

Genre Analysis of GRE Essay

Introduction

GRE is a test for for graduate application especially in the United States and for those students who want to add some competitiveness to their application. Among the several parts in GRE test, GRE essay is something that I am genuinely interested in because of the desire to improve my English and prepare for my graduate education as early as possible. Therefore, GRE essay makes for a worthwhile subject for this genre analysis essay. By examining its unique structures and tones across several sample GRE essays, it becomes obvious that purpose of the GRE essay is to test argumentative ability, vocabulary, and the ability for a student to write in-depth texts.

Body Paragraph

GRE test was started in 1936 and includes sections of analytical writing, quantitative reasoning, and verbal reasoning (Educational Testing Service, 2023). It is used as a way to test students who aspire to apply for graduate schools. Importantly, the analytical writing is a major part of GRE test and is scored on a scale of zero to six, with a score above four counting as a relatively good score. The analytical writing section is basically an essay that requires the test taker to write a response to the given prompt in 350 to 600 words in 30 minutes. The scope of the GRE essay topics usually include writing agree/disagree response to a statement that is about large-scale social phenomenon (Educational Testing Service, 2023). According to the official GRE test holder the Education Testing Center (2023), some of the examples are whether the test taker agrees that college education should be free, whether materialism prevents people from becoming independent, whether teachers should

praise positive behaviors while ignoring the negative behaviors, and so on, which are rather general and prevalent phenomena that require understanding of the society and in-depth thinking in a short time.

When we more closely examine the details of sample GRE essays gotten from ETC website (2012), it is obvious that they share some similarities in terms of style, structure, and tones. More specifically, in response to the prompt that asks whether instilling in people a sense of cooperation is better than competition, the sample essays nearly all follow a structure, which is an introduction paragraph that either paraphrases the prompt or writes something that does not seem to be directly related to the prompt but rather serves as a powerful start for their arguments later on.

For example, a sample essay that received the score of six writes in the beginning that people sometimes argue that “history is a worthless subject”, and when they do, the author “simply hold my tongue and smile to myself” (ETS, 2012, p. 12). This beginning sentence seems unrelated to the prompt, but the writer later links this beginning and the whole essay to the prompt by examining historical evidence and how it explains that instilling a sense of cooperation in people is better than teaching them competition only. Another example is an essay that responds to the same prompt and received a score of five. Specifically, this five-score essay writes begins with the direct answer to the question by stating that while cooperation and competition are both valuable and important, “a sense of cooperation is much more important” (ETS, 2012, p. 17). This is the end of the first paragraph and is basically a thesis statement that shows which side of the argument this essay stands on.

Similarly, an essay that received a score of four begins with the very much the same

introduction paragraph and thesis statement when it directly answers the prompt in the first few sentences and ends the first paragraph with the thesis statement that “it is important for leaders to have a sense of competition” (ETS, 2012, p. 20). What is also similar between all the essays mentioned above is that they all present their own side of the argument and counterargument in the body paragraphs. Specifically, the essay that received the six in score uses the second paragraph to write about how competitiveness is harmful based on historical evidence, including Hitler’s competitiveness and the tragedy he caused. Then, this six-score essay uses the third paragraph to argue how cooperation is beneficial compared to the competitiveness. The same structure can be seen in the essay that received a score of five because it uses the second and third paragraph to present both sides of the argument.

In addition, the same structure is seen in the essay that received a score of four, as it writes about how cooperation is important for people to live in society and then starts with the word “However” and writes about how competitiveness is more important from his standpoint (ETS, 2012, p. 21). Although each time these essays write their own agreed argument in a different order, or they may have different arguments altogether, it is the structure that they write their stance on the issue, acknowledge the counterargument, and compare them to prove that their point is true that shows their similarity.

Importantly, there is another similarity, which is their use of transition words. For example, readers can see many words such as “while”, “although”, “however”, “unfortunately”, “but”, and other words that show a turn of logic. In other words, these essay may acknowledge one thing at first, but they then express that the things they just acknowledges may not be entirely true. These kinds of transition words can be seen in these

essays and made the essays sound argumentative and logical. In fact, a research article explains that GRE essay is closely associated with argumentative essay and specifically tests argument ability of the test taker (Kalpana et al., 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, GRE essay basically tests the students' ability to write in-depth and logical arguments in response to the prompt. While GRE essays can differ a lot in their specific arguments and stance, they are also similar because the sample essays all begin with an introduction section and a thesis statement, and then, they use two separate paragraphs to discuss two sides of the argument of the prompt.

