

MBA  
Application  
Guide  
2013-14



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## Foreward

First of all, I would like to welcome you to GMAT Club, the largest MBA community of Business School applicants, current business school students, admissions consultants, directors, and alumni. GMAT Club is regularly visited by over 300,000 people each month. We are not an admissions consulting company nor do we provide any admissions related services. However, we do provide support, boost your morale, and are here for you. The value we provide cannot be purchased or found anywhere else:

- GMAT Club is an **information resource** and whether you are just starting your journey or about to apply, I guarantee that you will find a wealth of information here to help you along in your business school research and application process.
- GMAT Club is a **support network** that enables you to connect with people who have gone or are currently going through the same process. Applying to MBA programs is a very difficult and stressful process but together we have a greater chance to get the most out of it (and also have a greater chance to remain sane by the end).
- GMAT Club is a **community well**. You are welcome to draw knowledge from it whenever you need it, but the well stays full through those who contribute back.

Truly Yours,

BB, Founder of GMAT Club



## Why MBA?

This fall, every MBA applicant will be answering this question in their mind, at family gatherings, and in their business school applications. Most dread hearing it asked because they never have the perfect answer nor will it be the same every time. At first, the answer usually starts off a bit uncertain, vague, and somewhat insecure, but as time progresses and a few essay drafts are written, the explanation becomes more polished and confident. Throughout my eight years with GMAT Club, I have heard many explanations – anything from a career change to a fresh start after a broken relationship. As you consider your answer, I'd like to share the top 3 reasons most use to pursue a business degree and how you can stand out. Whatever you decide to put in your essays, remember that the key to getting into your first choice school and being happy there, is to be honest, passionate, and committed.

### Top 3 Reasons for getting an MBA

- **Career Change**

Changing careers or functions, such as going from IT into consulting or finance into marketing, is probably the most common reason for getting an MBA. Workers switch careers several times during their life time (2-3 times is the latest statistics) and MBA is a good and frequent path. For one, switching a career is not easy – why would anyone take a finance person to do a marketing job? Business school offers a buffer to that (taking marketing classes, getting a marketing internship, and networking with students and alumni in the field). Second, business school often allows one to “sample” careers in the safe environment of a class or a small group. Often thrown into groups with students from all walks of life, one gets the inside perspective on what many industries and jobs are like – consulting, banking, etc. Finally, a career change could also mean starting your own business or vice versa and business school could allow one to gain the missing skills or build key relationships for their future business. Many schools want to attract successful or promising entrepreneurs and sponsor business plan competitions such as the Business Plan Challenge at University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

- **Recommendation:**

The keys to cracking this question are:

- to be as specific as possible in your response, such as “I would like to become an IT outsourcing consultant in the United States, working for Accenture”.
- To clearly outline your current role and how MBA will help you bridge into the new one.
- To demonstrate understanding of the role you are planning to pursue.

- **Career Advancement**

Often people get stuck in lower/middle management in large organizations and it may take years for the next promotion. MBA is a good way to break this pattern and

signal that you are ready for a stronger position in middle/senior management. For others, a promotion may be there but they are lacking management/business skills to step into it. This is the best situation to be in and a very common reason to enroll into Executive or Part-Time programs. This is a financially advantageous move if sponsored by the employer – the applicant keeps their income, gets free tuition, and is guaranteed a job after graduation in exchange for longer-term commitment. However, the common opinion is that the non-financial value of part-time programs falls short of a Full Time 2-year MBA program which allows one to focus on their career goals and dedicate themselves to self-improvement without major distractions (no, they never have pool parties in business school).

Recommendation: 1) A common path is to paint a strong image of current/past successes, outline that you are at the limit of your career/skill-set, and the next logical step is an MBA that will open a number of doors. 2) Be realistic and avoid coming off naïve about the value of MBA and what it will give you. MBA is not a magical transformation and as the July-August issue of Harvard Business Review suggests – management is not a profession and business education is not one-size-fits-all (See “No, Management is Not a Profession” by Richard Barker, HBR 2010).

### Final Recommendations:

After you are done answering the “Why MBA” question, the admissions committee should clearly see that you are in a great need of an MBA and by declining you, they will be making a big mistake

This may sound counter-intuitive but apply to your second choice schools first. Many applicants find that they write much better essays and applications after some practice. Pick your schools carefully – only apply to the schools that you would actually attend. Ask yourself – “If I only get into school X, will I actually attend X?” This will save you time and energy

Research, Research, Research. You must know everything about your top choice school – it will give you an edge in the entire application package (selecting the right recommender or performing well on the interview) and will show in your essays one way or another and will catch an eye of the admissions committee

### Top 3 Wrong Reasons for getting an MBA:

- **Replacement for work experience:** Though there are MBA programs that will enroll students straight from college, most emphasize the need for work experience and require applicants to demonstrate a degree of leadership before admission. There is a reason work experience is required – it will help you better apply class knowledge, enable you to contribute to the class more, fit in with other students, and finally get a job after graduation.
- **Specific Training** – getting an MBA in order to reap financial or marketing training that can be achieved faster and more effectively using other programs.
- **Figure out one’s life** – yes, MBA is a break for 20 months but it is a terrible reason if all you want to do is figure out your personal life and goals. Everyone will be doing some soul-searching during the program but nobody likes a confused person without goals or purpose.

**Recommended Reading:**

Great book on writing business school application essays: [Great Application Essays for Business School by Paul Bodine](#)

Good overall book for business school admissions: [How to Get into the Top MBA Programs by Richard Montauk](#)

Collection of real essays with analysis: [Business School Essays that Made a Difference by Princeton Review](#)



## Why MBA? Why Now?

As you can see, there are two questions here: Why are you pursuing an MBA? And why is now the best time for you to do so? Let's jump right in.

### Why MBA?

Another way to phrase this question is: What do you want to do that requires an MBA? After all, isn't your reason for getting an MBA the fact that you want to use your MBA in the future? Therefore, when addressing this question, you must focus on what your career goals are and why you need an MBA to achieve them.

### Short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals

Before you draft your goals essay, you need to work out three types of goals: short-term, intermediate, and long-term. Short-term goals are immediately post-MBA until about two years later; intermediate goals are about two to five years post MBA; and long-term goals are those goals from five years in the future onwards. Essays usually ask for short- and long-term goals, but awareness of your intermediate goals will help you bridge the gap between the two.

When describing your goals you'll want to be more specific for your short-term goals since they're the direct link to your MBA program. Define your short-term goal in terms of function and industry. In other words, what do you want to do after your MBA (not study during the program) and in what industry do you see yourself doing it? If geographic location is relevant, include it too.

As you progress to your intermediate and then long-term goals, it's okay to use less detail; nobody knows with certainty where they'll be in 20 years, so it's not expected that you describe the far off future in as much detail as you do the short-term. Also, since no one can predict the future of an industry in flux (like healthcare), be sure that your goals reflect this fluidity.

### Answering specific goals questions

Read the question carefully, and emphasize in your writing what the question emphasizes (e.g., does the question ask for a description of short-term and long-term goals specifically, or does it just mention post-MBA goals in a more general manner?). In other words, [let the question guide you](#).

Often a question will ask why you want an MBA or why you want to attend a particular program. Link these points directly to your goals – again, your career goal is your reason for attending a specific program and for pursuing an MBA. If a specific program will help you develop the skills you need for a particular goal, then there's your answer for "Why MBA" and for "Why MBA at this particular school."

### Creating clear, concise goals

[www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide](http://www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide)

You should create goals that are clear, credible, and convincing. That's Step 1. Some programs, either in essay or interview questions will also want to know how your goals developed. What's motivating you? What makes you tick? An authentic answer that tells your story creates excitement about your dream. You want the adcom to respond to your essay with, "Wow, it would be amazing if she could achieve that!" Think of it like this: You want to turn your reader into your personal cheerleader.

*Let's look at a couple of factors that can really engage the reader in the story of your goal.*

**What is experience?** When you describe an experience, you are describing those events – the when, where, and how – that lead to the development of your goals.

**What is motivation?** Motivation is that pivotal point when an experience gained traction with you, when you became captivated and engaged in such a way that you were led to pursue a specific path. It can contain emotional, experiential, and analytical elements.

While generally separate entities, these elements can be intertwined in your goals essay. Here is a brief example, slightly modified from a goals essay co-author Cindy Tokumitsu and I wrote for a hypothetical applicant in [The Consultants Guide to MBA Admission](#):

*Last year, when I was in Taiwan advising a global financial services company on consolidating its Asia strategy, I found myself thinking what a shame it was that my relationship with the client proved responsive rather than proactive. With my knowledge of the region's changing demographic and logistical realities, I could have recommended strategic opportunities a year ago to prevent the client from getting bogged down in redundant acquisitions and incompatible markets. Following that experience, I envisioned a new consulting paradigm resembling primary care medicine, based on a long-term, prevention focused relationship between the consultant and client.*

Describing your experiences and motivation, when asked for them, will transform your goals from static to dynamic. Also, by highlighting your experiences, you'll enhance your credibility and create a story which is more memorable than pure exposition.

Important: Make sure that your goals really require an MBA. Any and all learning is helpful for almost any endeavor, but the adcoms want to see that you really need the resources that an MBA (and specifically an MBA from their program) will offer.

## Why Now?

In addition to asking why you need an MBA, many b-school goals essays will also ask you to explain why you are applying now. This question provides yet another way for you to explain that an MBA is right for you.

The "Why now?" question is really a focus and maturity question. You may have rock-solid, detailed career goals and a strong case for how an MBA will help you achieve them, but if you can't explain why you need to pursue your MBA now – now and not a year from now – then the adcoms may conclude that you're applying now for the wrong reasons.

A sense of urgency or momentum will convince the adcom that your seat in the next MBA class is a necessity.

The implicit "I need it now" mentality should infuse your essay. The fact that all of your

experiences and motivations have led you to this point and that the lack of an MBA will keep you from following that trajectory of your leadership roles, skills, and functional breadth should underlie the description of your goals. There should be no [“Why MBA?”](#) answer without a “Why now?” answer alongside it or implicit within it.



## How to Start Researching Business Schools

You decided to get an MBA. Great! But from where? There's a lot of amazing business schools out there. How do you know which one is a good fit for you? Besides the well-recognized names, which ones should you apply to? Where do you start your search? [EssaySnark](#) is here with some advice to get you started.

Obviously you found **GMAT Club** and so half your battle is done! There are some remarkable resources here that will help you learn about these schools. The school-specific forums are incredibly helpful for discussions about a particular program.

A note of caution when reading things on the Internet: **Much of the admissions process is incredibly subjective.** One person may dislike a school for the same reasons that you would find it appealing, and misinformation and strong opinions abound. Keep an open mind, and do a lot of follow-up on anything you hear. You must rely on your own instincts – trust but verify.

### How many schools should you be targeting?

[EssaySnark](#) recommends applying to six or so MBA programs throughout the entirety of the admissions season. If you do a good job on that many, you're going to end up with a couple offers to choose from. If you're starting early enough to get some Round 1 apps in, then three or four applications per round is ideal. If Round 2 will be your first submissions, then you need to apply to more schools. Be reasonable though. If you try to do more than four or five schools at once, you'll get totally burned out. The quality will suffer and your chances of admission go down drastically.

However, at this early stage, **don't limit yourself.** Your job right now is to explore all your options and identify the best schools for you. Your list can be fairly long here at the beginning. Keep adding to it as you hear about schools that you like. Stay open-minded. The schools that end up on your short list may be ones you hadn't even heard of at the beginning!

In addition, you shouldn't be afraid to cross schools off your list, for any reason. Over time you should be whittling the list of targets down. **Aim to identify eight to ten MBA programs that you're interested in over the next few weeks.**

[The EssaySnark blog has a resources page for researching schools.](#) In addition, we're offering these tips to get you started.

### Here's how to start your school research project:

## Figure out why you want an MBA.

This may sound a little silly, but a lot of people don't put enough thought into the whole reason behind their interest in the MBA. A useful tool to begin with is [this GMAT Club article from Accepted.com: Where should you apply? \(with case studies\)](#). Answering some of those questions for yourself and knowing why you want an MBA can take you far in understanding which schools are good targets for you. Do some preliminary work to identify your interests and goals at the outset and you'll be in a stronger position for all the important decisions to come in the application process.

## Tap your network.

Do you know anyone with an MBA? If people at work already know that you're interested in bschool, then ask around at the office (obviously you won't want to do so if it will put your job in jeopardy). If you work at a big company, you could even look on the corporate website to see which executives have MBAs, and set up informational interviews with them. Or if you need to be more lowkey about the MBA at work, then leverage your social circle. Maybe a friend of a friend went to a school that you're interested in, or your college roommate was just accepted. Look on LinkedIn. Find people to talk to. Break out of your shell, make some phone calls, send a few emails.

**TIP:** Here's a great article on [How to Make Phone Calls in Business](#) from Mark Suster, a well-respected VC in California.

## Study the schools' websites.

**You may feel that a lot of the schools' websites sound the same. They are all trying to market to you using similar language, and sometimes it gets overwhelming. At this stage of your research, pay more attention to the parts of the site focused on students. Don't worry about the application instructions just yet. Look at the class profile, and see if they have biographies of current students and recent alum. Check out their academic offerings and student clubs. There's a core set of common features that all schools share – all of them have a Corporate Finance class and a Consulting Club – but there's also a lot of differences. You'll start to understand what each school is about as you have more and more interactions with them.**

**TIP:** [Get any school guides available for the programs you're interested in](#), and see what different advice and insights others have to offer.

## Sign up for all the schools' emails.

Most schools let you register your interest with them before you even start an application. While you're on their website, one of the first things you should do is to sign up for their email announcements. Many schools track candidates by geography and you'll get advance news about information sessions in your area.

## Take notes!

At this stage you're a sponge, absorbing information – but it can be overwhelming. Keep tabs on the insights you learn. When you add a school to your list, make notes on WHY you're interested in them. You need to have reasons for choosing a school (not just the fact that they're highly ranked). You might also want to note the reason for eliminating a school for consideration, so you can remember your thought process later on. Also, keep track of who you've spoken to and what you talked about. These notes can not only help you organize all this information you're collecting, they'll also be a huge asset to you later on, when you're writing essays and you're telling the adcom why you are interested in their program.

**TIP:** You might want to create a spreadsheet to record the important attributes that you care about and which schools offer them.

### **Finally: Timebox the process.**

While the research phase never really ends – you'll still be discovering new things about your programs of interest all the way through, including the interview experience and Admit Weekend – it's also a phase that can get away from you if you let it. It's important to set an initial strategy and move on within a reasonable amount of time. Give yourself a few weeks – or a month – but set yourself a deadline by which you'll at least have a shortlist of eight-ish schools identified.

Talking to people about their experiences in business school is invaluable in helping you learn about schools and discovering what to focus on in your selection process. The best people to speak with are current students and recent graduates. Not only can they share their experiences with you, they can often give you input about the other schools they considered when they were applying. Just keep in mind that schools change; the policies and programs that may have been in effect when someone else went through the admissions process a year or two ago may not apply any longer. Take in all the information you can and be sure to verify it before proceeding.

Remember too that interacting with the school itself is the best way to get reliable information and insights about their program. You really can only figure out if a school is right for you by interacting with the school community directly. This means, if possible, taking a trip to visit. Or, attend a local info session. That “talk to people” step is critically important. Bschool is a tremendous investment of time, energy, and money. You want to be an informed consumer when you choose which schools to apply to.

To wrap things up, we have to mention the obvious: We didn't mention anything about your profile and choosing schools. Yes, GPA and GMAT scores matter – but you shouldn't be deciding which schools to apply to based solely on those statistics. If your GMAT score is very low, then it may limit your options, and of course you need to be realistic, based on what you'll be presenting to the adcom. To be more confident of your chances, you'll want to find schools whose accepted students' GMAT scores are in line with yours. If you fall outside the 80% range (usually published on the schools' websites) then you're going to have a tougher time getting in. Not impossible, but definitely not the easy route.

At this early stage, you're deciding which schools are interesting to you. It's kind of like going on an online dating site and looking at profiles of people who are available. Any of them might be The One... but who knows which it will be? Lots of them seem very

attractive. **You need to get to know them a little bit more before you will be able to decide.**



## Getting to Know Your Shortlisted Schools

Now that you've narrowed down the full universe of business schools to a more manageable list of ten or so MBA programs, [EssaySnark](#) has a few more tips for taking your research to the next level.

### Follow your schools on Twitter and [Facebook](#)

Many schools have multiple Twitter accounts – not just the admissions team, but often other accounts that broadcast school news, and for career services, and often different research departments and rockstar professors too.

**TIP:** *Consider creating a new Twitter account for yourself just for your bschool admissions project. You don't have to do that but it would allow you to have a more focused experience, and sometimes the schools follow back – if you're using a bschool-only account for yourself, then there's no risk that they'll see your tweets to your friends.*

### Attend any and all school webinars, Twitter chats, and especially any in-person events that you can.

Most schools send admissions staff around the world in the summertime so it's very likely that there will be information sessions happening somewhere near you. Other schools have virtual events and discussions. Look for online MBA fairs and other opportunities to interact with the schools. Webinars with admissions consultants are certainly also helpful (you can learn about those here on GMAT Club) but your priority needs to be the schools themselves.

### Talk to current students.

Many schools have a way to contact students with questions. Look on their websites for email addresses and contact forms. Wharton, for example, has the [S2S Discussion Forum](#) where you can post a question for current students and alumni to answer. There's only a few Wharton alumni who are active on that forum and keep in mind that they are not admissions representatives, so sometimes the answers given seem a little off (that's just [EssaySnark's](#) opinion). However, those forums and direct contact with students are a great way to get valuable information from the school community.

### Reach out to admissions.

A few schools will let you do a pre-application consult with their admissions teams, to talk about your goals and whether their program is a good fit. The Duke Cross-Continent MBA is one such program that has this. Definitely take advantage of this if it's available (just to be clear though, this is not something that most top full-time programs do; it's the less-common programs and schools that tend to offer it). However, unless you have a really good reason, [EssaySnark](#) feels that it's best to avoid contacting the admissions people outside of their regular outreach channels like info sessions and chats. Most people's application questions can be answered through a search through the school's website. If you have an unusual situation that you need guidance on, then sure, you can ask admissions what to do. Often though, people contact admissions when they don't need to, and sometimes that can backfire.

