

Long-Term Planning (Practical and Psychological)

Look at the entrance scores that you got on your GRE entrance diagnostic. Move up one improvement band. That is the score you can reasonably expect after a few months of hard work.

Now look into the graduate school programs of your choice. Find out what kind of GRE scores they expect, either as a minimum or an average. Schools sometimes post these scores on their websites or in the US News and World Report. Alternatively, you can often call a department or admissions and ask them about incoming GRE scores. Are these scores in line with your reasonably expected outcome? If so, celebrate and hit the books!

If you find that there is a major mismatch between your goals and your expectations, then you will have to make one or two adjustments:

- Look for schools with GRE expectations more in line with your expected score, and / or
- Plan to spend more time preparing for this exam than you had thought.

Stan the typical Student is hoping for a 160 math score, but his entrance score was only 140. He has a long, long way to go. He must improve from the lower half to the upper quarter. Only the exceptional improver can do that. On top of that, Stan works full-time. “I just can’t afford to quit my job,” he says. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, Stan, but you are setting yourself up for quite a challenge!

If you are really serious about changing your career path, then you need to start thinking like your future self, not your past self. In other words, you need to prioritize GRE and grad-school applications over your job – you know, the job you’re trying to get away from?! This preparation is not something that you’ll “just get out of the way.” It is your life now! That’s a hard pill for most working adults to swallow, but think about the choice you’ve made. Is it worth it? Is it so important to you that you can make some sacrifices now?

If it looks like you have a mountain to climb on your GRE, then start psychologically preparing yourself for the idea that it might take a year longer than you thought. How will you get through that year?

- Cut down on work hours
- Cut down on non-work activities (church, volunteering, social life)
- Lean on parents / spouse / savings for financial support
- Move in with roommates

I know it’s tough, but most successful graduates started as starving students. It comes with the territory. Changing your career path is one of life’s greatest challenges. It will take hard work and sacrifice, but **YOU CAN DO IT!!!**