References

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Appendices

Appendix 1 (GRE Essay of a score 6)

The following sample issue response received a score of 6:

Whenever people argue that history is a worthless subject or that there is nothing to be gained by just “memorizing a bunch of stupid names and dates,” I simply hold my tongue and smile to myself. What I’m thinking is that, as cliché as it sounds, you do learn a great deal from history (and woe to those who fail to learn those lessons). It is remarkable to think of the number of circumstances and situations in which even the most rudimentary knowledge of history will turn out to be invaluable. Take, for example, the issue at hand here. Is it better for society to instill in future leaders a sense of competition or cooperation? Those who have not examined leaders throughout time and across a number of fields might not have the ability to provide a thorough and convincing answer to this question, in spite of the fact that it is crucial to the future functioning of our society. Looking closely at the question of leadership and how it has worked in the past, I would have to agree that the best way to prepare young people for leadership roles is to instill in them a sense of cooperation.

Let us look first at those leaders who have defined themselves based on their competitiveness. Although at first glance it may appear that a leader must have a competitive edge in order to gain and then maintain a leadership position, I will make two points on

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this subject. First, the desire to compete is an inherent part of human nature; that is, it is not something that needs to be “instilled” in young people. Is there anyone who does not compete in some way or another every single day? You try to do better than others in your school work or at the office, or you just try to do better than yourself in some way, to push yourself. When societies instill competitiveness in their leaders, it only leads to trouble. The most blatant example in this case is Adolf Hitler, who took competition to the very extreme, trying to prove that his race and his country were superior to all. We do not, however, need to look that far to find less extreme examples (i.e., Hitler is not the extreme example that disproves the rule). The recent economic meltdown was caused in no large part by the leaders of American banks and financial institutions who were obsessed with competing for the almighty dollar. Tiger Woods, the ultimate competitor in recent golfing history and in many ways a leader who brought the sport of golf to an entirely new level, destroyed his personal life (and perhaps his career -- still yet to be determined) by his overreaching sense that he could accomplish anything, whether winning majors or sleeping with as many women as possible. His history of competitiveness is well documented; his father pushed him from a very early age to be the ultimate competitor. It served him well in some respects, but it also proved to be detrimental and ultimately quite destructive.

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Leaders who value cooperation, on the other hand, have historically been less prone to these overreaching, destructive tendencies. A good case in point would be Abraham Lincoln. Now, I am sure at this point you are thinking that Lincoln, who served as President during the Civil War and who refused to compromise with the South or allow secession, could not possibly be my model of cooperation! Think, however, of the way Lincoln structured his Cabinet. He did not want a group of “yes men” who would agree with every word he said, but instead he picked people who were more likely to disagree with his ideas. And he respected their input, which allowed him to keep the government together in the North during a very tumultuous period (to say the least).

My point in choosing the Lincoln example is that competitiveness and conflict may play better to the masses and be more likely to be recorded in the history books, but it was his cooperative nature that allowed him to govern effectively. Imagine if the CEO of a large company were never able to compromise and insisted that every single thing be done in exactly her way. Very quickly she would lose the very people that a company needs in order to survive, people with new ideas, people ready to make great advances. Without the ability to work constructively with those who have conflicting ideas, a leader will never be able to strike deals, reach consensus, or keep an enterprise on track. Even if you are the

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biggest fish in the pond, it is difficult to force your will on others forever; eventually a bigger fish comes along (or the smaller fish team up against you!).

In the end, it seems most critical for society to instill in young people a sense of cooperation. In part this is true because we seem to come by our competitive side more naturally, but cooperation is more often something we struggle to learn (just think of kids on the playground). And although competitive victory is more showy, more often than not the real details of leadership come down to the ability to work with other people, to compromise and cooperate. Getting to be President of the United States or the managing director of a corporation might require you to win some battles, but once you are there you will need diplomacy and people-skills. Those can be difficult to learn, but if you do not have them, you are likely to be a short-lived leader.

Comments on sample essay receiving score of 6:

This outstanding response earns a score of 6 for presenting an insightful position on the issue and supporting its analysis with compelling reasons and persuasive examples. The response takes the insightful position that competition, though necessary to some aspects of leadership, is less important for young people to learn

Appendix 5 (GRE Essay of a score 5)

The following sample issue response received a score of 5:

Cooperation, the act of working as a group to achieve a collective goal, is an important value for young children to learn. Another vital life lesson children can learn is how to be competitive, which is a mindset in which a person feels the need to accomplish more than another person. Both are necessary to become well rounded individuals, but concerning preparing for a future in government, industry or various other fields, a sense of cooperation is much more important.