### **The best way to learn about a school is to visit.**

Obviously this is time- and resource-intensive so you wouldn't do it for just any school. However, once you start to narrow your list, there's nothing more valuable than visiting the campus in terms of the ROI it offers on knowing whether it's a good fit for you.

A quick warning about the advice above regarding outreach to schools and students: Make sure that your communication has a purpose! If sending an email to a student, you need to pose a question for them – and be sure it's a good one! Don't contact people just for the sake of contacting them, and definitely don't waste people's time by asking something that could easily be answered from the website. Many school websites are a little lacking, so it may require some digging on your part, but be sure to make that effort before you ask a question of anyone at the school (either a student or the admissions team).

The process of selecting schools can be a little daunting. Take your time with it, and be as thorough as you can. Just like with dating, it's the kind of effort you need to put in for yourself – nobody else can tell you what the right school for you is. You need to have some quality time with the school before you can decide if they might be The One.

[EssaySnark](#) invites you to read some of the applicant Success Stories on our blahg – almost all of them talk about how they found the school they applied to and the process (it's a little like falling in love – lots of fun but often some heartache!). Here's a great one to begin with: "[How I discovered the IESE was the school for me.](#)"

We hope that you'll have an equally exciting Success Story to share with us soon!



## Where Should You Apply?

You've decided that you are going to apply to b-school. Now you need to ask yourself the next critical question: WHERE? Where should you spend your next few years? Which city? Which country? And last but not least, WHICH PROGRAM?

[Accepted.com](http://Accepted.com) has designed a handy infographic, the [Accepted Positioning System](#), that will help you answer the important questions in a way that will lead you to your ideal MBA program. Here I'll highlight some of the questions that you'll encounter during your journey. The answers you provide will guide you on the most effective route to your goal:

### 1. What is your post-MBA goal?

- a. What job function do you see yourself doing?
- b. Which industry do you want to work in?
- c. Where (which country/city/environment) do you want to live?

### 2. Which schools support your goals?

- a. Are the companies you would like to work for recruiting for the functions/industries you would like to pursue at your target school?
- b. Do your target schools offer clubs and extra-curricular activities in your desired field (and if not, is it possible for you to start your own club)?
- c. Does the school's curriculum offer a major, concentration, or adequate coverage for your particular interests and goals?
- d. Are there professors who have done or are currently doing research in your area of interest or in a field where you want to acquire expertise?

### 3. What are your qualifications?

- a. Are you academically competitive? (Take a look at your GMAT/GRE score, transcript, additional courses, etc.)
- b. Do you have impressive work experience, qualitatively and quantitatively?
- c. Do your community service activities show additional skills and character traits (like initiative, leadership, responsibility, and teamwork)?

### 4. Choose your 4-8 schools to apply to

The schools that support your goals and at which you are competitive are the ones you should apply to. If there are lots of schools in that category, you're in luck! Apply to the ones that simply appeal to you most for whatever reasons. If no school meets those two

criteria, then you either need to improve your qualifications or adjust your goal.

*These questions are clear, but how do the answers guide you? Here are a few prototypical applicants so you can see at least on a superficial level how I would use this information.*

### **Joe**

- 1) Wants to go into Management Consulting at elite strat consulting firm
- 2) Schools to consider: HBS, Stanford, Kellogg, Tuck, Darden, Chicago, Wharton, MIT, Columbia, Haas, NYU Stern, Ross
- 3) Qualifications
  - a. 740 GMAT
  - b. 3.7 GPA from Princeton. Majored in econ and graduated in 2009.
  - c. Interned for boutique consulting firm in college.
  - d. Captain of tennis team at Princeton.
  - e. President of fraternity.
  - f. Joined army and served as an officer in combat. Should be discharged this June.
- 4) Where should he apply? HBS, Stanford, Wharton, Kellogg, and Tuck. Will apply to Darden, Haas, and Ross R2 if not accepted anywhere R1.

### **Jane**

1. Wants to go into marketing with focus on digital marketing and then maybe start her own company. Prefers to live in South Eastern US.
2. Schools to consider: Kellogg, Cornell, Haas, Duke, UNC, Ross, UCLA, Emory, UT, MIT, CMU Tepper
3. Qualifications
  - a. 680 GMAT with 65% on Quant. Highest score after 3 attempts. Taking MBAMath and several quant classes at local college to boost math skills, counteract low quant score, and prepare for quant demands of b-school.
  - b. 3.4 GPA from public ivy. Majored in econ and history. Graduated in 2007
  - c. Works as law firm manager in 20-lawyer office. Has been in charge of publicity and social media for firm which has seen tremendous growth from that channel. Started as a clerk after college and worked her way up.
  - d. Married has one child. Husband can work from anywhere.
  - e. Active in church and alumni association. Runs 5 and 10K races. In college was officer in sorority.
  - f. Wants to apply R1 for 2014.
4. Where should she apply? Duke, UNC, Darden and Kellogg for R1. Kellogg is a stretch, but she really likes its strength in marketing and collegial culture. Will include as a stretch. Will apply to UT and Emory round 2 if not accepted anywhere R1.

### **Ajay**

1. Has high tech product ideas and wants to start own business, if not immediately after MBA, then within five years after MBA. Attracted to design thinking.
2. Schools to consider: MIT, Haas, Stanford, CMU Tepper, UT Austin, UCLA, USC Marshall, Duke, Ross, Cornell Johnson, UNC, Babson, Rotman
3. Qualifications
  - a. 700 GMAT (51 quant; struggles with verbal). Took previously and had 660 and 680. Doesn't want to retake again.
  - b. Has 7.2/10 CGPA from IIT Madras. B. Tech. Graduated in 2008
  - c. Has been working for Tata Consulting on software consulting projects for last 3 years in the UK and Europe. Previously worked for Infosys as a programmer for two years in India. Can show increasing responsibility at work.
  - d. Was active in college, but hasn't done much since outside of work. Likes to play guitar and cricket.
  - e. Wants to apply in 2013-14
4. Where should he apply? Will apply to Darden, UCLA, UT Austin, and Duke R1. Will apply to UNC, USC Marshall, Babson, and Rotman if not accepted R1. Also considering Ross' MS in Entrepreneurship.

## Jack

1. Wants to go into R/E development/ finance and grow family business. Really prefers East Coast.
2. Schools to consider Harvard, Stanford, Wharton, Chicago, Columbia, NYU, Haas, Kellogg, Duke, Cornell, Rochester, Georgetown, UNC, UCLA, USC, LBS
3. Qualifications
  - a. 730 GMAT, balanced.
  - b. 2.9 from Georgetown. Class of '09 (Immature freshman year; Illness sophomore year; upward trend in last two years; dean's list as a senior) Majored in math; minored in Asian history. Has passed all 3 levels of CFA. Took a few business classes (accounting, stats for business, finance) online and got straight A's
  - c. Financial analyst program for 2 years. Then joined family property management business (outside NYC) for two years. Handled 2 8-figure property acquisitions.
  - d. Had been active in Romney campaign and in local Republican politics.
  - e. Wants to apply in 2013-14
4. Where should he apply? Will apply to Columbia, NYU Stern, Wharton, and Duke R1. If not accepted, will try for Chicago, UNC, UCLA, and Georgetown round 2. May substitute LBS for one of the last four.

Follow these steps to map out the route to the best MBA program for you. For more details, grab your copy of [Best MBA Programs: A Guide to Selecting the Right One.](#)



## MBA Specializations

The MBA is known as a general management degree, educating students in overall management skills so that they can understand the function of a business as a whole. There is more than just one type of MBA available. In addition to a general Business Administration program, there are MBA specializations available in a number of business sectors that graduates can pursue.

A specialized MBA is often an indication of a faculty or institutional strength; however, many business schools offering general MBA programs may be just as strong or stronger in a particular field, despite not offering a formal MBA concentration. But within virtually all MBA programs there are what are called the 'core specializations' and most business schools will feature these heavily in their syllabus.

### MBA Specialization Types

An MBA is typically a two-year program that aims to make the student proficient in various subjects of management and an expert for one. In the first year of an MBA the main focus is on giving students a brief idea about various subjects of management. Towards the end of the first year students are introduced to the specialized areas.

In the second year of an MBA, students have to choose one specialization from the variety of specializations available. This is not applicable if students have gained admission to a specialized course. Choosing a specialization can be a difficult process for students. It is very important for student to consider their career goals and professional development before choosing a specialization.

Students have the opportunity to either pursue a general management program or complete a specialization as part of the MBA program. Specializations are a matter of choice, not a prerequisite, and all students receive the same MBA education regardless of whether or not they complete a specialization. Students should consider their career goals and professional development in settling on a specialization.

*Listed below are the most common MBA specializations:*

### Finance

An MBA in finance is the oldest form of MBA specialization and probably one of the most popular. In the US, the finance department has become a battleground for business school supremacy. With the high profile of Wall Street amongst MBA recruiters, finance is one of the most eminent disciplines. An MBA in finance prepares you in various subjects, such as costing, management accounting and control, budgeting, international finance, banking, privatization, capital management, etc. The course will emphasize various aspects of financial theories, identification of best managerial practices in the area. After studying these subjects, the graduate becomes specialized in financial management, enabling him or her to work in the finance department of any organization. One becomes eligible for exciting careers in banks, financial consulting firms and financial institutions. One can get

involved in consumer and investment banking, institutional finance, merchant banking, corporate finance and international finance.

## **Marketing**

An MBA in marketing is very dynamic and competitive. An MBA in marketing will help enhance one's skills & knowledge in the field of marketing, advertising, public relations, etc. One needs to have excellent communication skills and resource mobilization skills, and an undying zeal to excel in marketing. This specialization can help accelerate entry and progress in some of the most competitive fields: marketing, advertising and public relations.

## **Entrepreneurship**

This is a controversial one because many claim that entrepreneurship is not something that can be taught. These criticisms miss the point that this MBA is really about business administration strategies that engender the same innovation that makes entrepreneurs so successful.

## **General Management**

The General Business Management MBA program is considered most popular MBA program as it offers comprehensive insight into the core elements of business including accounting, management, finance and marketing. MBA in General Management trains candidates in management and strategy for running business for organizations. The main aim of MBA in General Management is to train candidates in monitoring the general operations of the company. This program is designed for individuals wanting a broad, yet in-depth overview of business topics, enabling them to enter into any number of management roles. Usually, companies prefer candidates with solid job experience in general management before offering jobs pertaining to this field. Individuals looking to have a variety of career opportunities available to them upon graduation should consider pursuing a general management MBA. This path may also be suitable for business majors unsure of what specialization to pursue.

## **International Business**

With the relentless pace of globalization, organizations need professionals who know how to conduct business around the globe. That need has increased the demand - even at US-based companies - for graduates with degrees in international business. This MBA specialization provides an in-depth understanding of the organizational capabilities required for international operations, including specialized functions such as international marketing, finance etc. The degree may be thought of as an MBA with a particular focus on multinational corporations.

## **Operations**

Operations management is the corporate area in charge of designing, managing and

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tracking different processes. These processes are made up of interrelated, sequential activities through which the components and actors required (raw materials, labor, capital, information, the client, etc.) are transformed into products. The key is the value added through the process as perceived by the customer, i.e. the end product has a greater value than the elements pre-process. Companies now need a new kind of supply chain/logistics/operations manager and this need has led to the creation of an MBA in supply chain management or logistics & operations. An MBA in operations teaches the student how to deal with production management or shop floor management. One learns how to maintain process flows and to develop vendor and inter-departmental relationships. Most candidates with engineering backgrounds go for an MBA in operations, as it gives them an edge over their peers in product development and designing and in process optimization.

### **Information Technology**

In this technologically advanced world, no business can run without solid IT support. An MBA in IT is designed to educate & develop managers who can effectively manage the planning, design, selection, implementation, usage and administration of emerging and converging information and communications technologies.

IT graduates play essential roles on the business team, typically designing and implementing hardware and software solutions to business problems. They hold professional positions in areas such as client/server or web applications development, systems analysis and network administration.

### **Health Care Management**

The pharmaceuticals industry is a key player in the worldwide economy as more and more MBA graduates are opting for this trendy field. An MBA in healthcare covers core business skills and practices. However, it focuses on the specific issues managers may encounter in roles such as hospital administrators, medical practice managers, insurance-company executives and a wide variety of other roles. This is a specialization that can prepare graduates for management positions in health care facilities, pharmaceutical companies, insurance agencies, facilities for elderly care, and public health agencies. It's a growing industry, and thus is becoming an increasingly popular MBA.

As is the case in many key industries, MBA graduates tend to be recruited by the pharmaceutical sector as much for their potential as for any specific previous experience, although academic training in the sciences or a background in such areas as sales or marketing can sometimes prove to be an advantage. There are huge opportunities for MBA graduates in the health care field, and most of them pay very well. With an MBA in healthcare, one can find a good, well-paying position in a biomedical startup, e-health, consulting or pharmaceutical and medical device R&D.

### **Accounting**

Getting into an MBA program in this field of specialization offers in-depth knowledge that can help one find a senior level or management positions in different sectors.

An accounting MBA readies students for the CPA exam and jobs in business accounting administration. Students gain skills to become accountants, financial managers, auditors, and more.

## **Human Resources**

An MBA in HR management is for those wanting to develop a management career in HR and strategy. This includes labor markets, international leadership, recruiting, training, team building, performance updates, employee policy, salary, benefits and increments, employee health and safety as well as staff amenities. If one has good communication skills and a charismatic personality, and is dependable and confident, an MBA in HR can be just the thing. This MBA can lead to a key role managing a company's most important asset – its people.

## **Supply Chain Management**

An MBA in supply chain management is a unique and exciting opportunity in the field of business management. It includes inventory management, warehousing and transportation of various materials as required by a client or a company. Supply chain management can be done by graduates of any stream.

## **Media/Communication**

This one-of-a-kind MBA is geared to professionals already working in media or to students looking at jobs in media, advertising, journalism, and public relations. It was specifically designed to provide graduates with the foundation, skills, and competencies required to both understand and function within the complex legal, ethical, economic, and social dimensions of media management. Admission to this program usually requires entering students to have prior media, art or media related business expertise. MBA degrees in these fields are not as widespread as they are in finance, and they can give a real competitive edge in advancing to mid- to upper-level management positions.

## **Telecommunications**

An MBA in this particular field equips students with a global vision of the business convergence process currently taking place and poised to form one of the major industries of the 21st century. It is oriented to innovative professionals of any background who want to plan a career path in the digital economy, either as a key player in a leading multinational or as an entrepreneur.

Telecommunications have made huge leaps forward in the past two decades. It is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. The emphasis is on the value added services, such as e-mail, cellular phones, WAP etc in developed countries and in improving basic telephone availability in developing countries. This sector plays a key role in encouraging growth in the industrial and services sector.

## **How to Choose an MBA Specialization**

MBA programs come in all shapes and sizes, but most prospective students play it safe and go for finance, marketing, or management. One of the main reasons for this is that they do not fully investigate the diversity of specializations out there. This is a great

shame, because only once a student knows the full range of MBA options available, can they select the one that best fits their career goals.

As more and more universities offer MBA programs, it is becoming ever more difficult for candidates to decide on which business school offers the most suitable MBA program to meet their requirements. Many business schools are deviating from the 'generalist' system, which has been the typical MBA model for the last thirty years. Today one can choose from a wide range of MBA specializations, ranging from an MBA in financial studies, as well as insurance and risk management accountancy and finance, to an MBA in sports management, or even an MBA in technology.

The standard specializations are marketing, finance, human resources, IT/IS, operations and entrepreneurship; but these are rapidly being joined by more specific subjects, such as corporate social responsibility, wine management, football industries, luxury brand management, hotel management, etc.

How should students go about deciding which specialization is best for them? There are a number of ways that individuals can easily make that decision and get on the road to earning a specialized MBA that pays off in the long run. Here are some things to consider:

**School ranking** - Make sure that the school is well ranked for that specialization (see above). Different specializations will have different rankings, so do the research – prospective employers will certainly do theirs.

**Program length** - Both one-year and two-year programs are available. A two-year course allows you to be a generalist in year one, and move to specialist in year two. On the other hand, a one-year specialist MBA is really a branding exercise as there is not enough time to cover both standard MBA topics and the specialization within the limited time available.

**Personal strengths** - If you prefer working alone or consider yourself a leader, a specialization in entrepreneurship might help you in your quest to start your own business. Do you find health care intriguing? A specialization in health care management might be your best option. Take an honest inventory of your strengths and weaknesses.

**Personal interests** - Which classes interested you most in your undergraduate studies? If you shied away from math but loved international relations, you might want to consider an international program over finance. It may also be wise to look at your grades from those courses, to determine which fields stimulate you intellectually. The biggest tip any individual can get is more of a general education tip, but it still applies to MBA hopefuls looking into specializations: If you are considering going back to school for an MBA, then do it first for your own benefit, and select a specialization that interests you in addition to being useful towards achieving your goals.

**Career goals** - Do you want to create your own business, or run part of an established franchise? Would you like to travel, or will you be happy settling down with a long-established corporation in a big city? Knowing where you want to be in five years will help you determine where you should begin looking now. Do you want to stay in your current industry or are you interested in a career change? Those working in the field of finance and looking to advance in their field would be well advised to choose a finance specialization to help open doors to upper level management. However, if you have reached a glass ceiling and see no potential for growth in that field, you should consider a career change. A new specialization might be necessary. The most important thing is to

match up career experience and future potential in that field when considering a specialization.

After considering the above factors, start researching MBA programs and specializations. While new fields are arising, most schools have several standard specializations. Look at notable programs with lists of specializations that interest you. Most universities will include a list of their MBA specializations, or concentrations, on their websites. Ask for information from schools that interest you. In some cases, you may ask to meet with the professors who teach the specialization that interests you, which may help you in your decision to choose a certain field or university. Schedule an appointment with your university department or program advisor, if you are currently enrolled. Your advisor may be able to offer some insight on your options based on your strengths and weaknesses.

