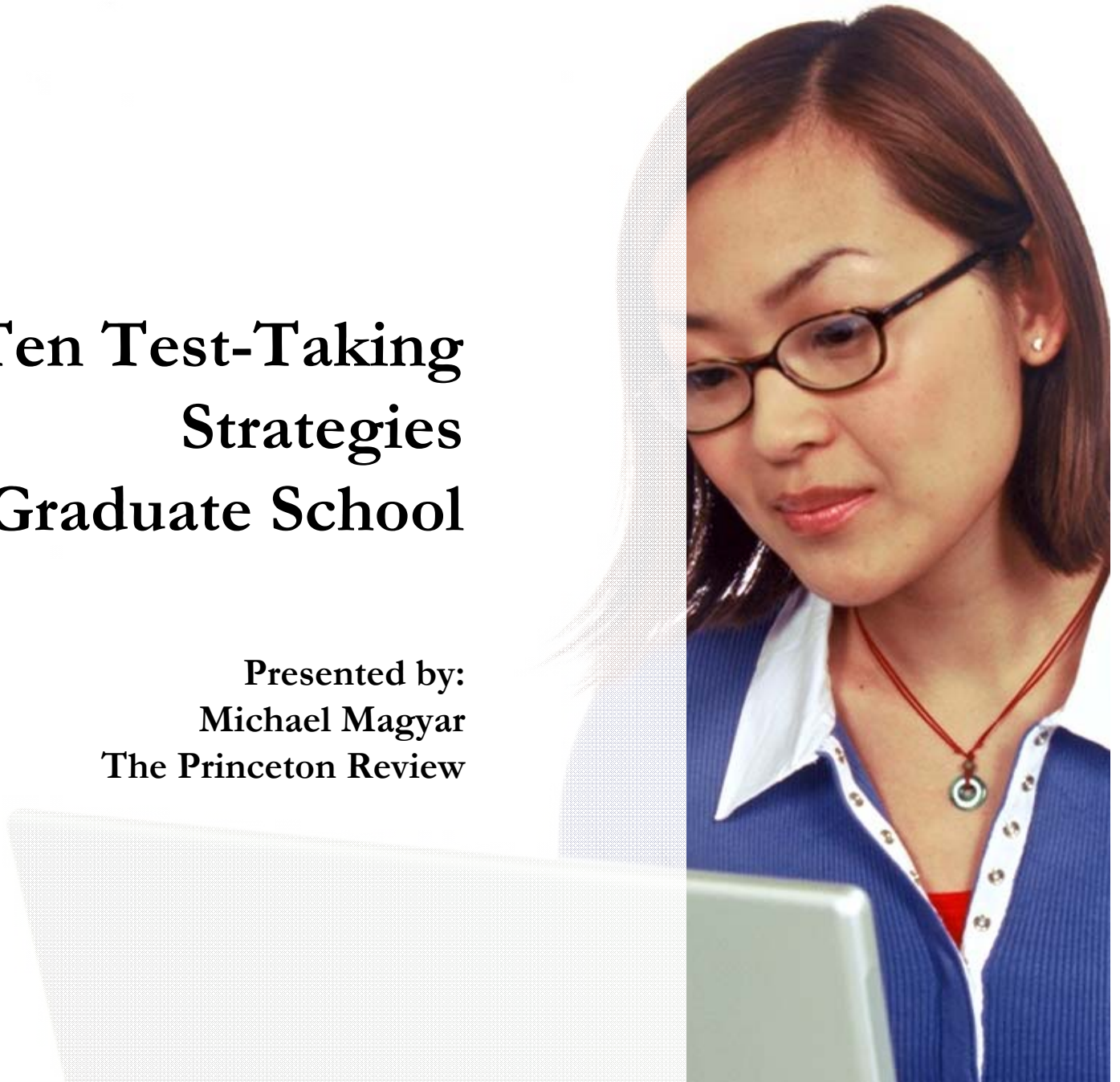




# Top Ten Test-Taking Strategies for Graduate School

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The Princeton Review





- **About Me:**
  - Michael Magyar
  - Princeton Review - Tallahassee Office
  - The Florida State University Golden Key
- **About This Presentation:**
  - General Info on ALL Graduate Tests for U.S.
  - Could spend hours and hours on each test



- **Tests:**
  - MCAT: Medical School
  - LSAT: Law School
  - GMAT: Business School
  - DAT: Dental School
  - OAT: Optometry School
  - GRE: Everything Else School



