a rudimentary understanding of statistics knows, those numbers don't tell the whole story. Look at the middle 80%. For example, the middle 80% at Chicago was

660-760 (ranked in the top five) and the middle 80% at NYU Stern was also 660-760 (ranked top 10). The middle 80% at the University of Washington was 640-750 (ranked top 35). Get the picture?

You simply need to do well enough so the GMAT isn't an issue. I like to think it's like tennis: you need to get it over the net. You want a good, solid score. The goal, especially for those of us who aren't great test-takers, is to figure how to make it so the whole process doesn't intimidate you. You don't need a scary-smart teacher. The test is intimidating enough as it is.

Like everything else with the MBA application, it's better to start early so you are, as Milton Friedman would say, Free to Choose. Some classroom courses are given only every two months, so if you want to take the test before October, you may need to sign up for a course before it gets away from you.

Good luck!

* Some schools now accept the GRE, or Graduate Record Exam, in lieu of the GMAT. In either case, students can benefit from prep courses and/or tutoring.

Betsy Massar is Founder and CEO of [Master Admissions](#). A graduate of Vassar College and Harvard Business School, she spent the majority of her extensive career as an investment professional and financial journalist on Wall Street, in Asia and Silicon Valley. Betsy has been helping candidates in their applications to business school since she was in her second year at Harvard. She is an ESL tutor and a lifetime member of the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents Club.

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Doug Barg, 02.Aug.09 - 17:46

Great insight! Thanks.