### Summary - MBA Specializations by School

- Harvard MBA Specializations: General Management, Nonprofit
- Stanford MBA Specializations: Entrepreneurship, General Management
- Wharton MBA Specializations: Finance, Entrepreneurship
- Columbia MBA Specializations: Finance, International Management
- Chicago MBA Specializations: Finance, Economics
- Kellogg MBA Specializations: Marketing, General Management
- MIT MBA Specializations: Information Systems, Entrepreneurship
- Berkeley MBA Specializations: Technology, Corporate social responsibility
- Tuck MBA Specializations: General Management, Corporate Strategy

### MBA Specialization Rankings

#### Harvard MBA Specialization Rankings:

- 1st - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2012)
- 1st - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2010)
- 1st - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2009)
- 1st - Global MBA in General Management rankings (Financial Times, 2012)
- 1st - Global MBA in General Management rankings (Financial Times, 2009)
- 1st - Global MBA in Corporate Strategy rankings (Financial Times, 2012)
- 2nd - Global MBA in General Management rankings (Financial Times, 2010)
- 2nd - Global MBA in Corporate Strategy rankings (Financial Times, 2009)
- 3rd - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2012)
- 3rd - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2009)
- 3rd - US MBA in Nonprofit rankings (US News, 2012)
- 4th - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2010)
- 5th - US MBA in International Management rankings (US News, 2010)
- 5th - US MBA in Nonprofit rankings (US News, 2010)
- 5th - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2010)

#### Stanford MBA Specialization Rankings:

- 1st - Global MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (Financial Times, 2012)
- 1st - Global MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (Financial Times, 2009)

2nd - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2012)  
 2nd - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2011)  
 2nd - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2010)  
 2nd - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2009)  
 2nd - Global MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (Financial Times, 2011)  
 2nd - Global MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (Financial Times, 2010)  
 2nd - Global MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (Financial Times, 2008)  
 2nd - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2011)  
 2nd - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2010)  
 2nd - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2009)  
 4th - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2011)  
 4th - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2012)  
 5th - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2010)  
 5th - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2009)  
 6th - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2012)  
 6th - Global MBA in General Management rankings (Financial Times, 2012)

### **Wharton MBA Specialization Rankings:**

1st - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2009)  
 1st - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2012)  
 1st - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2011)  
 1st - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2010)  
 1st - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2009)  
 2nd - US MBA in Accounting rankings (US News, 2011)  
 2nd - US MBA in Accounting rankings (US News, 2010)  
 2nd - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2012)  
 2nd - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2011)  
 2nd - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2010)  
 2nd - US MBA in International Management rankings (US News, 2012)  
 2nd - US MBA in International Management rankings (US News, 2010)  
 3rd - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2012)  
 3rd - US MBA in International Management rankings (US News, 2011)  
 3rd - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2011)  
 3rd - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2010)  
 3rd - US MBA in Accounting rankings (US News, 2012)  
 3rd-4th - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2009)  
 4th - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2012)  
 4th - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2011)  
 4th - US MBA in General Management rankings (US News, 2010)  
 5th - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2012)  
 5th - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2011)  
 5th - US MBA in Entrepreneurship rankings (US News, 2010)  
 5th - Global MBA in Accounting rankings (Financial Times, 2012)  
 7th - Global MBA in Accounting rankings (Financial Times, 2011)  
 8th - Global MBA in Marketing rankings (Financial Times, 2011)  
 8th - Global MBA in Accounting rankings (Financial Times, 2010)

### **Chicago MBA Specialization Rankings:**

1st - Global MBA in Economics rankings (Financial Times, 2010)  
 1st - Global MBA in Economics rankings (Financial Times, 2009)  
 1st - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2010)  
 2nd - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2011)

2nd - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2008)  
2nd - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2012)  
2nd - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2011)  
2nd - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2010)  
2nd - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2009)  
2nd - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2008)  
2nd - US MBA in Accounting rankings (US News, 2012)  
2nd - Global MBA in Accounting rankings (Financial Times, 2010)  
2nd - Global MBA in Accounting rankings (Financial Times, 2008)  
3rd - US MBA in Accounting rankings (US News, 2011)  
3rd - US MBA in Accounting rankings (US News, 2010)  
5th - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2012)  
5th - Global MBA in Accounting rankings (Financial Times, 2011)  
6th - Global MBA in Accounting rankings (Financial Times, 2012)  
7th - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2012)  
7th - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2011)

**Columbia MBA Specialization Rankings:**

2nd - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2012)  
4th - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2012)  
4th - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2010)  
4th - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2008)  
4th - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2011)  
5th - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2011)  
5th - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2008)  
5th - US MBA in International Management rankings (US News, 2012)  
5th - US MBA in International Management rankings (US News, 2009)  
6th - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2010)  
6th - US MBA in Finance rankings (US News, 2009)  
6th - US MBA in International Management rankings (US News, 2010)  
6th - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2008)  
7th - Global MBA in Finance rankings (Financial Times, 2010)  
8th - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2009)  
8th - US MBA in Nonprofit rankings (US News, 2009)  
9th - US MBA in Nonprofit rankings (US News, 2010)  
9th - US MBA in Marketing rankings (US News, 2012)



## Is My GMAT Good Enough?

Let's start by setting the story straight here: Many people think that the GMAT doesn't carry *too* much weight and that if the rest of your application is stellar, then a less-than-perfect GMAT score won't break your stakes. While this *should* be true, it's not necessarily the case. The GMAT score is often the first element of your application that adcoms look at, and if it's not in the ballpark, they likely will look at your application, but with somewhat of a more critical eye, perhaps a jaundiced eye.

So do you need a perfect score on your GMAT to gain acceptance to a [top-tier business school](#)? No. But do you need your score to be high enough so that your application is seriously considered, so that the rest of your application isn't fighting an uphill battle to overcome a sub-par GMAT score? *Yes, definitely.*

Now let's return to our question at hand: Is your GMAT score good enough? And to that I offer more questions (sorry – that's my style!): Good enough for *what*? Who are you? What does the rest of your application look like? Which b-schools are you applying to? And what is your score?

### Who are you?

Who you are matters because admissions decisions don't follow a strict formula or algorithm based entirely on numbers. You need to evaluate your score in the context of your demographic profile.

For example, if you're a guy from India in the IT field who just spent the last five years sitting at a desk coding and crunching numbers, then you're going to need a more competitive GMAT score than if you're a gal from Chile who spent the last five years working for a energy-related non-profit that shuttled back and forth between Tierra del Fuego and Antarctica.

(Again, even our Chilean social enterprising world explorer will need a score high enough to get her application looked at, but once she makes it past that point, she'll have no trouble keeping their attention.)

### What does the rest of your application look like?

It *is* possible to recover from a not-so-ideal GMAT score, but that is *if and only if* the rest of your application is flawless (or nearly so).

If you have an almost perfect GPA, stunning application essays, amazing letters of recommendation, and a resume that shows that you've worked hard and succeeded, then you'll be in a position to prove to the adcom that you're a fantastic candidate and that the GMAT is just not your thing (again, it still needs to be good enough to get your app looked at).

I can't emphasize enough how important the application essays are. They are perhaps the best way you can show the adcoms who you are and how you plan on contributing to your future MBA program and to the world of business at large. You can use your essays to

provide context for low numbers, especially the GPA. It's harder to do with the GMAT, because you can always retake if context was the issue. However, if you have a good "reason" for your low GMAT score, you may want to touch on it in an optional essay, but make sure you explain calmly and confidently – no sob stories please!

### **Which b-schools are you applying to?**

It goes without saying that some GMAT scores will be highly competitive at some programs and not even close to competitive at others. To see if your score is "good enough," you need to visit your target schools' websites and see what their GMAT range is. Don't just look at the average; the range will give you a better idea of how low they'll go before weeding out an application based on GMAT score alone. (Of course you shouldn't aim for a GMAT score that's close to the bottom of the range – you should aim for above average – but knowing the range will help you determine if you should retake the GMAT or make adjustments to your school selection options.)

### **What is your score?**

If you scored above the 80th percentile on both the verbal and quant sections of the GMAT then you should consider yourself in the clear and good to go to apply to highly ranked MBA programs (assuming that the rest of your application is top-notch as well). If you received lower than that, that doesn't mean that you need to retake the GMAT (necessarily), but does mean that you need to look at your GMAT in the larger scheme of things and consider retaking the GMAT if you feel your profile needs it and you are aiming for those top programs.

### **Should I Retake the GMAT?**

There's no yes or no answer here, but I will give you some points to consider that will help you make your decision.

#### ***You probably should retake the GMAT if...***

- You have other weaknesses in your profile and you feel a high GMAT score will help you compensate for it.
- You have the time to prepare, study hard, and change the outcome.
- You are a reapplicant who has received feedback that suggests you need to boost your GMAT score.
- You blame your not-so-brilliant score on a bad day and know that if you retook the GMAT you'd have a meaningfully higher score.

#### ***You probably shouldn't retake the GMAT if...***

- You proudly overshot the 80-80 hurdle. (Note: If you scored above the 80th percentile in both the verbal and quant sections of the GMAT, then you generally don't need to retake the GMAT, even if you apply to a school at the tippy top of the tier. However, if you're applying to a top school and you come from an [overflowing representative demographic](#), then you may want to consider retaking the GMAT, but only if you meet the other conditions on this list.)

- You've already taken the GMAT 3+ times. (Think about the law of diminishing returns.)
- You are aiming too high and know deep down that you should probably just apply to b-schools with lower average GMAT scores at matriculation. If your GMAT is high enough for schools that you would be happy to attend, then you don't need to retake it.



## Fit vs Rankings: Which is more important?

Everyone wants to go to Harvard or Stanford or Wharton, and you probably do, too. They are top-ranked business schools. It will be an easy decision if you are admitted to one of these schools.

What about other schools? Obviously it's very difficult to get into one of these three top programs. It would be foolish for most people to apply only to these three and that's it. Other schools are good too – but there's a lot of them. [Wikipedia lists around 300 business schools in the U.S. alone](#). Which ones should you pick?

**Rankings are useful as a starting point for your school research.** Rankings show how different schools can compare against each other. They use data about a school and rate the respective criteria on an apples-to-apples basis – things like:

- **GMAT or GRE score and GPA:** How high is the bar? A school with higher average scores is going to be more appealing to recruiters.
- **Number of applications and acceptance rate:** How hard is it to get in? This is mostly a factor of how many applications they receive. If a school is very popular then this means that lots of people value their MBA.
- **Graduation placement rates:** How easy is it to get a job afterwards? A school where MBAs are successful landing jobs means that recruiters value those grads and its students are in demand.
- **Surveys of recent grads, alumni, and recruiters:** How satisfied are people who went here? Or who hired people who did?

The value of the rankings is that they crunch through all that data and give you a list to see, as objectively as possible, which ones are considered better. As schools implement changes to the curriculum to respond to changes in the world of business and better meet the needs of their students, the rankings should change over time to reflect the ones that are doing a good job. It's like Consumer Reports: When you want to buy a new flatscreen TV, you can go check out the big brand name models and see which one performed the best under different conditions. Rankings can be useful because they represent someone else's hard work and analysis. They're like a cheat sheet to which schools meet a minimum standard in performance and which ones excel.

Most of the rankings like **BusinessWeek** and **U.S. News** have the same MBA schools in their Top 20 lists, they're just in a different order. Those lists focus on the U.S. full-time programs. Other lists like **Financial Times** include more international schools. They all use a different methodology, and the order the schools appear in on each list changes each year, but not usually by a whole lot. If you pick any school in any Top 20 list you're going to get a very good education there. Any school that makes it into these lists is a quality university.

Any school in the Top 20 is also going to have competitive admissions. How competitive it is (the acceptance rate) is not determined by the rankings. A school that's lower down the rankings might have a lower admit rate, which is not what you'd expect (Berkeley Haas – only about 13% of applicants admitted). And a higher-ranked school sometimes has a high admit rate (Chicago Booth – 23% acceptance rate). So the rankings do not tell the whole story.

**If you want to be sure of getting in to a good business school, you need to use more than rankings.**

An important factor to evaluate as part of your school selection process is School Fit. This is a difficult term to define sometimes; it's in the category of "you know it when you see it." Just like with people, some schools will be a better match to you, based on your interests and personality.

There's an objective side and a subjective side to School Fit:

**Objective:** Are you a good match for the school based on your profile and goals?

**Evaluate:** Is your GMAT score in the school's 80% range for accepted students? Does this school offer specialized study in the field you want to pursue?

**Subjective:** Is this the type of environment that appeals to you? Do you feel comfortable when you interact with the school community?

You can get an answer to the objective side by sitting at your computer and reading the Internet; that will help you cross schools off your list if you're not a good match for each other.

The only way to get an answer to the subjective side is by talking to people. Ask your friends if they know anyone who went there. Attend an information session or a webinar. The more opportunities you have to interact with the school community, the more you'll come to understand what they're about. This level of engagement is the only way to be sure of School Fit. If you do this type of research then you'll be able to prioritize the schools based on the ones you like the best – not just the ones that are higher-ranked.

The main benefit to doing this work is that you will be able to speak in more detail about why you want to go to this school. This question frequently comes up in the interviews and it can help you stand out from the crowd.

**Here's how to use rankings and school fit to identify your school targets:**

**Start Wide.** At the beginning of your search, it may feel overwhelming, so it's OK to just use the Top 20 schools.

**Use a Filter for Objective Criteria.** Make a list of criteria that matter to you: curriculum or specialized majors available, location, size of school. Add on the criteria that matter to the school: 80% GMAT range, work experience. Filter your list of schools and cross out any that don't meet these criteria.

**Use a Funnel for Subjective Criteria.** If a school meets your objective criteria, it should only be nominated for your Priority List if it meets your Subjective Criteria. The best way to identify what your Subjective Criteria even are is to talk to current students and recent graduates at lots of top schools and see what they valued in the experience and what matters to them in looking back on their MBA. You'll become a more educated consumer that way and you'll know what to look out for. Then you can begin to promote certain schools over others on your list, based on the qualities that you experience when you interact with them.

Rankings are important as a baseline measure of quality in the graduate school world. You can't go by rankings alone to determine which school is right for you. School Fit is critical to determine if the school and you are a good match for each other. Rankings are necessary to begin this process, but School Fit is mandatory to succeed.



## The Great Debate: Applying Round 1 vs. Round 2

Many have debated the existence of God, the validity of truth, and the intricacies of equality and liberty. And now, there's another great debate to add to the roaring fire of controversy – the Round 1/Round 2 debate. Should you apply Round 1 or Round 2? When is it right to apply early and when should you push it off?

As suspected, there's no simple answer here (otherwise it wouldn't be much of a debate, would it?). Each situation is different and so I can't tell you when to apply. But I can offer some advice that will help you make the best decision for YOU.

### Who Should Apply Round 1?

**Applicants who have put the final touches on their A+ application in time to submit.** Everyone in the great debate will agree that if you can apply Round 1 to b-school, then you should. So what does it mean in this position? IF your application is ready, then you should apply. If you're not at all sacrificing the quality of your application, then you should certainly take advantage of the early advantage that accompanies applying R1.

Actually, that's it. There's only one group of candidates who should apply R1 – those that are ready. Quality is really the most important thing – if your application is not R1-ready, then you shouldn't apply R1. It's as simple as that.

*NOTE:* R1 is not just for superstars. That means that not everyone who applies R1 is a superstar and not everyone who waits to apply R2 is a loser. If that were the case, then adcoms wouldn't bother looking at R2 applications (not to mention R3 apps, which is a subject for another post).

### Who Should Apply Round 2?

**Applicants who aren't confident with the quality of their application.** This is obviously the converse of what we've been saying before. If you're not ready to apply, then don't submit a mediocre application simply so you can get it in before the R1 buzzer.

**Applicants who want to retake the GMAT.** Related, if you plan on retaking the GMAT because you weren't satisfied with your score, then you should wait to apply R2.

**Applicants who don't have their LORs in hand.** If you were slow to the punch requesting letters of recommendation, and you know that your recommenders won't get their part of the job done in time, then you should push off applying until R2 (unless your school says it will wait for letters of recommendation and start processing your application without them). An application with late or missing LORs will just be pushed to a later round, so don't apply before you know that your application will include them.

**Applicants who need a bit more time to grow and learn.** This applies to growth in the work place and outside it. Sometimes applicants are so close to presenting a strong work history or impressive extracurricular activities or hobbies, but just need some more time to

fully go the distance and reach the goals they've set out for themselves. If you know you'll be promoted or given new work responsibilities in the next month or two, then you may want to wait for R2, especially if you think this new growth will impact your letters of recommendation. Similarly, if you are taking classes or going for a CFA to offset a less than desirable undergraduate GPA, wait until you can show those new shiny As or a pass on the CFA exam.

Yes, it's true that when you wait to apply Round 2, seats have already been given to R1 applicants, and that's why I recommend that if you can apply R1 without sacrificing on quality and you know that all components are ready to go, then you certainly should apply R1. But if your application is not top-notch, then you can assume that you wouldn't be getting one of those R1 seats anyway, and that you'd be better off applying R2.

*Let's look at a few examples and determine whether the applicant should apply in each case:*

### **Applicant A:**

Applicant A has been struggling with his GMAT and wants to attend a top 20 program. He is unlikely to be admitted with his current score, but wants to apply R1 because the rest of his application is ready to go, and quite impressive at that. Should he apply Round 1 or Round 2?

**Answer:** Maybe the rest of his application is already impressive; but if he can raise his GMAT and make it even more impressive, then that's what he should do. This applicant should apply R2.

### **Applicant B:**

It is two days before the R1 deadline and Applicant B has all application components ready to submit. She does a quick look over her essay and sees a typo. And then another typo. Then she realizes that maybe she was too quick to call this copy her final copy, and maybe she shouldn't asked a friend/colleague/cousin to review her writing. Should she apply R1 or R2?

**Answer:** While one typo won't doom an application, several reveal sloppiness. Even if it's one or two days before the deadline, contact [Accepted.com](http://Accepted.com). If we have availability, we can review your application with an experienced and objective professional eye. Then you can submit R1. If you aren't confident your essays are typo-free or if you have them reviewed and it will take more time than you have to get them into top-notch shape, wait to apply R2. A sloppy application is a dinged application – so don't take that risk!

### **Applicant C:**

Applicant C has good grades, scores, extracurriculars, and work experience. He is in a crowded applicant sub-group and thinks he should apply R2 because (he thinks) the competition will be less intense.

**Answer:** This is a big mistake. Competition is intense both rounds. This race isn't about timing; it's about differentiating yourself from the competition, improving your profile so that you really stand out, learning about the schools so that you choose the one that will best suit your goals, and creating essays that show that you're unique despite your profile

group. He should submit Round 1 when there are more spots available.