- **What's the point of these tests?**
  - National standard for admissions decisions  
(can't interview thousands of applicants per year)
- **How important are they?**
  - Usually about  $1/3$  to  $1/2$  of your application
  - Scholarships and financial aid



- **What do they measure?**
  - Intelligence?
  - Ability to succeed in life?
  - **Correct Answer:** How well you can take a test
  
- **High scores?**
  - Bell curve
  - Levels of preparation



## Tip #1 – Know thy Enemy

- **Become familiar with the test:**
  - You study for undergraduate tests, why not study for admissions tests?
  - Every test is drastically different (format and questions) and they are nothing like undergrad
    - LSAT: Pencil and Paper
    - MCAT/DAT/OAT: Computer-Based
    - GMAT/GRE: Computer-Adaptive



## Tip #1 – Know thy Enemy

- **Computer-Adaptive Tests: (GMAT/GRE)**
  - Start with medium level question
  - How you do on previous questions affects the level of difficulty of subsequent questions
  - Cannot move on to the next question until you answer the current question
  - Cannot go back and change answers
  - Tip: The beginning questions are more important so spend more time on them!



## Tip #1 – Know thy Enemy

- **Familiarity:**
  - Get comfortable with the directions, rules, and types of questions before test day
- **Create an attack plan:**
  - How will you attempt each question type?
  - How many questions will you attempt?



## Tip #1 – Know thy Enemy

- **Test-specifics:**
  - GRE: Vocabulary
  - GMAT: Data-sufficiency problems
  - LSAT: Logic-games
  - MCAT: Lots of science content



## Tip #1 – Know thy Enemy

- **Invade the test-writers' minds!**
  - Q: How do they get a bell curve?
  - A: By making test-takers miss a lot of questions
  
  - Q: How do they make you miss questions?
  - A: By increasing the difficulty of questions and by hiding traps in the questions and answers!



## Tip #1 – Know thy Enemy

- What is a trap answer?
  - Jelly, Pepper, Chair, Right, Down, 1-10
  - We are predictable!
  
- Example: What is equivalent to  $(x^2)(x^3)$ ?
  - A)  $5x$
  - B)  $x^5$
  - C)  $x^6$
  - D)  $2x^5$
  - E)  $2x^6$



## Tip #1 – Know thy Enemy

- **Other Examples:**
  - **Math:**
    - Common math errors
    - Easily forgotten properties of numbers
  - **Verbal:**
    - Half-Right
    - Strength of Language
    - Things that are probably true, but aren't supported



## Tip #2 – Take on Your Own Terms

- Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses
- Know yours and adjust your strategy accordingly



## Tip #2 – Take on Your Own Terms

- **Pace:**
  - Know yours (comes with practice)
  - Don't attempt every question if not a CAT
  - Going too fast: careless mistakes and traps
  - Going too slow: don't daydream



## Tip #2 – Take on Your Own Terms

- **Computer Adaptive Tests: (GMAT/GRE)**
  - The first 10 questions are really important
    - Spend more time on them!
  - Still make sure to finish
    - Questions are worth less as they go on
    - The blank penalty is worse than getting it wrong!
  - Don't waste time on really hard questions
    - This means you are doing well



## Tip #2 – Take on Your Own Terms

- **Forced Order: GMAT/GRE**
- **Choose your own order: The Rest**
  - They don't know which types of questions you do
  - Questions count the same whether easy/hard
  - Easier and less time-consuming questions first
  - Benefits: Builds confidence and ensures that you attempt the easier ones



## Tip #2 – Take on Your Own Terms

- **Multi-Pass Methodology: (not GMAT/GRE)**
  - **First:** Do all of the easy questions or the ones you are sure that you know how to do
  - **Second:** Do all of the medium questions or the ones you might know how to do
  - **Last:** Do all of the hard questions or the ones that you have no clue how to do



## Tip #2 – Take on Your Own Terms

- **Examples:**
  - **LSAT:**
    - Games: Determine order first
    - Arguments/RC: Skip if hard as you go
  - **MCAT:**
    - Avoid graphs/charts
    - Do free-standing questions first



## Tip #3 – Guess and Move On

- **When to Guess:**
  - Don't waste excessive time on a question that is taking too long or you cannot figure out
- **How to guess:**
  - Try to eliminate one/two answers first
  - Letter of the Day



## Tip #3 – Guess and Move On

- **GMAT/GRE:**
  - Spend more time on earlier questions
  - Guess at the end
- **The Rest:**
  - Guess on the ones that you struggle with
  - No guessing penalty: answer everything!