While not all children are overly competitive in nature, every person has some level of competitive drive inside them. This is a natural thing and is perfectly normal. Unfortunately, if this competitive nature is emphasized, the child will have problems relating socially to other children, and subsequently, will have issues interacting with adults later in life. A fierce competitive drive will blind an individual, causing them to not see situations where group effort will be more greatly rewarded than an individual effort. Take for instance the many teams of people working for NASA. If the people that make up these teams were all out to prove that they were superior to others, our entire space program would be jeopardized. One needs to look beyond the scope of what is best on an individual level and learn to look at what will most benefit

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a broad group of people. This is where instilling a sense of cooperation in young children is vital. Cooperation is taught at an early age and must be emphasized throughout life to fully embrace the concept.

In the world of sports a competitive drive is vital; unfortunately, life is not a sports game that simply leads to a winning or losing score. Life is far more complex than this simple idea and there is no winner or loser designation to accompany it. We all have to work together to come to a conclusion that will assist not just ourselves, but others and future generations. In every scenario there will be individuals that have brilliant ideas, but those ideas require other people to build upon, perfect and implement. Take for instance Bill Gates; Bill Gates is responsible for the Microsoft corporation which he invented in his garage. His competitive drive assisted in building his idea, but it was the collaborative effort of many people that helped propel his invention into the world known product it is today. Without the cooperation of others, his genius invention might never have made it out of his garage.

It may be true that an individual can change the world, but only so far as to say that an individual can construct an idea that will inevitably change the world. Once an idea is formulated, it then takes a team of people working collectively towards a common

Appendix 7 (GRE Essay of a score 4)

is vital but insufficient for life because life is “more complex” than a sporting event, and cooperation, which is critical but more difficult to learn. In addition, the writer conveys meaning clearly, demonstrating sentence variety and a facility with language that is more than adequate. There are a few minor errors, mainly typos and misspelled words, but language control in this response is more than adequate (e.g., “One needs to look beyond the scope of what is best on an individual level and learn to look at what will most benefit a broad group of people.”). Because of its facility with language and its thoughtful position on the issue, this response earns a score of 5.

The following sample issue response received a score of 4:

When the generation of today matures, it is important for them to succeed and become the successful leaders in government, industry and other fields. There are many traits that leaders must possess, and cooperation is one of these very important characters. Nonetheless it is important for leaders to have a sense of competition, so as to prevent themselves from being complacent with their position.

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Cooperation is needed in order to be a functional person in society, while still adhering to social standards. Most leaders in society, did not start out as such. A person cannot isolate themselves from others with demeanor and attitude and expect to become an executive. While there may be leaders that have developed this ill attitude towards others, they did not get there by being that way. A person who is able to effectively cooperate with others, will subsequently develop a nexus of supporters. Through collaboration, people are able to develop their studies further and better themselves.

However, it is still important for there to be a sense of competition. Competition is the root of motivation for most. It drives us to become stronger, smarter, and to want more. Nonetheless, the spirit of competition must also be reigned in, and not be allowed to run wild. Competitiveness can lead to abuse of power and distasteful actions, which is quite the opposite of someone who displays cooperativeness.

Some may argue that competition is not needed. That those that are meant to be leaders will not become complacent, because they have their own internal drive to lead. If there was no competition, there would be no world records. Michael Phelps may not be a leader

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of government or industry, but he is certainly educated on the technique of swimming, and leader in his field. Would he be as good as he is today if there was not competition? Would the leaders of Microsoft have been motivated to create Bing if there was no Google?

Cooperation helped many leaders get where they are today, and will continue to do so in the future. But leaders, as well as those that aspire to be one, all need to have a sense of competition as well.

Comments on sample essay receiving score of 4:

This adequate response presents a clear position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task, arguing that both competition and cooperation are important for leaders. The response uses counterarguments both in the construction of its overall position (comparing the value of both competition and cooperation) and in its discussion of the positive and negative aspects of competition. However, the development of ideas in this response is not as thorough or as persuasive as one would expect to see in a response that earns a score of 5 or 6. For instance, the example of Microsoft inventing Bing to compete with Google is certainly relevant, but it is not developed with any thoughtfulness. It is simply stated. Other examples are somewhat more fully developed, but there is also