**TIP:** Don't apply too early within either round. Unless you're applying to an [MBA program](#) with rolling admissions (like Columbia for example), then you may actually benefit from applying later in the round rather than earlier. The reason for this is that as you complete more applications and write more essays, you'll get a clearer window into yourself and a strong understanding of what these applications are all about. It would be a shame to come to some sort of breakthrough in application #6 and then realize that you can't tweak applications 1-5 because you sent them in weeks before the deadline. Hold on to completed applications until you've completed them all so that previous applications can benefit from your recent writing experience and greater clarity. Obviously, calendar the deadlines and submit a day or two before.

### **Why a day or two before the deadline?**

You don't want to wait until the 11th hour to hit SUBMIT. If you encounter a problem uploading your application or if servers get overloaded on deadline day, then you'll be sorry. You don't want to miss a deadline on an application that was completed weeks earlier because you waited too long.

We've touched on a lot of subjects here but I'd like to sum up with what has become one of my b-school application mantras: **Apply as early as possible PROVIDED you don't compromise the quality of your application.**



## Over Represented Applicant Pool: A Case Study

If you're an Indian applying to business school – especially if you studied engineering in college – you keep hearing that you are at a disadvantage because you are in an over represented applicant pool. What can you do about it?

Let's take the case of Amit. He was 30 when he decided to get his MBA. Class X SSC results were 84%, class XII HSC 90%, B. Eng. First Class. He took the GMAT and got a 700. His schools are Harvard, Kellogg, Booth, Wharton and Columbia, with Tuck as a safety school.

Is there anything else he needs to do or is he ready to apply?

The first thing people look at is the GMAT. He got 700. Everyone says you want to get over 700 so he figures that must be good enough. He wrote his essays in September and he submitted in October.

**Amit applied to 10 schools in Round 1. All of his applications were rejected with no interview. He got so depressed that he did not try for Round 2.**

### Where did he make mistakes?

The one place where everyone has control is the GMAT. Did Amit do everything possible on that test? He has a technical background. Those people are usually the ones who do best. He only took the GMAT one time. A 700 score is good but is it enough?

Maybe not. **It is below the average GMAT for all these schools.** Having a higher GMAT would probably not have changed the results. We know this because he did 10 applications in one month. You can't do a good job on that many applications in such a short time. A higher GMAT would not have fixed the errors he made in rushing his essays. He did not help himself by settling for a 700 score when he knew he could do better.

He also selected some of the most popular schools. He indicated Tuck as a "safety school" even though his GMAT score is below their average. That shows that he was unaware of how competitive it is.

The first step is to make sure that you know why you are picking the schools on your list. This must come through on the application. It takes a lot of time to do this kind of research.

**Amit said that wanted to be a consultant.** That's a common goal. Did he have what it takes to get there? Did he pick the right schools?

All of these schools are good for consulting. There is a lot of competition for these schools though. Amit needed to show how he is a unique individual and he needed to use the

application to bring out his work experience. He is a Team Lead at work and he thought that was enough for leadership because it says so on his resume. He needs more than the title of Team Leader. He should have brought in the examples of leadership and results. He started a NGO and he thought was good. He didn't talk about the project in a way that helped his chances. He just dumped information in an essay.

**He also was not realistic with those schools.** He has an average profile for an Indian candidate. The GMAT and the university record are not a great combination. He is good, just not great. He is like everyone else. All the schools on his list are above average for qualifications required. Amit needed to do more to get into a Top 10 school or he needed to adjust his targets to include some other schools too.

**He is also worried about his age.** It is not as easy to get in to a Top MBA program in your 30s. He is not too old but he needs to work hard to make it happen.

In the spring he decided that his job was a dead end and he had to get an MBA. **He tried again.**

He took a new approach. He found out how much **the recommendations matter**. Amit has worked in a technical environment for a long time and his manager does not write well. He realized that the manager did not do a good job on his answers last year. Amit decided to ask a previous manager for the recommendation now because he will do a better job of describing Amit's work. If your recommender has never done a project like this before for someone else then you need to make sure they understand what to do and how important it is.

**The essays matter too.** Many technical people do not know how to answer the questions in the school essays. Amit rushed with the essays and he now knows that they were not that good. The essays need time. Getting help from reliable sources is the right strategy. Don't have your mother read your essays. Try to get help from your friends who have gotten into business school already. You don't need to pay for expensive consulting, only do your research well enough. Read a lot. Study the questions. Go onto the school chats and read for help here on GMAT Club. The essays are not as easy as they might seem.

When Amit gave the GMAT again he got a 720. That score made him more confident. He also looked again at schools. He decided that other schools like CMU Tepper are better for him because he wants to do technical consulting. Tepper has an average GMAT of 698. Amit's 720 is a lot higher. He also did a lot of research and the Tepper people were all very friendly. He didn't get the same response from the other schools.

He applied to 3 schools in Round 1 and was accepted at Tepper. He was wait-listed at one other school but he decided to go to Tepper because he liked everything about it from his research. Maybe he could have gotten in with his 700 GMAT score but he knows that he made it easier to get accepted with a high score and he learned a lot from the first applications to help be successful in the end.

What should he have done differently the first time?

- A higher GMAT score in a later round is often a better tradeoff for applicants like Amit. It doesn't help to apply earlier if your profile is not as strong as it could be.
- The recommendations need to be chosen carefully. Having someone who can write well and answer the questions with details about you is very important.

- The essays are not simple. Amit started as soon as his GMAT was done in June. He spent all summer on the essays this time.
- Selecting schools matters more than anything. If you are not a good fit then they won't let you in. Amit researched what they wanted and he was able to tell them about himself and his work experience in the essays a lot better.

Amit's story is very common. There are a lot of mistakes for Indians that don't have to be made. Applications take a long time if you are going to do them right. You do not have to have a cure for cancer to get into business school. You can be a regular guy you just need to do more work than you might expect to show admissions committee that you are serious. It doesn't matter that you are coming from an over represented pool. It matters that you do a great job and give admissions everything that you can. An "average" profile won't work if you want to go to a great school.



## How To Make the "Why This School" Argument and Win

Saying “I love you” is a delicate matter. You don’t want to be too cavalier about it, or else your sig-o may not believe you. But you also don’t want to hire Air Force One to skywrite your love for them over the grocery store where they buy their mangoes. That just makes you seem crazy and needy.

Finding a way to say “I love you” to the MBA program you’re applying to is a similarly delicate thing. It’s about finding a comfortable balance between “I love your school, I’m so excited, you guys are the best!” and “Your program has mad connections and will make me rich, so let’s do this.”

Adcoms read an insane amount of applications, and they have finely tuned radar for the insincere stuff. They can tell if you’re truly passionate about their school or if you’re just looking to ride on their coattails for brand notoriety. Trust us—no one wants to have stretched out coattails. Coattails are a pain to iron.

So, that’s insincere love. What really kills us, though, are those folks who sincerely love the school, but don’t put in the effort to make their love seem specific and well thought out in their application. That’s lazy love. Adcoms don’t like that either.

So what’s an MBA applicant to do in order to avoid lazy and insincere love and demonstrate two big draws on your application:

- 1) Fit and
- 2) Passion?

Poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning said it best:

“Oh MBA program of my dreams, how do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”

(Well, she didn’t say EXACTLY that, but you get the picture.)

Show them HOW you love them (professionally AND personally,) in a number of SPECIFIC ways.

Professionally speaking, take your hard-earned knowledge about school offerings (classes, career center services, special events, hiring statistics, special projects, etc.) and demonstrate how you will fit in and succeed because of them. RELATE them to your goals, and how they will help you achieve your goals.

We here at [Admissionado](http://www.gmatclub.com/MBAGuide) fundamentally believe that prestige is way more important than fit and that you can fit in anywhere, at any school you choose. But in your application it’s your task to craft an essay that shows how you fit in with THAT school specifically. The adcom needs to know why THEY are the one for you... more than anyone else. So give ‘em concrete facts, but not just a laundry list of stuff they already know. Personalize them

with your own specific history and future goals, and how THEIR offerings are exactly what YOU need to move forward in your career.

And while you're doing that, don't leave any dots unconnected. If lots of people from Business School X go on to be Project Managers in Lockheed Martin, and that just happens to be EXACTLY your goal, make that connection clear. Don't assume that ANYTHING seems obvious. It isn't. And Adcoms' brains get tired just like everybody else's, so don't make them do Da Vinci Code level work to figure out what you're trying to say. [Because...erm... they won't. They've got 5-7 minutes to read that app, and that's not a lot of time to start decoding.]

But what if you're applying to a school that isn't so strong in your intended industry? No problem. You can earn mega points by showing them how the school is perfect for you in terms of OTHER stuff: the community, the extracurriculars and study abroad programs you want, the conferences and research initiatives, and professors you hope to study with. Those reasons for fit are just as compelling as the other stuff, if you play your cards right.

Pushing it even further into the personal, [if you can visit the school before you apply](#), even better. Then you can write with glittering, gorgeous detail about how you felt as you walked the stacks of the library, listened to a professor give a lecture on a topic you're interested in, sat in on a meeting of the Finance Club and got excited about hearing them plan for the next big Case Competition and how that inspired you to start thinking about what you might contribute...

So in short: make a school feel loved by showing them that you KNOW them, by connecting what you know to your past experience and future goals, and reflecting on what about this school feeds your drive to be DOING this stuff that all.

*And if you HAVEN'T done the research yet, get your overwhelmed self a big ol' iced coffee and get your butt online and start checking out the school website. Trust us—we've got MBA fact sheets galore—there is a treasure trove of information out there waiting to be woven into your essays.*

*Big takeaway here folks: get accepted to the best schools you possibly can, and decide later which one is best for you for what you need right now. That name brand and network are going to take you further than anything else in your career.*



## LOW GPA: What you can do

### What is a low GPA?

Technically, the yardsticks for GPA are quite flexible and school specific and you should not bother about absolute high/low figures. What you should be concerned with is the median range of the GPA of the school you are applying to, and it's always good to be on the higher side. However, that said and done, undergrad GPA, just itself, is not a complete piece of information as business schools look for your story, and not absolute figures that you have achieved in life. So a low GPA is definitely not a deal-breaker and let's try to explain why.

### Why GPA is important:

- GPA is a clear indication of how you performed in college in the past, so business school can have a fair idea of how you will perform in the school by simple correlation.
- Often, the progression in GPA values is more important than the mean GPA itself, as an ascending GPA is often regarded as a highly valuable asset in your profile. So even if you have a relatively lower GPA than the school median figure, the fact that you have improved throughout your college semesters mean that you have been persevering and consistent.
- Higher grades, especially those in quant subjects, is indicative of your reasoning abilities and acts as an assurance that you will be able to survive the academic challenges of a business program.

### How to overcome low GPA in business school application:

- **Ace your GMAT:** Chances are that, if you are an international candidate, your high GPA might not be as valued as those studying in US/Europe. The GMAT is a common platform and your score is equally valuable as that for your international competitors and becomes the most effective way to stand out. A 700+ score is always helpful and especially if you get a score which is higher than the median score of the school you are applying to.
- **Alternative transcripts and certifications:** These are great add-ons to your academic evaluations. Of course, these cannot increase your GPA but it can surely act as a guarantee that you can do well in the MBA program. Make sure to take quant courses such as finance, accounting, calculus, probability and statistics and make sure you get all A's. Community colleges or even online programs can come of help with these, but please be certain that alternative transcripts do not erase your GPA problem. See this link for a couple of courses to consider: <http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/x459.xml#5>

- Cerifications such as CFA, PMP, CSQL can come in handy, but make sure they are strongly tied to your story and goals for them to make a stronger impact.
- **Your story:** As always, your story is your best bet when you want to overcome/compensate for your low GPA. Explore the reasons that led to your GPA problems and make them your strengths. Were you working somewhere part time/full time while you were in college? Were you involved in very strong extra curricular and achieved significant results albeit with some sacrifices on the GPA front? Were you into serious national level sports? Not only these can give you tools to defend your GPA but also they can act as incredible story telling topics which the adcoms will love, provided they are aligned with your short/long term goals.
  - **Other facets of your application:** Like your GMAT score, your GPA is also one part of your entire application and thus has limited effect in your admission. Make sure you use your essays , LOR, EC and most importantly your story so as to compensate for your GPA issues. There have been and still continues to be a massive number of applicants who did not get straight A's but got admitted in top 10 schools and so can you. Here are a couple of inspirational profiles who got in with a relatively lower GPA/GMAT: [profiles-admitted-to-top-b-schools-w-low-gmat-or-low-gpa-73999.html](http://profiles-admitted-to-top-b-schools-w-low-gmat-or-low-gpa-73999.html)

### Correlation Data with GPA and GMAT

Undergraduate GPA range (10th-90th percentile) and median GMAT		
School	Undergraduate GPA range (10th-90th percentile)	Median GMAT
Harvard Business School	N/A	724
Stanford GSB	3.36-3.97	730
University of Pennsylvania (Wharton)	3.18-3.87	718
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Sloan)	3.1-3.86	710
Northwestern University (Kellogg)	3.19-3.88	712
University of Chicago (Booth)	3.08-3.9	719
University of California--Berkeley (Haas)	3.39-3.9	715
Columbia University	3-3.8	716
Dartmouth College (Tuck)	3.2-3.84	718
Yale University	3.1-3.87	719
New York University (Stern)	3.02-3.79	719
Duke University (Fuqua)	3.06-3.79	689
University of Virginia (Darden)	3-3.8	701
University of California-Los Angeles (Anderson)	3.2-3.86	704
Cornell University (Johnson)	2.78-3.77	691

### More discussions on GMATClub about low GPA:

[www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide](http://www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide)

<http://gmatclub.com/blog/2011/03/mba-ad-...-a-low-gpa/>  
<http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/07/is-my-gpa-too-low/profiles-admitted-to-top-b-schools-w-low-gmat-or-low-gpa-73999.html>  
[what-are-my-chances-at-top-b-schools-lower-gpa-129420.html](http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/07/what-are-my-chances-at-top-b-schools-lower-gpa-129420.html)



## Extracurricular Activities - What You Can Do

You should not be fearing the Extracurricular section on your resume/essays but instead leverage it. We'll walk through a few ideas and suggestions. However, you should customize them to your particular situation and story. Use these experiences to prove your point, show the person you are, illustrate what you believe in, and make you unique and special.

### Why Are Extracurricular Activities Valuable?

Although it is largely dependent on your specific application, there are a number of benefits - use them!

- Relevant EC (even loosely tied to your long term goal) can demonstrate the commitment to your field/goals adcoms are looking for. E.g. if you said in your apps you were really passionate about the environment but have never done anything about it, then perhaps you just like to say things....
- On the other hand even irrelevant experience can show your personality
- Your extracurricular (non job related) experience can help you strengthen your leadership picture. Even if you were a troop leader for boy scouts or in charge of a local clean up effort - all of that counts not only on paper but also will speak loudly through your application. But please do not make stuff up - admissions team will see right through that
- Someone you have volunteered with or worked together on a project may end up being a good candidate for a Letter of Recommendation
- You can use extracurricular activities to explain a few things such as an employment gap or poor academic record during one of the semesters
- Extra curricular activities (whether volleyball or volunteering, or political work) can enrich your life, give you a new perspective, and contribute to your life in general
- Community work can be incredibly substantial, especially if you have a long term goal to work in the non profit. Make sure your EC is relevant to the non profit industry and even a small stint can come to be quite useful there.
- Even 2-3 months of community work can work pretty positively in your application. It makes you a human being, shows your passions and interests and gives an interesting take on your character by taking a necessary break from GPA figures, GMAT score and WE achievements.

### I did not volunteer anywhere. But I do spend 10 hours a week helping with X/Y/Z. Is that EC?

- YES, they can be. These X/Y/Z can add a lot more to your profile and say much more about you than a couple of weeks of community service could ever do really.
- The goal of the AdCom is to admit individuals who will support a vibrant campus community and step into leadership positions. In other words, as admissions officers consider each applicant, they ask themselves "what's in it for our school?"

- One misconception is that your extracurricular activities have to be altruistic. Admissions committee members and admissions consultants will tell you business schools are looking for applicants to participate in activities for which they are truly passionate. One of the successful applicants to Ross, was a really good DJ who was invited to many parties and made side income by being a DJ in some of the hippest parties in Madrid. As a matter of fact, Ross even advertised this on their website to encourage R2 2011 applicants. Another real applicant took care of exotic animals confiscated by the zoo and it worked out great for her too.

### **OMG. I have nothing. What can I do now?**

#### [From the Rhyme's MBA Guide](#)

I think the best way to think of extracurricular activities is to think of them as activities you engage in outside of work. This might include hobbies (e.g. restoring old cars, hiking the mountains), sports (softball team, etc.) more formal programs (being a big brother, volunteering at shelters, being part of your university recruiting efforts etc.). As you might imagine, leadership oriented involvement is more meaningful in any of these – so if you go hiking, do you act as the guide? If you volunteer at shelters do you take on a key role?

- So the first step is to stop and think about things in those terms – and see if anything jumps out.
- If you are part of some extracurricular program and want to try to take on a more leadership oriented role, just ask. In fact, you might even be able to make the role related to your goals – I know one candidate who approached a local dog shelter and offered to help them revisit their financials and marketing materials. They had plenty of people willing to look after the pets, but no one with business acumen to help out.
- Assuming neither of those options worked – and the problem is purely a lack of activities completely... we need to get creative. Start with your alma mater and see if there are roles you can take on as an alumnus. (Many schools will have formal alumni recruiting efforts, even at the undergraduate level). If that fails to lead somewhere meaningful, try browsing <http://meetup.com> or <http://www.craigslist.org> for local interests groups. You can either start your own (which isn't free, but it's a small price to pay in the grand scheme), or you can join another group for free. Odds are, you'll find something on meetup.com (everything from dumpster diving to xylophone fan clubs seem to exist). Either way, you can quickly become involved in something of consequence. Assuming neither of those ideas work out, start calling local charities and see how you can get involved. Admittedly, none of these strategies can fix a lack of extracurricular involvement in years past, but some involvement is still better than none.
- Sign up for Toastmasters. It is a public speaking club that almost immediately can provide you with a number of leadership opportunities during the weekly meetings and give you a role of a VP within 3 months. It will help you with public speaking and interviewing, as well as with leadership and EC experience. Many people in the club can probably recommend other interesting local opportunities - they tend to be in the know
- Do what you believe. You don't have to be a Mother Theresa. If you think the world needs more capitalists, find a local organization that teaches kids financial wisdom (google for one or search or see about starting it). Or if you want to save the world,

- you can probably do that as well in some way. AdComs love people with strong convictions (nobody likes a flip-flopper without a personality)
- You are welcome to get involved with GMAT Club. We welcome [moderator applicants](#) and frankly will consider any crazy idea. Just contact us.