## Tip #4 – Process of Elimination

- What is the capital of Malawi?
  - A) Dallas
  - B) Paris
  - C) Tokyo
  - D) London
  - E) Lilongwe



## Tip #4 – Process of Elimination

- **Right answer? Who cares?**
  - Look for wrong answers and eliminate them
  - Besides math and logic games (LSAT), you need to find the “best” answer, so read *ALL* of them
- **Mark it!**
  - Actively cross off definitely wrong answers
  - Use symbols for like, dislike, and not sure



## Tip #4 – Process of Elimination

- Choose the best replacement for the underlined part of the sentence:
  - The United States are the most great place to live.
    - A) are the most great place to live
    - B) are the greatest place to live
    - C) is the most great place to live
    - D) is the greater place to live
    - E) is the greatest place to live



## Tip #4 – Process of Elimination

- Similarities/Differences
  - Eliminate verbal answer choices with same error
  - Pay attention to differences among answers and see how that affects the question
- Focus on language:
  - Eliminate extremes
  - Match quantity and comparison statements
- Eliminate answers with irrelevant information
- Check units for MCAT
- Remember to Eliminate Traps!



## Tip #5 – Practice, Practice, Practice

- Increases accuracy
  - Points out your weaknesses
  - Points out traps/patterns
  - Increases test-taking skill
- Increases speed
  - Familiarity with questions
  - Familiarity with techniques
- Allows you to create an attack plan



## Tip #5 – Practice, Practice, Practice

- What to practice:
  - Focus on your weaknesses and the parts of the test that you **REALLY** don't enjoy first
- Practice plan:
  - Stagger your practice tests
  - Start untimed to improve accuracy and then time yourself to improve speed and to create a plan
- Emulate test conditions!



## Tip #5 – Practice, Practice, Practice

- **Review: Overall**
  - Which type of questions did you miss?
  - Could you have gone at a better pace?
- **Review: Each Question**
  - Why was the credited response correct?
  - Why did you miss the question?
    - Content? Technique? Trap answer? Silly mistake?
  - What can you do in the future to get it right?



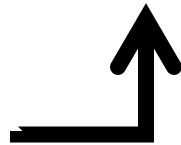
## Tip #6 – Learn/Practice Techniques

- There are step-by-step plans of attack for every question type – especially obscure ones
- Learn them from books and test companies
- Determine which ones make the most sense and which ones work the best for you
- Practice them
- You will be slow with them at first



## Tip #6 – Learn/Practice Techniques

- Math:
  - What is  $x$  when  $x^2 - 4x + 4 = 0$ ?
    - A) -2
    - B) -1
    - C) 0
    - D) 1
    - E) 2
- Tip: Plug the answers into the problem





## Tip #6 – Learn/Practice Techniques

- Verbal:
  - Every one of the Golden Key chapters are awesome!
  - What's wrong with this sentence?
  - Tip: Eliminate prepositional phrases
  - Every one ~~of the Golden Key chapters~~ are awesome!
  - Now what's wrong?



## Tip #7 – Learn Content

- **Who knows/remembers:**
  - LSAT: Rules of Logic
  - GRE/GMAT: Algebra, Geometry, Algebra 2, Vocabulary/Grammar rules
  - MCAT: Physics, General Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Biology



## Tip #7 – Learn Content

- Is 132 divisible by 6?
- Is zero: even, odd, or neither?
- What are the special right triangles?
- What is the volume of a sphere?
- What is a collective noun?
- What is a contra-positive?
- What is the distance formula?



## Tip #8 – Stay Focused

- **Long before the test:**
  - Explore prep options
  - Create a preparation plan and stick to it!
  - Reduce course/work loads while prepping
- **Day before the test:**
  - Sleep/eat well
  - Relax: don't plan to cram – review your strategy



## Tip #8 – Stay Focused

- **During the test:**
  - Dress comfortably
  - Relax: nervousness is a killer
  - Remember your attack plan
  - Daydreaming? Focus!
    - Take deep breaths and a 10-20 second break
    - Take your breaks and get up and move around
  - Be careful about drinking too much liquid!



## Tip #9 – Scratch Paper

- Cannot draw on a computer screen!
- Use it!
  - Draw diagrams
  - Work out math problems
  - Annotate passages and write down a main point



## Tip #10 – Build Confidence

- **Long before the test:**
  - Familiarize yourself with the test format
  - Learn techniques and content
  - Practice using techniques and taking the test
- **Day before and day of the test:**
  - Don't do new problems
  - Review materials
  - Be confident and optimistic



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