**More discussions on GMATClub about Extracurricular Activities:**

[teach-me-about-extracurricular-activities-4-questions-127778.html](#)

[extracurricular-activities-63220.html](#)

[how-important-are-extracurricular-activities-80684.html](#)



## Best Resume and CV Formatting and Tips

### Resume Books

- [Most comprehensive Resume Book](#) from Graduate Business Conference (All top 20 schools). Also a [discussion of some of the most interesting](#) of these 120 resumes
- [Wharton Resume Book](#) - the types of people admitted to Wharton
- [IMD resume book](#)
- [Tuck Resume Book](#)

### Resume Resources & Links

- **Resources & Downloads**
  - [STAR Resume Format](#) by University of Washington (Foster) - PDF
  - [List of Action Words](#) - PDF
- **Blog Posts by Experts**
  - [Top 5 resume mistakes](#) by [Knewton](#)
  - [7 Resume flaws to avoid](#) by Accepted
- **Member Advice**
  - [Resume Best Practices](#)
  - [Should I add a spark of personality on the resume?](#)
  - [Tailoring resume for each school?](#)
  - [How to note a consulting role on the resume?](#)
  - [Do you put GMAT Score on the resume?](#)
  - [How much do you exaggerate?](#)
  - [How long should the resume be?](#)
  - [Rhyme's MBA Guide](#) has a section on resumes

### Best Resume Tips

*(Collected from GMAT Club Members)*

- **By 3underscore - NYU Stern Alumni 2009 | Occupation: Equity Research**
  - Edit, edit, edit. [Use action words](#). Define achievements with tangible values (reduced costs by x%, process time by x days, saved one FTE...)
  - It has to fit to a page. There is no way any MBA student should not be able to get their resume to one page. If it needs jobs to be dropped at the bottom, roles to be grouped more - whatever, get it to one page.
  - Especially focus on the "hangers" with two or three words on the next line. and Edit.
  - Font - I would go really simple. Times, Arial, Helvetica - the really anonymous type face. If electronic, make sure it is an intersystem generic font. Maybe search through here and see some of the business school templates you can find.

- On a person note, Don't put interests including crochet knitting, fine wine and cheese or stuff like that or I will never interview you.
- **Shadow - Yale SOM 2012 Student**
  - One tip that i found was to make your resume look more "standard". Look at the link to the Tuck business school resume book for their graduating class. i basically copied their format to make my resume look more professional.
- **MBACrystalBall (admissions consultant)**
  - Always leave some 'white-space' within the CV. And I'm not just talking about the margins. The reviewer's eyes need a (visual) break too.
- **Zakk - Haas Alumni**
  - Leave out technical specifications - you need to write the resume for the Bschoo, not an employer. C++, Flash, Mcirosoft-whathaveyou (can you tell I'm not in tech!) will mean very little. Focus on leadership, accomplishments, promotions and other weird stuff. Did you get shipped to the UK to oversee a big client and supervise a team? I would spend words on that over a jargon filled sentence on what you're knowledge base is.
- **Lepium - Ross Alumni**
  - Only 1 suggestion: don't go over 1 page unless you are 50+ years old. Specially if you are under 30, 1 page ought to do it just fine, while 2 would sound either arrogant or boring.
- **Kryzak - Haas Alum 2012; 5,000+ posts on GMAT Club**
  - Also remember, for those of you who might leave your extracurricular stuff off the resume, that some interviews are blind to your application, so all they know about you and all their questions are from your resume. Keep that in mind when you work your resume for the different schools. Haas interviewers are blind to your app
- **Audetat - Duke 2009 Alum**
  - If You've been a self-employed consultant, this is really ONE JOB. This ain't pretty, but you can lay it out on the resume like this:

Self-Employed Consultant

2002-Present

Key Projects:

\* Acted as Steve Jobs' muse for I-Phone creation

\* Led strategy for Martha Stewarts' comeback

They'll get the idea of what you've done, and they'll know that you can't describe every project you worked on.



## How to Craft Your Resume

Hi everyone,

Most of you will be required to submit a resume at some point during the MBA application process. We have below an overview of the resume portion of your application. If you are looking for more in-depth information, you can visit the [Stacy Blackman Resume Guide](#), and we can also answer questions in this thread.

### Resume Overview

In general, the purpose of the resume is to provide someone with a quick snapshot of who you are, professionally. A well designed resume should be easy to scan, and should tell a chronological story of an individual's professional and academic development.

When you are completing your resume, it is important to keep in mind your audience. The reader of your MBA resume will be different than the person hiring you for an investment banking job or an engineering position, as the MBA reader will be looking for things that are important to an MBA program.

MBA programs are looking for individuals who will be successful as leaders and in highly collaborative work environments. They are seeking skills that are transferable to success in any industry. In addition to telling the chronological story of your academic and professional career, much of your information should be focused on supporting these things:

1. Showcasing leadership
2. Showcasing other "MBA relevant" skills such as teamwork, collaboration, innovation
3. Demonstrating growth and progression

### Format Specifics

We fervently believe that in almost every case, the resume should be one page only. One inch margins are ideal, but margins are one area where you can play around with spacing.

Typical fonts for a resume are Times New Roman, Verdana, Cambria and Arial, with Times New Roman being the most common. The business resume is not the place to experiment with fancy fonts.

### Professional Section

The professional section of your resume summarizes and chronologically illustrates your career. In most (not all, but most) cases, the career progress is also most important to MBA admissions representatives and that is what they will want to focus on and discuss. There are several key questions to ask when you are considering what to include in the professional section:

1. Is the work meaningful? Can you leverage this position to illustrate a specific skill set that you acquired or an accomplishment that is important?
2. Does it support your career path? Does it support your future goals?
3. How long were you at the job?
4. How recent was it?

With each of your positions, each point should lead with a strong and interesting action verb. Another rule to keep in mind is to quantify results as much as possible. While it is nice to know that you created a new marketing program, it is also important to know that, as an example, the new marketing program increased awareness by 40%

When completing this section, remember the qualities that MBA admissions committees are looking for. Below are five of these qualities:

- Leadership
- Diversity
- Self-Awareness
- Intellectual Horsepower
- Emotional Intelligence

In addition to the above, it is always great to show that you are progressing in your career. You need to make it clear that over the course of your career, you have picked up new skills, assumed new responsibilities, developed as an individual and that all of this growth has been recognized by others.

## **Education Section**

The Education section should include very basic information about your educational background. It should show a chronology of schools attended, areas of study and significant activities and accomplishments. As with the rest of the resume, it should be easy to scan, so that someone who is becoming acquainted with your background can very easily identify names of schools and dates and start to piece together your background.

## **Additional Information Section**

The Additional Information section is a brief, informal section which encompasses everything that you want to include on your resume that does not fit into the other sections. This should be very brief, not more than five to six lines at the bottom of your resume, with two to three lines being more appropriate.

If you do not have essential information that you are anxious to include, you can use this section to outline activities and interests. It is not uncommon to see two sentences at the bottom, such as this:

Interests include skiing, surfing, drawing and world travel. Speak Mandarin and Spanish fluently.

Always keep in mind that this is the “extras” section, and as such it should be kept very brief. While this may seem obvious to some readers, we have reviewed resumes that

boast of titles such as “Beer Drinking Champion”. This type of content is not desirable for your resume. The following are 3 examples of what not to include:

- Controversial Political Affiliations
- Long List of Anything
- Too Many Hobbies or Interests



## Start Working on Your Resume!

We at [mbaMission](#) encourage candidates to get as much “noise” out of the way as possible before business schools begin releasing their essay questions and they have to start writing applications. We want our applicants to have the freedom and time to reflect on their experiences, formally and thoroughly brainstorm, choose ideas, prepare outlines and then focus on crafting powerful essays. Essentially, we want them to be unfettered as they engage in what is, for many, one of the most significant creative challenges they will ever face.

So, a simple step such as preparing your resume now will allow you to concentrate better on the other elements of your application in the future. By working on your resume now—a process that can require several rounds of revisions—you can dedicate the time to do so at a more leisurely pace, before “crunch time” hits. Further, you will lay the foundation for brainstorming for your essays later, by reminding yourself of your most significant accomplishments.

We recognize that you may achieve additional accomplishments in the next few months, of course. However, we still suggest that you update your resume now and then revisit and amend it as needed one to two weeks before your application deadlines.

In your resume, make sure that you are showcasing your accomplishments, not merely stating responsibilities. When only your responsibilities are presented—with no accompanying results—the reader has no understanding of whether you were effective in the role you are highlighting. For example, consider the following resume entry, in which only responsibilities are offered:

2005–Present Home Products Group, The Jason Company Cincinnati, Ohio  
Brand Manager

- Responsible for managing a \$10M media campaign, supervising a staff of five junior brand managers, monitoring daily sales volumes and ensuring the consistent supply of product from five production facilities in three countries.

This kind of entry leaves the reader wondering, “Was the media campaign successful? Did the staff of five progress? Did sales volumes increase? Did the supply of products reach its destination?” When this one large bullet point is instead broken down into individual bulleted entries that elaborate on each task and show clear results, the reader learns not just about the candidate’s responsibilities, but also about that person’s ultimate effectiveness and successes. Consider the following example:

2008–Present The Jason Company Cincinnati, Ohio  
Brand Manager

- Initiated \$10M television/Internet “Island Vacation” promotion introducing new Shine brand detergent, surpassing first-year sales targets within three months.
- Mentored and supervised five junior brand managers, each of whom was promoted to brand manager (company traditionally promotes 25%).

- Analyzed daily sales volumes and identified opportunity to increase price point in Midwest, resulting in 26% margin improvement and \$35M in new profits.
- Secured “safety supply” of vital chemicals from alternate suppliers, ensuring 99% order fulfillment.

By comparing the first entry for The Jason Company with the second, you can see how much more effective an accomplishment-driven resume is than one that simply states responsibilities.

You should present quantifiable results in your resume whenever possible, because such results clearly convey your success in the actions you undertook. However, in some instances, you simply cannot quantify your success. In such cases, you can instead demonstrate nonquantifiable or even potential results. Consider the following examples:

- Persuaded management to review existing operations; currently leading Manufacturing Review Committee, which will table its final report in June 2012.
- Established divisional continuing education series, noted on review as “crucial” and “game changing.”
- Initiated biweekly “Tuesday at Five” team social event, resulting in enhanced workplace morale.

In each of these sample bullets, the results of the writer’s actions are not measurable, but they are nonetheless important. The accomplishments, while “soft,” are conveyed as clearly positive.

Ideally, your resume should be only one page long; admissions committees generally expect and appreciate the conciseness of this format. If you choose to submit a two-page resume or longer, your reader may have difficulty scanning it and identifying (and remembering) important facts. With these space constraints in mind, we offer two fairly straightforward “space saver” ideas:

1. Do not include a mission statement at the beginning of your resume. Your mission in this case is to get into the MBA program to which you are applying—and, of course, the admissions committee already knows this!
2. Only your name should appear at the top of your resume. You do not need to include your address, email address, gender, marital status, etc., because these data will all be provided in your application form.

Please, resist the urge to make your resume fit on one page by shrinking your font or margins. Your font should be no smaller than 10 point type, and your margins should be no smaller than 1” on either side and 0.75” at the top and bottom. Rather than trying to fit too much information on the page, commit yourself instead to showcasing only your most important accomplishments that tell your story best.



## 10 Fatal Resume Flaws to Avoid

Done correctly, your MBA resume can open the door to a top b-school acceptance; done incorrectly, this one-page summary can kill your chances. In this post we'd like to highlight the 10 toxic mistakes of a poisonous MBA resume.

### 1. You Improperly Prioritize

Here's why your resume is more important than you realize: Often it's the first element of your application package that the adcom look at. It also can determine whether the reader will review the rest of your application with interest or out of a sense of obligation. A strong, impressive resume will pique the reader's interest and inspire him/her to read on with an optimistic eye; a sloppy resume will do the opposite – it will demotivate your reader to view your application favorably. In short, you want to make a positive first impression; you don't want to turn your reader off.

### 2. You Stick with Basic Descriptions

Adcom readers are looking for career progression. A list of jobs, titles, and job descriptions will tell the adcom little about the projects you've completed, how you have excelled and transcended the average, and the impact you've had on your professional surroundings. Basic job descriptions just won't cut it. You need to bring out where you have gone above and beyond the expected and ordinary and when you have really contributed.

### 3. Your MBA Resume Looks like a Job Resume

Your [MBA resume](#) should not include technical, industry-specific jargon that you may appropriately include on a job resume. Relatedly, ditch the "objective" line/section at the top of your resume. The adcoms know your objective – gaining acceptance to b-school. Don't waste time and space stating the obvious.

### 4. You Don't Stick to Formatting Standards

Follow the resume standards set by your target school. The program's career services department may provide additional information on how you should standardize your resume, including tips on standardizing punctuation, formatting, and tenses. For example, if your school's format doesn't italicize job titles, then you shouldn't take the liberty to do so either. Furthermore, if your school doesn't ask for a pink font and a frilly border (which it won't!), then don't decorate your resume with these embellishments.

### 5. You Don't Edit Extensively

Remember what we said above about a sloppy resume? It's time to repeat that here: A [www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide](http://www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide)

sloppy resume will portray you as a sloppy person, and NOT the type of person admissions readers seek. In addition to running your word processor's spell check and grammar check, be sure to review your resume with your eyes and ears so you can see and hear errors that the computerized error-checkers may have missed. Better yet, borrow the eyes and ears of another person or two to further ensure that your resume is letter-perfect, properly formatted, and accurate.

## 6. You Go into Info Overload

Don't offer information that will appear in other components of your application, like your GMAT score, GPA, education background, and references. Only provide information relevant to your achievements, skills, and career progression. Needless to say, information like height, weight, date of birth, high school grades, and relationship status should be omitted. This is a resume, not an autobiography.

## 7. You Break the Page Limit Law

Some schools specify a maximum of one page. Some specify a maximum of two pages for the resume. Whatever it is, stick to it. And no, you are not the exception here even if you are dealing with a one-page limit. Almost all applicants have enough information to fill more than the specified space, and they trim it down to the required length. You can too. By submitting a too-long resume, you're telling the adcom one of a few things (or perhaps all): first, that you are cocky and think that your accomplishments are that much more impressive than those of other applicants and therefore deserve more of the adcom's time than other applicants do; that you are lazy; or that you don't care about the resume page limit.

## 8. You Don't Vary Your Verbs

A resume that uses the same verbs in its job descriptions over and over again is a boring resume. Many people don't think of the resume as a place to showcase your writing abilities, but it is! A good resume doesn't just present important content, but ensures that that content is well-presented. Switch up your verb usage by replacing overused words like "developed" or "led" with similar verbs like "delivered," "reengineered," "implemented," "initiated," "accelerated," and "established."

## 9. You Deny Your Reader the Details

Impact is illustrated in numbers, and if you delete these details, then your resume will lie flat. Bring your resume to life by including the most important details of [what you accomplished](#), how you impacted others through your accomplishment. These details should provide the meat of your job description and are necessary if you want to go beyond job descriptions to show an above-average track record of high performance.

## 10. You Lie

If you're reading this thinking, "Duh! Obviously you shouldn't lie in something as important [www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide](http://www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide)

as an MBA resume (or anything else, really),” then pat yourself on the back – your moral scrupulousness should be a model for others. Sadly, resume writers in and out of the MBA arena think that a little exaggeration here and there will go unnoticed and will only improve their resume. This is not the case. Admissions readers take serious measures to fact-check their candidates’ claims. Please be honest in this area and all other areas of the application process. An unearthed falsehood equals an automatic ding. Better to be safe and report a less-than-impressive fact than to be sorry later for embellishing.



## **Career Plan and the MBA career goals essay**

In general, a strong career plan is one that brings the candidate to a very successful future, and one that is very likely to happen. This translates to 9 foundations for a strong career plan:

### **1. Specific industry**

- o Specific enough to make it unique and concrete.
- o For example, banking is “too broad” an industry, whereas Project Finance or Biotech Finance is more specific and therefore more unique and concrete.

### **2. Specific positions**

### **3. Connection to past**

### **4. Assured first step**

- o Rather senior position
- o A company you work with / worked with
- o Impressive company description (i.e. largest...)

### **5. Unique career plan**

### **6. Rich, famous or both in the long term**

### **7. Likely and natural connection of goals.**

### **8. Community agenda**

### **9. Sexy industry**

In general, the more specific and personal the essay is, the better.

### **The key to the Career Essay:**

Connect most sentences with the future goals and the industry name.

o Most of the sentences should relate to the goals.

o For example:

Why School X? Because Professor X is the world's best in Y, and I need Y to achieve my goal Z.

### **Necessary to have:**

- 1) What are the short and long term career goals?
- 2) If the first step is assured – a VERY clear statement of this fact.

Because some admission readers may skim the essays, you want to make sure this paragraph is very noticeable (make it a separate paragraph), and to mention it twice if possible.

### **Nice, but not necessary, to have:**

- 1) Repeated mention of the exact same industry name.
- 2) Why are these your goals (why do you feel they are the right goals for you)?
- 3) When/how were your goals conceived?
- 4) Why these goals of all possible goals in the world? Should be personal, deep.

### **OK to have:**

1. How did your goals, once conceived, drive your actions/career choices up to here?
2. What elements/experiences in your past make you feel that these goals are realistic?
3. Any other details that a. promote and candidacy and b. answer the question: "what are my career goals and why these are my goals". It needs to be clear how these details are connected to explaining your goals.

### **Usually not OK to have:**

Descriptions of the candidate's past/resume/background which are not clearly connected to the career goals - unless the essay question specifically asks for it.

*Here is a good example for a strong career goals essay, written by an HBS admitted candidate:*

The application essay question / topic:

**Question: What are your career aspirations and why? How will you get there? (300 word limit).**

### **Long Run Objective**

*My long-run objective is to achieve a senior managerial position in a large multinational*  
[www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide](http://www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide)

*corporation that markets, or preferably manufactures, commodities. One of my highest aspirations is to be one of those who establishes, or significantly advances, such a corporation. Therefore, I intend to develop within the scope of one firm. I believe that on my way to achieve my goal I will express my talents and interests and contribute to society's prosperity.*

### **Short Run Objectives**

*Looking ten years back, I view my interdisciplinary experience in business management, army service, political and public positions, and traveling as a part of the solid background that can generate a successful senior manager in a multinational commodities corporation. To complete my preparation process, my short-run objectives are:*

*a. First - to acquire quality general academic education in business administration while also mastering the English language.*

*b. Second - to develop within the scope of one firm.*

#### *HBS - a Measure and a Target In Itself*

*I wish to say, sincerely, that in my opinion HBS will fulfill my first short-run objective optimally. HBS has the qualities that best fit my expectations, objective, and background. The more I hear and read about HBS - the more I feel I belong there; it is considered the best school in the world for developing general management skills and acquiring management tools in the marketing and consumption areas. Graduates gain excellent placement services and leading positions. HBS has no competitors in academic level and in world-wide fame (I learned that from talking to people in China, Eastern Europe, and Arab countries).*

*In conclusion, I believe that studying at HBS will be a great experience. Moreover, it will provide the optimal accomplishment for my first short-term objective, as well as a significant advancement towards achieving my long-term goal.*



## Sell Yourself with Your Resume

I'm going to assume that you have completed a first draft of your resume, chosen an attractive, easy-to-read format, and built the typical sections (Professional, Education, and some type of other section that may be called "Other" or "Interests" or "Other Key Leadership Activities and Interests").

As you examine your resume draft critically, the key question always is am I selling myself in the best possible manner? Too often applicants treat the resume as an afterthought, as the poor cousin of the MBA Application process, as a commodity exercise to be done quickly. Adcoms will tell you that resumes can tell a lot about an applicant, so don't lose this critical opportunity to sell yourself.

Let's get specific.

### SELL YOURSELF AS AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR

MBA students are constantly using communication skills, both oral and written. If you want to sell yourself as an effective communicator, then here are some mistakes to avoid that I encounter every year with private clients:

**No company descriptions.** If you work for Pfizer or Bain, then the whole world knows where you work and the kinds of issues you have likely faced. If you work for a family business, a small to medium-sized company, or a cool tech start-up, DON'T ASSUME readers will know your employer. With no company description, the reader will feel disoriented and will perhaps not give your bullet points the same coherent read. But ultimately, that is not their loss; it is yours, as you did not situate the reader. So add a line under the name of the firm like:

"A boutique management consulting firm specializing in business intelligence and analytics with four offices in the U.S. and Europe, 150 employees and founded by former McKinsey partners."

Now the reader understands the scale and importance of this firm and its blue chip origins.

**Avoid bullets filled with technical jargon.** Many folks fill their bullets with technical jargon, particularly engineers. And if you are working as a materials engineer or computer engineer then the most critical selling job you have is not painting yourself as an analytical geek who does not know how to make all functions understand their problems and contributions. The following example is from a real resume:

"Designed in-house computation models for performance analysis and energy optimization for bangle manufacturers".

What are the chances that an adcom is going to understand this contribution to the world of bangles? What are bangles? The only Bangles I know were a pop group in the 80s. So

don't sell yourself as an applicant who doesn't know how to communicate broadly to many types of business functions.

**Poorly explained activities.** Every year I see applicants briefly list major extra-curricular activities with so few details that the reader will not understand what the activity is or how significant it is for you. And don't assume the reader will take the time to Google your activity or refer back to your application form. Take the example of:

“Co-Founder of Long Island Lacrosse”

So what is wrong with this resume listing? Well, what if I told you that this applicant had started a nonprofit over three years ago, which now has a paid executive director and helps hundreds of disadvantaged high school students learn both a new sport and study skills/SAT prep? And what if I told you this applicant spends 15 hours a week on this organization and runs their 10-member board? Do you think that the bullet above gives the adcom any idea of the maturity and reach of this venture and the applicant's commitment? This is a classic example of losing a key selling opportunity on your resume. This is a better bullet:

“Co-Founder of Long Island Lacrosse (2009-Present). Run ten-member board and oversee salaried Executive Director of this NGO ([longislandlacrosse.org](http://longislandlacrosse.org)), teaching 200 plus low income high school students lacrosse while prepping them for subject test and the SATS.”

## SELL YOURSELF AS A BROAD LEADER

Sometimes I review resume drafts of very impressive candidates, but all of their listed accomplishments sound the same. There is no doubt that in many first and second jobs, we are specializing in a certain role and repeating similar analyses and projects. But keep in mind that adcoms want to accept folks who are as broad as possible despite the parameters of a given job. Those with leadership potential don't just analyze and run numbers, but they find a way to train others, interview for the group, lead a volunteer effort, challenge the status quo, contribute to a cross-functional team, present to the investment committee or executive team, or mentor a summer intern... Take a critical look at your resume and make sure you are alternating between types of accomplishments versus pure individual analytical achievements. The best resumes showcase a variety of wins and contributions.

## SELL YOURSELF AS A NEEDLE MOVER

There is a certain energy that is palpable from great resumes. They look simple and are easy to scan and follow chronologically, but they also show the applicant not just performing perfunctory roles and responsibilities. They show the applicant **moving the needle**. And this is achieved by sharing two critical things—specifics and results. Compare these two bullets:

“Responsible for launching baby cologne in 5 European markets.”

“Chosen to lead the first ever non-alcoholic baby cologne for 5 European markets, managing a multi-office global marketing team and securing incremental TV ad spend vs.

the established budget. The launch team exceeded established distribution goals in all markets, and profit impact to regional P&L was over \$10 million.”

Now who would you want to interview? The person who wrote the first or second bullet? It may sound obvious, but many clients show me resume drafts filled with the first bullet type, and risk coming across as routine managers. The real difference with the second bullet is that the author provided juicy specifics and measured conclusions. This brings us into their world, into the trenches of their achievements. This applicant was “chosen” for the project and not just “responsible”. He was managing a project with multi-country impact. He was able to convince management to increase the ad budget. Notice how the applicant does not just say “I” but rather gives credit to a team effort doing better than expected in their trade distribution goals and adding over \$10 million to the bottom line.

So look at your bullets and ask yourself if you are selling yourself with this level of detail and energy? It may mean you have room for fewer resume bullets, but leaders move the needle and galvanize the efforts of others to move the needle.



## The MBA Essay Editing Funnel

One of our favorite essay editing techniques here at [Accepted.com](http://Accepted.com) is the Essay Editing Funnel. You'll want to begin utilizing this technique once you're done writing the first copy of your essay and are ready to push forward towards the final draft finish line.

Here's how it works:

### 1. The Top of the Funnel

This is the widest part of the funnel and it represents the big picture of your essay. To help you get through this first stage of the editing process, answer the following questions:

- **Does your essay answer the essay question?**

This is one of the most important points in this section. You can write an outstanding essay about your virtues as a volunteer veterinarian assistant that voyages out to faraway lands to help clean up after natural disasters, but if the essay question is about MBA goals, and you don't address that at all, then your essay will have failed.

When the adcom readers are done reading your essay, they should have ZERO trouble connecting your answer to their question. This is the first thing you need to check when editing your essay.

- **Does your essay complement the other sections of your application?**

Your essay should NOT restate your resume in paragraph form, rehash the same stories that your recommender chooses, or document basic information like your name, date of birth, and test scores. An essay comprised of this data will come off as boring and unoriginal. But it's not just that. Your essays provide valuable space for you to introduce a new dimension of yourself; if you don't use this space properly, by adding new experiences and additional stories, then the adcom may think that you are one-dimensional and simply have nothing more to say. Or that you are too lazy to say it.

Likewise, if you are submitting multiple essays for a single application, be sure that the material in each essay complements the others. There should be no overlap; you should use each essay as an opportunity to present new and exciting information.

- **Does your essay help [introduce yourself to your reader](#)?**

Similar to the previous point, your essays should help the adcom readers get to know you better. As you read over your essay during this stage of the editing process, be sure you're your essay furthers your cause by highlighting some of your spectacular experiences and qualities – those things that help the adcom figure out who you are.

### 2. The Middle of the Funnel

As you move down to the middle part of the funnel, you'll start to pay attention to the structure and style of your essay. Ask yourself the following questions to guide you through this narrowing part of the funnel:

- **Does your essay have a clear theme?**

You may be inclined to cram in as much as possible into your essay, making it read like a list of headlines that never go anywhere or like a verbal maze that takes the reader all over

the place but to nowhere specific. These are no-no's. Instead, structure your essay so that it has a clear focus – this is your theme. Your core idea. Whether you implicitly or explicitly state your theme in a thesis sentence, you should make sure that by the time your reader is done reviewing your essay, he or she knows what your essay was about and can identify its theme.

- **Did you provide clear examples to support your theme?**

Your readers can identify your theme – check! But were you convincing? Did you support your main idea with specific, clear examples? Or did you simply state your thesis and run off, ditching your theme in the first paragraph, never to be seen again the conclusion?

To properly structure your essay, you'll need to think of examples that will assure your readers that you mean business with your theme. To state that you possess leadership skills, and then provide no proof, doesn't do much for your claim. Choose a theme, introduce it, and then back it up with examples drawn from your real-life experiences.

- **Did you infuse your essay with details?**

This is where the interest factor comes in. You may have a crystal clear theme and lovely supporting examples, but if your writing lacks color and texture, then you may lose your audience. Your goal should be to use language to breathe life into your essay to make it as readable and enjoyable, and thereby memorable, as possible.

### 3. The Bottom of the Funnel

Here at the narrow end of the funnel you'll examine the writing mechanics of your essay. You're going to need to put your reading glasses on here and pay close attention to the nitty-gritty.

Ask yourself the following:

- **Have you checked the spelling and grammar of your essay?**

While your word processor's spelling/grammar checker is a good place to start this phase of the Essay Editing Funnel, it's far from your stopping point. It'll pick up obvious spelling errors like if you write "hte" instead of "the" or (if you're lucky) catch a grammar mistake like use of "there" instead of "their." But it most certainly will not catch everything.

The best way to check your spelling and grammar is to use your eyes and your ears. Read your essay aloud to catch errors that your spell/grammar checker missed. Why read aloud? Your ears will hear mistakes that your eyes glossed over.

- **Recruit a second set of eyes and ears.**

Two heads are better than one, and four eyes and ears are better than two.

- **Choose the right words.**

One thing a spell/grammar checker won't catch is your choice of words. Make sure you don't use the same word over and over again and that you vary your sentences so that they're not all super short or super long. At the same time, don't use words or stylistic technics just to impress. Priority #1: clear, succinct communication.

- **Do a style, standardization, and word/character count check.**

Each school will have its own requirements when it comes to standardization. Consult the application instructions and then make sure your essay conforms (this includes formatting details like margin width and indentation points). And make sure your word/character count doesn't exceed the limit!

\*\*\*

So there's your Essay Editing Funnel – a tried-and-true editing technique that forces you to start big, dig deeper, and then finely polish each paragraph, sentence, word, and letter of your essays until they shine.





## Who Should I Ask to Review My MBA Essays?

The finish line is in sight – you’re almost there! You’ve written your [MBA application essays](#) and are ready to get a second (and third and fourth and fifth) opinion. Well first off, good for you – many applicants write their essays, edit them themselves, and then hit “Submit” without looking back. You’re already one step ahead of the game by taking this critical step – recruiting a few additional people to review your essay.

### But...am I not good enough? Why can't I review my own essay?

Consider the following three points:

1. **Sense** – Of course you know what you mean at every twist and turn of your essay, but that doesn’t mean that the admissions readers will. The best way to assess the sense factor of your essay is to present it to an outside (i.e. non-you) party to read it. These additional readers will objectively question your content and context to ensure that the points you’re trying to make come across successfully.
2. **Style and structure** – Your objective reader will also be able to judge whether your paragraphs flow properly or if the jump from one idea is bridged logically. Sometimes writers may move from one idea to another too abruptly; this jump may make sense to you – obviously you see the connection between these two ideas – but an objective reader may notice that the transition needs to be spelled out for the sake of clarity.
3. **Syntax and spelling** – If a few others look at your essay, the better your chance is of catching each and every spelling, grammar, and word choice error. You’ve looked over your essay one too many times to look critically at each letter on the page. This essay needs to be proof-perfect, and you’re more likely to hit that perfection sweet spot if you recruit fresh eyes.

### How many eyes are enough eyes?

You should ask 2-5 people for advice. These people should fall into two categories: those that know you well and those that write well. Ask 2-3 people from each category. The people who know you well will look at your essays and see if the essay represents you and depicts your personality, qualities, and skills accurately, while the people who write well will check the quality of your writing, making suggestions to improve grammar, style, word usage, etc.

### Can too many cooks spoil my essay?

This is a good question and the answer is YES. You don’t want to send your essay to every Tom, Dick, and Mary in your address book mainly because 90% of those people won’t be qualified to review your essay. Don’t be mistaken in thinking that more is merrier here. You don’t want less-than-valuable advice from mediocre (or worse) writers or people who don’t know you so well. Not only will their advice be potentially counterproductive, but [www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide](http://www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide)

you've got enough to do – do you really want to sort through the essay edits of each of your high school cheerleader buddies?

### **Should I go pro?**

Almost everyone can benefit from [professional essay editing](#), and if money is no object, then I recommend that everyone procure editing. Since, however, money is generally a consideration, I would say this: If you are confident that your essays (as well as the other components of your application) are sound, and if the people who review your essay agree, then you may not need the assistance of an admissions editor. If, on the other hand, you feel like you need the assistance of an admissions consultant or editor to get you to that point, then I suggest you do go pro. A professional consultant or editor will serve as a sounding board if you have specific questions about your essay, or as an overall guide if you need more direction. You can engage the assistance of a consultant/ editor at any point in the writing process – at the beginning when you're floundering for a topic, at the end when you need some final essay polishing, or any time in between.



## What NOT to Include in MBA Application Essays

There are certainly a lot of things you should include when writing your MBA application essays, but some things you should definitely not include. Here are a few:

### False claims of uniqueness

*“The semester I spent in France during high school was a unique experience.”*

*“I want to attend Columbia Business School because of its unique Entrepreneurial Club.”*

*“The opportunity to do hands-on consulting at Ross is unique.”*

*“My finance background and strong interpersonal skills will allow me to make a unique contribution to Cornell’s Investment Management Club.”*

One of [mbaMission](#)’s consultants recently counted five uses of the word “unique” in a single 600-word essay. What is more, not one of the uses actually fulfilled the term’s correct definition: “existing as the only one or as the sole example.” Applicants tend to use the word “unique” as a way of trying to make themselves stand out to the admissions committee. However, because they use the word imprecisely—and often too frequently—it instead has the opposite effect of making the essay lose its distinctiveness and believability. Another danger of using the term too casually is that you risk exposing your lack of research about the school if you claim something is unique to its program when it really is not.

Here are the same four statements written without the generic term “unique.” In each case, the sentence is far more descriptive and therefore much less likely to appear in any other applicant’s essay!

*“The semester I spent in France during high school was eye-opening, from the frogs’ legs I was served at dinner to the concept of shopping daily for my food.”*

*“I want to attend Columbia Business School because its Entrepreneurial Club offers an incredible range of activities and resources that will prepare me to better run my own company.”*

*“The opportunity to do hands-on consulting at Ross will complement the theoretical background I will gain by taking classes on consulting.”*

*“My finance background and strong interpersonal skills will allow me to effectively coach and mentor classmates new to finance through Cornell’s Investment Management Club’s mentorship program.”*

### Platitudes

Many business school candidates unwittingly start their essays with platitudes—obvious or trite remarks that are written as though they were original. For example, when responding to Harvard Business School’s essay question “Tell us about a time when you made a difficult decision,” a candidate might write the following:

*“Managers constantly face difficult decisions. Still, everyone hates indecision.”*

However, the applicant does not “own” this idea and cannot lay claim to this statement. A simple alternative would be to insert his or her personal experience and viewpoint into the sentence:

*“Yet again, I was in the boardroom with Steve, anticipating that he would change his mind on the [mbaMission](#) file.”*

By discussing your personal and unique experiences, you take ownership of your story and better engage your reader. Avoiding platitudes and generalities—and ensuring that you are sharing your experience and opinion, rather than one that could belong to anyone else—is a simple but often overlooked step in creating a compelling message.

### **Too many sentences starting with the word “I”**

Although putting yourself at the center of the stories in your MBA application essays is certainly important, a common mistake business school candidates make is beginning too many sentences with the word “I.” As a general rule, you should never have two sentences in a row that begin this way. Consider the following example:

*“I worked for three years at ABC Plastics, a small injection molding company. I was responsible for overseeing the overall management of ABC Plastics, from day-to-day operations to strategic planning. I managed 100 people. I worked very long hours, but I learned more than I could have ever imagined.”*

Now consider the same statement reworked to avoid using the word “I” at the beginning of subsequent sentences:

*“For three years, I worked at ABC Plastics, a small injection molding company. My responsibilities at ABC included overseeing the overall management of the company, from day-to-day operations to strategic planning. Because I supervised more than 100 staff members, my days were long, but the experience taught me more than I could have ever imagined.”*

As you can see, the second example reads much better than the first—and none of the sentences in the second example begin with “I.”

### **The abbreviation “etc.”**

As a general rule, “etc.” should never appear in your MBA application essays. Consider the following sentences:

*“I helped draft prospectuses, analyze key company data, value companies, etc.”*

*“I look forward to courses such as ‘Small Business Management,’ ‘Leading Teams,’ ‘Multiparty Negotiations,’ etc.”*

In the first sample sentence, “etc.” replaces information that is of interest to the admissions reader and that he or she would use to evaluate the writer. The reader cannot make the leap and understand where the writer’s experiences led. In the second example, “etc.” trivializes the school’s resources and may even suggest to the admissions committee that

the applicant is just too lazy (or disinterested!) to properly do his or her homework. We are at a loss to think of one instance in which “etc.” could be used appropriately in a business school application essay. Very simply, ensure that this term does not appear in your essays.

### Extreme descriptions

Our philosophy at [mbaMission](#) is that candidates should let the experiences they share in their essays—not their word choices—captivate the admissions committees. Sometimes we find that applicants attempt to emphasize their actions with “extreme” adjectives and adverbs, and we strongly discourage this approach. Consider the following example:

*“As others withdrew their support, I remained remarkably dedicated to our crucial fundraising efforts. I dramatically increased my participation in our strategic planning meetings and insisted that we push forward with a wildly creative guerrilla marketing plan, which brought forth tremendous results—\$1M in ‘instant’ proceeds.”*

In these two sentences, the writer uses the descriptors remarkably, dramatically, wildly and tremendous in an attempt to make an impression on the reader. We find that a more effective approach is to eliminate these “extreme” descriptions and let the experiences do the “talking.”

*“As others withdrew their support, I remained dedicated to our fundraising efforts. I increased my participation in our strategic planning meetings and insisted that we push forward with a guerrilla marketing plan that brought \$1M in ‘instant’ proceeds.”*

In this second example, we do not need to be told that the results were “tremendous,” because the \$1M speaks for itself; we do not need to be told that the marketing campaign was “wildly creative,” because this is implied in the nature of guerrilla marketing. In addition to showing a level of humility on the part of the candidate, this approach is less wordy. Although the eight words saved in the latter example may seem inconsequential, we removed them from only two sentences. If we can remove four words from each and every sentence, we would be able to augment your essay with other compelling ideas.

### Arrogance

Business school candidates often fret about striking the right balance between confidence and arrogance in their MBA application essays. For example, you might have difficulty choosing the better choice from between the following two statements:

*“At the Stanford GSB, I will take advantage of the newly designed curriculum to...”*  
*“At the Stanford GSB, I would take advantage of the newly designed curriculum to...”*

Or between these two statements:

*“After completing my MBA at Harvard Business School, I will pursue a career in...”*  
*“After completing my MBA at Harvard Business School, I would aspire to a career in...”*

In each set of examples, you are choosing between certainty (“I will”) and diplomacy (“I [www.gmatclub.com/MBAGuide](http://www.gmatclub.com/MBAGuide)

would”). Considering these options, you might ask yourself whether the first option is too presumptuous or the second option too weak. The answer is that neither of these examples is “right”; each candidate needs to choose an approach that is consistent with his or her personality. However, the key is to maintain consistency—mixing the two styles is distracting to the reader and can seem sloppy.

## Repetition

Recently, a prospective business school candidate emailed [mbaMission](#) with the following question: “What is the most basic stylistic error that candidates make when writing their MBA application essays?” Our answer: unnecessary repetition. Although repeating a word within a single sentence or in consecutive sentences does not constitute a grammatical mistake, it can still be grating to a reader’s “ear.”

Consider this example:

*“During my time at XYZ Sales, I increased productivity by 31% and increased revenue by 21%. Meanwhile, I increased my client base by an industry-leading 81%, bringing increased prestige to my firm.”*

Although this example—which uses the word “increased” four times in just two sentences—may seem like an exaggerated case, it is actually not as rare as you might think. However, the repetition can be easily eliminated and the sentences made increasingly reader friendly with just a few simple changes:

*“During my time at XYZ Sales, I increased productivity by 31% and revenue by 21%. Meanwhile, I grew my client base by an industry-leading 81%, thereby enhancing my firm’s prestige.”*

The key to eliminating repetition is to first become aware of the potential problem and then gain distance from your work. If you step away from your essay drafts for a day or two and then go back to reread them, you will have the objectivity necessary to catch—and correct—this easily avoidable mistake.

## Mentions of rankings

In your essays and interviews, you should thoroughly demonstrate your interest in your target program by developing and presenting arguments that center on the school’s academic and environmental attributes (e.g., research institutes, professors, experiential learning opportunities, classes, pedagogies)—but do not identify the school’s position in the various MBA rankings as a reason for applying. Although applicants, administrators, students and alumni all pay tremendous attention to rankings, within your application, the topic is entirely taboo.

Why is this? Rankings are a measure of a school’s reputation and tend to fluctuate from year to year. By citing rankings, you indicate that you could (or would) be dissatisfied by a drop in your target school’s prestige, as conveyed by such rankings—a drop that would be out of the school’s control and that, from the school’s perspective, could ostensibly put your relationship as a future student (and later as an alumnus/alumna) at risk. Further, MBA programs want to be sure that you are attracted to their various academic offerings and that you have profound professional needs that they can satisfy. Rankings, however, are superficial, and referencing them in your application materials undermines the

profundity of your research and motives.



## Preparing Short Answer Questions

With the recent release of the 2014 HBS application, it is clear that shortening the number of essays is a trend that is here to stay for now. With only one essay on the HBS application this year, it is becoming more important than ever to not only communicate effectively and concisely, but also to leverage the balance of the application (and of course the interview) to stand out from the crowd.

One result of the decreasing essay trend is an expansion of in-application short answer questions. Just a few years ago, there were few or none of these questions, but schools have since moved several opportunities to share your story out of the essay section and into the application itself. So just how do you go about preparing to answer these short questions? The preparation is remarkably similar to how you approached the essays in the past.

Sounds simple, but you must always be thinking of how you look compared to someone else with the exact same background, cultural experience and involvement because trust us, they are out there. Everyone thinks of themselves as unique, but when you are placed into a pile with other similar folks, you suddenly are not so unique anymore! The challenge comes when you are limited to just a few sentences (or even characters in some cases) to get your point across. There's no room for dramatic storytelling or elaborate embellishment, but you still need to explain why something mattered to you or how it has shaped you.

One thing we generally recommend is to use a matrix to ensure you are communicating a balance of core essentials to the admissions committees. If you use this approach, you will be much more organized as you apply and will also be able to quickly ascertain where you may be coming up short. How does it work? We view the four core essentials of a perfect application are: Leadership, Innovation, Maturity, and Teamwork. These are the four critical areas that all business schools desire to see in their applicants.

Make a grid on a piece of paper with these four attributes across the top columns. Now on the left side of the grid, list the areas down the rows that are covered by the short answer questions (by the way, this also works with the long essay topics). For example, if there is a question in your application about your short and long term goals, write "short term goals" and "long term goals" in separate rows. Make sure you skip some rows between each topic to give you space to fill in information about yourself.

Now comes the easy part. Simply revisit your experience in your mind, and jot down what you see as relevant or compelling information about each topic. Don't worry about whether or not you get everything exactly right, just stream your thoughts. Once you have the rows filled in, go across the grid and check off boxes which you think are adequately demonstrated by that piece of information. For example, if your short term goal is to work in investment banking, and your background is analyst work in an investment bank, you can check off the "maturity" box as well as likely the "teamwork" box, since you probably

worked in a team environment and your post MBA goal selection demonstrates a mature plan (because it builds upon something you did in the past). If you feel something is detrimental to a particular area, or does not demonstrate leadership, innovation, teamwork or maturity, give yourself an X in that box.

Of course by the end of the exercise, you will have a scorecard from which you can see where you are strong and where you are weak regarding these four critical areas. If you don't have any checks in the leadership column, for example, you should dig deeper into your experience to try and draw out examples of such. Feeling like your information communicates immaturity in some way? Try to tighten up your goals and plans or think of a situation you've had to handle which required wisdom. Thinking your job was a bit independent of working with others? Draw out examples of how you work in teams in your extracurricular activities.

Once you have your refined grid in hand, you should now be able to selectively draw the key components from your basket of experience to answer your short questions in a way that presents the right amount of balanced evidence. The key word is balance. Business schools like to admit candidates with the "total package," that is, they possess a broad offering of skills and experience which illustrate all four key attributes of the perfect applicant. It's not enough to be the best darn leader your company has ever seen. If you can't work well in teams, schools will pass on you. Are you mature with great strengths in teamwork, but lack the creative spark of innovation? Schools may pass.

Sometimes, this exercise will expose an area where you need to go out and bolster your experience further. That's why it's good to do this early in the application process. Ultimately, the information you offer in the short answer questions is just as vital as the info in your essays. Don't be fooled into thinking these are throwaway questions. The ability to concisely and completely answer a question with a very limited word restriction is an exercise in restraint and economy that demonstrates a very valuable skill in itself to the admissions committees. Don't blow your chance to impress them!



## Review the complete application and finalize

*“Are we there yet???”*

You started this application journey months and months ago – maybe it's even been years. You took the GMAT. You wrote your essays. You revised your resume. You got your recommenders. Is the darn thing done yet?

Nope. Not yet. This is one of the most important steps in the entire process. If you skip this step, you might be completely jeopardizing your chances of getting in – no matter how great the essays are, how glowing the recs, how high the GMAT.

The part that you cannot take shortcuts on is the Final Application Review.

### **It's more than proofreading.**

You surely appreciate the importance of proofreading your essays. Let us reinforce the importance of this:

The worst feeling in the world is discovering an error in an application that's already been submitted.

OK no, we take that back: The worst feeling is being rejected from bschool.

The worst worst feeling is being rejected from a school whose app you had discovered a typo in, after it was submitted.

This final phase stuff is important. We need to emphasize that it's really important.

You know that you can't just run spellcheck and call it a day – you need to be careful of those sneaky mistakes like typos that aren't typos because they're real words – like writing “project manger” which we see so often that it's not funny.

[Here's an article on some common word errors that spellcheck won't catch.](#)

Remember that if you have words in ALL CAPS, such as the name of your company on your resume, spellcheck often will simply skip them. It's a feature in MS Word; you may want to disable it during this critical phase of your applications. We frequently notice typos in headers of resumes because of this setting (the most embarrassing is when an applicant misspelled his own name!).

Another problem is that your brain overcompensates. You're reading that same essay for the umpteenth time... You know what it's supposed to say. You don't notice that it's not actually saying it. It's all too easy for your mind to insert words onto the page that aren't

actually there. Articles and prepositions are the most common culprits; they're often missing in a draft and never noticed. These can be hard for your brain to spot since you've been staring at the screen, reading the same words over and over, for days on end. But your adcom reader is likely to latch onto any instance of a missing word like an eagle onto a small varmint running across a field. You may not get rejected over such an error but it's not going to do you any favors in the bschool admissions game.

**TIP:** Do your proofreading in hardcopy. A good way to jolt the brain into paying closer attention the actual words on the page is to read them on the page. Don't just go over the same thing on your computer. Print it out and hold it in your hands. You might even try reading it out loud, word by word – better yet, do that standing up. You'll have to engage with the matter with fresh eyes. You may be surprised at how many errors you spot this way!

### **Give yourself time.**

The best gift you can give yourself at the end of all the hard work you've put in on your applications is to get finished with all the pieces early enough that you have time to relax for this final process. You don't want to rush through your proofreading stage. It's requires extra attention and you will be cheating yourself if you try to cram it in after the end of a long essay development session.

Instead, carve out time in the week before your application is due to sit down with everything in sequence, when you're not feeling harried and exhausted.

**TIP:** Set aside time for final proofreads – separately. Do your essays in one session. Do your resume separately. Do the application dataset last. Don't do all of them back to back. Proofreading requires careful concentration, and you can easily burn out and start to cut corners mentally without even realizing it.

If you find yourself running up against the wall of the deadline, then at minimum, put everything aside and come back to it one last time in the morning. Don't submit an application if you haven't had the chance to do a fine-toothed comb review.

### **Cross-check and verify.**

A proofreading step that people often skip is the data verification process. You've entered your information into the school's online application, and your resume also has captured it. Do those datasets match? Very frequently, we see people reporting one set of dates on their resume, with a different set on the application. This is bad news when it comes time for a background check. Again, this is an error that might not get you rejected from bschool, but it could raise uncomfortable questions at a critical juncture. Or, if the adcom reader notices it, they will simply assume that you lack attention to detail, and/or you don't really care about their program and didn't put in the time and effort.

Everything in your application needs to be PERFECT. You have no margin of error in this process. The way to draw attention to yourself is through unforced errors like typos and

inconsistencies – and that's the type of attention you most definitely do not.

**TIP:** Don't just read for spelling errors. Cross-reference your dataset against itself. Make sure that you're presenting a single, cohesive view of yourself, and that there are no contradictions or conflicts in what you've reported.

### **Avoid the worst error of all.**

We're saving this one for last – this is a mistake that, as ridiculous as it sounds, happens all the time.

Make sure that the name of the school in your essay is the school you intended to name.

If you took the shortcut of doing a Save-As to reuse an essay from one school to another, you'd better be certain that you excised all references of the original school name in the entirety of the document.

You have no idea how often the Stanford people read an essay saying “I want to go to Harvard because...” – or more often, “MIT”, based on the similarities of some of those two schools' essay questions.

Or Wharton → Columbia. And vice versa.

Be super careful, if you didn't write this essay for this school from scratch, that it's got all the instances of the other school's name replaced.

Can you imagine how irritating that must be to the adcoms?

**TIP:** Hopefully you didn't re-use essays. But if you did, don't be careless about it.

It's very tempting, once you get to the end of the road, to upload all your files and finally click that Submit button. This is a crucial time! Don't rush things. Take care, and make it shine.

That way – we hope! – when your adcom reader picks up your application, all she will do is smile.



## Letters of Recommendation

Recommendations are a vital part of the MBA application. However, they are typically underutilized by applicants. Walking a recommender through the process can ensure your recommendation will add another dimension to your application. A recommendation can validate claims you made in your essays, it can add stories that you cannot fit into the limited confines of the essays, and it can also further build on the stories you do write about in your essays. The key to a great recommendation, like with the rest of the application, is leg work. Don't just ask your supervisor for a recommendation and then type his name into the online application system a month before its due. As soon as you narrow down your schools, provide them with the materials in the list below. Give them as much time as you can because you don't want a missing recommendation to be the reason your application wasn't accepted for Round 1.

### What to Provide a Recommender

- Cover Page
- Name of each school
- The Round you are applying and its deadline
- The first of many "thank you's" you should be writing to them
- A request for you Recommender's Information  
*Note: this is because your recommender may not want schools to send them the forms to their work email or to call their work phone.*
- Phone number
- Email address
- Home address
- Copies of each school's recommendation form (available on most school's websites)
- Positioning Statement: material similar to most school's essay #1
- Why you want an MBA
- Why you need an MBA NOW
- What your short and long term post MBA career goals are
- Accomplishments you want them to talk about
- Teams you have lead
- Improvements you have made
- Facts, Figures, Percentages, Statistics...any numbers you can provide to quantify your claims that they can reference
- Weaknesses
- How you are already working on improving these
- What will a school help you to overcome

## Writing a Business School Recommendation

*First of all, thank you so much for taking this on. I know this represents a time commitment for you (and one with firm deadlines!) and I can't say how much it means to me that you've agreed to take this on. I've summarized a chapter that I read on recommendations to help you get started with your letter.*

*The recommendation is an important part of the application. The school will use your recommendation to see if you confirm my own claims, to understand my character, and to find out how I do in the work world. Your view of my managerial potential will also get special attention. It's important to note that business school recommendations are very different from recommendations for employment. Basically, thousands of candidates are applying for a few hundred places in the next incoming class, with a very limited number of staff to manage the process. Few applicants are granted an interview, which usually lasts only 30 minutes. It's also very rare that the admissions committee calls a recommender. Therefore, a well-written, well-organized recommendation, usually about 2 pages long, is a necessary component of a strong application package.*

*Generally, there are 3 key areas for you to discuss: business skill, brains, and character. Below, I've listed some aspects of each area. I probably don't show all these traits, and you may not have experience with all of them. But, if possible, I would like you to discuss components from at least 2 of the areas.*

### Business Skill

- Maturity
- Thoughtful decisions
- Self-control in stressful situations
- Work habits
- Self-confidence and poise
- Creativity
- Thoughtfulness
- Ability to listen
- Ability to work well with others
- Ability to motivate others
- Organizational and planning skills
- Judgment
- Leadership qualities
- Problem-solving & analysis
- Overall managerial potential

### Brains

- Analytical ability
- Quantitative skills
- Mental agility
- Healthy skepticism
- Imagination and creativity
- Communication skills (written and oral)
- Mastery of other languages
- Thoroughness
- Research methods
- Breadth of scholarly interests

## Character

- Ethics
- Integrity
- Dependability
- Motivation
- Initiative
- Sense of humor
- Personal relationships
- Civic responsibility
- Dealings with “subordinates”
- Social skills

*I am building an application package that will not only show that I can handle the workload of an MBA program, but also that I stand out from the usual candidates. Your recommendation will be particularly credible and powerful if you can use specific anecdotes to illustrate your points. Your stories will make me real and memorable for the admissions committee. It's also helpful if your letter focuses on skills that are valuable in a business context. Of course, you will also want to address any areas for growth – hopefully with a positive spin! Generally, I hope you and I will agree on my strengths and skills and that your letter will support my positioning (see positioning paper).*

*I am applying to 4-6 schools, and each school will have slightly different criteria for your recommendation. I suggest writing a general letter and then making any slight adjustments as necessary for each school. For example, Harvard's emphasis on the case method might lead you to emphasize my ability to grasp real world situations and keep up with and contribute to fast-moving discussions. Cornell's small class size might prompt you to discuss how much I enjoy working in small groups in a cooperative atmosphere. Of course, I will give you a short list of any relevant school-specific variables.*

## Some other tips:

- Feel free to use headings to organize your letter and make it easy to read
- Weaknesses: List what you view as your weak points in your profile
- A well-written letter – grammatically correct and organized – is very important
- They like it if you can show my growth and development over time
- Similarly, a drive to improve myself is well appreciated
- Quantify your claims (top 3 or 50% improvement or whatever)
- Discuss your view of how I meet the requirements of a top manager or leader
- Make sure you have the right school name on each letter (I hear this is a common mistake)
- Explain why you make a good recommender
- Don't brag too much about the company; it's all about me!

## Questions to consider:

- How do I add value to (insert your company name)?
- How would I fit into the b-school environment?

- How do I fit into multicultural and international environments?

### **Appropriate Gifts for a Recommender**

- A handwritten thank-you note included with all gifts
- Gift Certificates to a store or restaurant
- Bottle of wine, port, or other adult beverage depending on their known preference
- Box of chocolates
- Gift basket
- Tickets to a game, music event, or play
- Memorabilia from the school you were accepted into or matriculating (can be an additional gift if you already gave one earlier)
- Only you can decide how much you are willing to spend. Your recommenders most likely aren't expecting anything, so this is a gesture of your gratitude. Whatever you decide, ensure that it is appropriate for the individual. The above examples will work well for some but not others. There is no consensus on whether to give the gift before or after an admittance, so it is up to your own judgment. If you're applying R1, the holidays is a great time to give a gift (big or small) and then give another one when your decisions come in. For other rounds, giving a gift either after all your recommendation letters have been submitted or after you receive decisions would both be appropriate.
- Some impressive gift ideas can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)

### **Some great past discussions in GMATClub about LORs**

<http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/05/recomm...ters-tips/>  
<http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/08/letter...ule-of-10/>  
<http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/11/make-s...-personal/>  
[http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/09/strate...n-process/  
how-to-pick-a-recommender-129379.html](http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/09/strate...n-process/how-to-pick-a-recommender-129379.html)  
<http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/08/should...mendation/>



## Best Ways to Pick a Recommender

Many people forget how important the letter of recommendation is. You should often start 4-8 weeks in advance to ask recommenders and often times you've been working on building your reputation with them for years!. The best recommenders are going to be those that will first and foremost give you a glowing recommendation. So if you are having a difficult time deciding, just make sure that you chose someone that will at least take the time necessary to toot-your-horn a bit. You want them to tell the Adcoms that you are the best they've ever seen, that the school would be silly to turn you down.

Assuming that you have many options, all of which will give you that raving review, how do you decide? Here is how to rank recommenders from Best to Worst.

### **BEST:**

#### **1. Current Supervisor or Boss**

It's always going to be the best choice to choose a person that knows your work product inside and out. So if you can swing it with your supervisor, then this is the best route to go. Just make sure that asking your boss won't jeopardize your job.

#### **2. Your Bosses Boss**

If you can't get your direct supervisor or think your Bosses Boss will be better, there is no reason not to give them a shot. They will obviously be familiar with your work product!

#### **3. Previous Boss**

As you can see, having a supervisor vouch for you is really great in the recommendation process. If you are worried about asking your current bosses, then it might be time to reach out to an old boss for that letter. This is why it is so important to keep strong relationships even after leaving your previous job.

#### **4. President or Supervisor over you in an Extracurricular (EC) role**

Extracurriculars can pay off by not only getting you that great experience, leadership, or bonus points on your application, but they can also pay big dividends on the recommendations. If you have strong EC work, then that recommendation becomes that much stronger. Make sure that the person you ask is more of a superior than a peer.

### **MEDIOCRE:**

#### **1. Previous Teacher**

If you are a younger applicant without much work experience (less than 2-3 years) then a you may not have strong enough connections or appropriate persons to ask. It might benefit you to think back to that teacher that really had an impact on you in college. If you

were able to build a strong enough relationship, they might be willing to give you that raving review. They will not be as good as a current employer b/c they will not be familiar with your work product as much as a supervisor

## **2. Pier**

Often times people look to their piers for recommendations. This would include anyone that is close to your same level at your current or previous job and has never been your direct supervisor. The recommendation do not hold as much weight as a supervisor b/c often times an Adcom would just assume that you chose a friend. So this would not be the ideal candidate for a recommendation, but they would still be able to give a strong opinion about your work experience

### **WORST:**

#### **1. Mom, Dad, or any family member**

There is absolutely no time, reason, or way that you should chose your mom or dad for a recommendation. Even in cases where your mom or dad is your boss, or you work with the family business, there is NO time when mom or dad should be writing you a rec. letter. Their opinion of you will hold no weight in the Adcoms eyes b/c you mom or dad can not be unbiased in your opinion.

#### **2. Someone you don't know that well**

So you know someone that will give you a rec. letter if you ask. They are that long time family friend, or someone you knew as a child, or someone that would definitely say yes when you asked. He/she is in a great position, so it seems like the perfect fit. NOOO, this isn't a perfect fit. Often times there are recommenders that won't say no, but when it comes right down to it, their opinion will not hold weight b/c you have never worked with them. Don't get sucked into the "easy" recommendation. It might be easy to ask them, but it won't necessarily pay off those huge dividends.

#### **3. Someone that you don't trust, is too busy, or never on-time**

Some people are just flat out too busy to write rec. letters. Don't let someone that is in a rush hurt your chances at Bscool. If you don't trust their ability to manage their time, get you a rec. letter by the deadline, or you just know it will be the last thing on their plate, don't ask them. It just isn't worth it. I've seen so many individuals hurt by their recommenders, and sweating if they will turn it in on time. The heartache is not worth it!

### **Conclusion:**

The recommender is a key part of your application. Don't look past it, and make sure to START EARLY to get the best people on your side. Become familiar with how your school will ask the recommenders the right questions, and make sure to coach them so that they will paint you as the perfect candidate. Best of luck in your applications, and keep up all the hard work! It will all pay off 😊



## Selecting Recommenders

One of the most important components of your application is the recommendation section, where you are allowed to recruit someone to vouch for your candidacy. Most schools require at least one recommender, with the majority of schools now asking for two and some even requiring three separate recommendations. Because the recommendations are the only part of the application that is outside your direct control, we always advise clients to engage with recommenders early in the application process. You want your recommenders to spend the appropriate amount of time on them, so putting it off until the last minute is a potentially devastating strategy. You can also burn a bridge or two if you find yourself having to put pressure on people to finish them, and heaven forbid you actually have a recommender fail to submit one, essentially rendering your application incomplete. But let's say you are organized, thoughtful, and prepared to approach people early...

### Whom do you choose?

The most important thing to realize with recommenders is that they must be able to comment directly and anecdotally on your work performance. No matter how tempting it might be to get the CEO of your company to write your recommendations, you should ask yourself a very important question first: how well does this person know me, and how intimately can he or she respond to questions about my specific job performance? If the answer is "not well" to either question, then it's best to find someone else. The best business schools are looking for recommendations to provide insight and detail about your professional interactions and results versus trite, complementary adjectives that could apply to anyone in the company. This is why most b-schools want to see at least one recommendation come from an immediate supervisor—they are generally in the best position to not only comment directly on your work but also to compare you with your peers.

Comparing you with your peers brings up another important point: you want to be a stand-out. Even if you feel you are a stand-out amongst your peers, however, you need to make sure your boss thinks so too. We generally advise folks to take time with their recommenders to figure this out. Take them to lunch, tell them about your goals and why you want the MBA. Ask them if they feel you would make a strong candidate at your target schools and why. Sometimes they need help or encouragement in this area to see things from your perspective. Talk about your plans and how your role at the company has prepared you (in your view) and then see if they agree. Many schools have specific questions they ask the recommenders—not just relying on a self-drafted letter or note of approval. Often these questionnaires include a ranking system so they can evaluate you against your peers and also against other employees the recommender may have seen in their time at the company. During your conversation with your potential recommending supervisor, you should be able to ascertain fairly quickly if they are "on-board" with your going to school or not, and whether or not they view you as a top 10% employee. If you can't get your current boss on board, or if there are extenuating circumstances around why

you can't ask your boss to recommend you, you will need to make sure to communicate this to your target schools and give them a reason why (by the way, "my boss doesn't like me" is generally not a good reason).

This is sometimes where things get tough. If your boss is not in your corner, the timing may simply not be ideal for a run at b-school right now. Better to get in a job where you are making an impact and being recognized first, then perhaps apply down the road once you have a better support system. Business schools can see right through applicants who are using b-school to run away from a bad situation at work. This is rarely a good starting point from which to build a winning application. Still, if you are in the unfortunate position of having your most recent stop on the career train at a bad work environment, you can alternatively tell the adcoms that using your current boss would be detrimental to your employment, and then go fishing for a former boss who might be more enthused by your pursuit of an MBA. If you have a strong recommender from a prior position, this can be an acceptable option.

Of course, most MBA applicants find this advice unnecessary, since most MBA applicants are in a job where their boss thinks they are the bees-knees. If this is you, then great—one down, one to go.

### **So who should be recommender #2?**

If you find yourself with a solid recommender in your boss but struggling to find that second person, rest assured that with one very solid recommender, you can afford to be a bit more creative for the second. This is where you can feel more free to journey further back in your past for someone who may have a unique or highly favorable insight into some time in your life where you were most impressive. Still others try to diversify their recommenders by going to a non-professional person. For example, using someone at a volunteer organization where you are involved, or selecting a customer with whom you have worked closely or a professor who thought highly of your potential can sometimes be a good fit. There are really no hard and fast rules beyond rule #1: make sure they know you well and want to see you succeed.

### **Two final rules: 1) no family, and no peers.**

Admissions committees will discount the heck out of such subjective sources. 2) Never, ever, write your own recommendation and have your boss sign it. Firstly, b-schools are really good at sniffing this out and secondly, if your boss is suggesting this, then they don't care enough about your MBA plans to participate at the required level to get you into your target schools. Hope this helps!

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## Recommendations in B School application

Hi everyone,

Recommendations are important to your MBA application. In fact, when pressed, some admissions committee members have admitted that recommendations are possibly the most important part. We have below an overview of the recommendations portion of your application. If you are looking for more in-depth information, you can visit the [Stacy Blackman](#) Recommendation Letters Guide and we can also answer questions in this thread.

### Recommendations Overview

It often comes as a surprise to candidates that recommendations can be so important to applications. In fact, many applicants just don't take recommendations seriously because they are not the ones to personally complete them.

These applicants fail to see one of the key reasons why recommendations are extremely important. Recommendations can provide a glimpse into your management skills. If you cannot ensure that your letter of recommendation is appropriate, professional and on time, what does that say about your managerial potential?

In addition, a letter of recommendation is the one piece of the puzzle that provides a very important and potentially revealing third party perspective.

Letters of recommendation are an extremely important part of your MBA application process. They must be carefully thought through and professionally managed.

### Primary Recommender

Selecting the right people to draft your letters of recommendation is essential. In almost all cases, without exception, you will want to select professional references for at least the first two letters.

When selecting someone to write your letter, choose people with whom you work closely and who know you well. The person's stature is not as important as how well they know you. Don't choose the company CEO with whom you meet monthly, over your manager with whom work daily. In fact, the single best person to ask for your initial letter of recommendation is the manager to whom you report directly.

Choose people who like you, and who think you're good at what you do. Choose good writers who can express their opinions clearly. If a potential reference seems less than enthusiastic in any way, keep looking. That person's ambivalence is likely to come through in the letter.

## Secondary Recommender

If you select two references from the same company, try to make sure that they can provide different perspectives on you, so as not to be repetitive. As an example, one can be your manager, the other can be someone with whom you worked cross functionally. Ask yourself these three questions, among others, when considering potential references:

- Have you worked closely with this person?
- Do you feel this person thinks favorably of you?
- Is this person an advocate for you internally?

## Alumni Recommender

We often hear questions regarding the benefit of selecting MBAs to write your letters, or even better, alumna of your target schools. All things being equal, we do believe it is helpful if your recommender has an MBA. However, don't fool yourself into thinking that an alumni letter has great benefit. The truth is that many, many applicants have alums, and often very prominent ones, writing letters on their behalf.

Consider this a "nice to have" but don't select an MBA at the expense of our number one rule: select someone who knows you well.

## Academic Recommendations

With academic recommendations, although you may think that your former Economics professor is a great person to write a letter, a professor usually cannot answer questions about interacting with peers, leadership abilities, career goals, areas needing improvement, and more. It's truly essential that the people writing your letters have clear insight into the information that the business schools seek.

## Extra-Curricular Recommendations

Should you choose to go outside of the workplace for a recommender, the next best option is often someone from an extra-curricular involvement, such as a volunteer commitment. Leadership is an excellent attribute that is often exhibited to a greater degree outside of work. If you have solid letters from your boss and one other person that you work with or have worked with in the past, you may opt to make a third letter from this type of non-corporate environment. This is generally accepted and can work very well for your application.

## Asking Recommenders

Once you have selected your recommender, you will want to broach the subject with the individual in a way that sets you up for success. Ask for their feedback or advice on the topic of business school. Get a feel for whether the person is supportive of business school in general. You may want to begin these discussions quite a bit in advance, so that there are no surprises.

If you are not comfortable with the meeting when you talk to your recommender in detail, remember that you can always choose a different recommender. This is an important part of your MBA application and you want to make sure you have a recommender that is both

supportive and able to add meaningful information to your application. Once you have spoken to these individuals, the next step will be preparing your recommendations. No applicant should just send recommenders off to do their job. You will always want to prepare them and make their job as easy as possible.

### **Preparing Your Recommenders**

Preparation needs to happen. The worst thing that you can do is slave over your applications and then leave the recommendation piece to chance. In preparing your recommenders, you will have two primary goals:

- Share with them the details of your application strategy
- Jog their memory with regards to your accomplishments and actions

Supply your recommenders with information so they are likely to write about the content that you want to go into the letter and so that it is relatively easy for them to write one or many very strong letters on your behalf.



## How to Make the Most of a School Visit

Once upon a time, the [Admissionado](#) founders met countless admissions committee members from schools in the US and Europe at different recruiting events and conferences. One particularly surprising insight was shared repeatedly. Many adcom members (especially those in Europe) revealed they would NEVER admit someone who didn't visit the campus.

Whoa.

"What if they can't afford it?" we always asked. Their standard reply time and time again: business school is expensive and if they can afford b-school, they can afford a visit. A visit was hard evidence this person really wanted to attend, and that they took the time to really get to KNOW the school.

The bottom line, obviously, is that schools visits are important. The value you get from them is unquantifiable. We won't say "visiting will get you in" -- you can't strike out on the application and expect a visit to save you - but it's a good and important step in this whole process nonetheless.

Stepping foot on campus (vs. just reading about it on the interwebs) will make you confident about your choices, knowledgeable about the school, and will expand your network. Plus, it's just... fun. I mean, gosh, go hang out on a college campus for a day or two? Yes please!

And let's be honest - if you're gonna drop \$200K on a school and spend 2 years there... you should check out the goods first, right? Get a little consultation? Who spends that kind of money on something they've never seen?

So, yeah, you should make some time to pop on over to the schools on your shortlist. But before you do, make sure you know how to make the most of that trip:

**Dress sharply and professionally.** This isn't undergrad, folks, so leave the sweats at home. And even if you'd wear jeans to class as a student, don't do so as a guest. The aim is to impress, after all, so business casual is appropriate.

**RESEARCH.** Don't fall for the tempting idea that you'll "learn stuff when you get there." Find out all you can about this school BEFORE you go, and show up familiar with the program. Additionally, go with some goals - maybe to see a specific professor in action, to see how a club works, or to chat with students from your country/desired industry.

**Before you visit, think about how you would answer the "Why I want to go to school X" question.** And when you're there, taking in the scenery, take notes on anything (personal OR professional) that might be of use in your essays. This will absolutely come in handy later. You can work your findings into your essays to prove to the school that

you've done your research and that you're serious about attending, and you can "name drop" people that you met and professors you listened to.

**Take notes.** Write down the name of EVERY person (student, alumni, faculty, administrator) you meet, what you talked about, and anything else about them (age, profession, country of origin, etc.) After a visit or two, all those faces and buildings and programs are going to blend together, and the last thing you want to do is profess your love for Darden's cluster program....in a letter to MIT.

**Uh, have FUN?** This isn't a work trip, folks. At least not ALL work. It's about figuring out where you want to spend the next 1-2 years. So live it up. And soak it up. All of it - the people, the community, the program, the atmosphere, the "scene." Get out there, try the school on and see how it fits.

And when you leave, a clearer picture in your mind, **send a thank-you note to anyone you met with from the admissions office** (no need to thank professors...unless you want to) This is a classy move (wahoo!)... if you do it right. So make it brief. Don't overdo it or attempt to sell yourself. This isn't an application, after all. Just thank them for their time and sign off.

Then head home and start [working on those essays](#).



## GMAT Club B School Visit archive

### School Visit- What, Why and How?

[Importance of School Visits](#)

[School Visit Etiquette- A word of caution!](#)

[School Visits- Plan](#)

[Effective School Visit](#)

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### School Visit Experiences

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## Guide to Interviewing

Interviews are mostly about fit. That is to say, they are not about assessing whether or not your goal to be in banking makes sense for you. They aren't looking to see whether or not your quant skills are up to par for your intended job. They are assessing, in effect, three things: 1) Do you have a well thought out idea of what you want to do and why? 2) Do you know why you want to come to school X? 3) Are you a normal personable individual who could "carry" the school's name?

Second, most school interviews are blind. That is, at most, the individual interviewing you will have a copy of your resume. They may or may not have read it. Be prepared for the question "So tell me about yourself"...

With that in mind, there are a few key things you must know, and you must know COLD.

### 1. What are your short and long term goals and why?

Important here is to sound interested and excited. Focus less on the details of what and more on the why. The interviewer is going to be more interested in hearing about why you want to be a banker than what a banker does day to day. Think introspection, think self-aware, think passionate. Explain more than you think you should - remember the interviewer does not know you worked at company X for 3 years in role Y and role Z, and you loved role Z but not role Y. Tell them. Remember, they are not mind readers. The more cohesive, clear and passionate your story is, the better. Super bonus points if you can also describe why you need an MBA now in your career, rather than say, in a year or two. The easiest way to do this is to find something that is going on now in your target industry, and then just talk about how you want to be a part of this change, and to do so, you really need to get your MBA now. For instance, you might talk about you want to deepen turnaround management and finance experience with distressed firms, and that, given the current credit crunch, getting your MBA now is essential to capitalize on the growing opportunities in this area. You can probably come up with something better than that but you get the idea.

### 2. Why do you want to come here?

You had better have lots of reasons. Avoid website mental dumps. Excellent faculty and diverse student body are weak and meaningless points. Talk about your experiences visiting the school. If you haven't visited, talk about what you've heard, but don't spend time explaining why you haven't been unless asked. If you are asked, just keep it short and sweet. Talk about specific clubs, activities or features of the school that are truly unique. Try to avoid cliches. Kellogg is not all about teamwork and friendliness. Chicago is not all about finance and quant. Stanford is not all about entrepreneurship and VC. Comments of the sort are weak and often make you appear poorly prepared. Rather, talk about what you truly believe - if there's a professor you love, mention him or her by name. If there's a class you are dying to take, mention it. If you can't wait to take part in some activity - say a random walk at Chicago or a round of golf with friends near Darden - then just say it. Better to sound honest and interested than contrived and pandering. The best answers are

ones that sound true, contain very specific details and ideas that go beyond merely the website (thus demonstrating a deep understanding) and tie directly into question 1. For instance, replying "I also hope to do a quarter abroad in Australia at School Y, which provides me with exposure to the cultures of my primary target market, when I launch my shark shaped surfboard, which I know I can here at school Y through your program X which I heard about from XYZ. " demonstrates interest, research and dedication to your goals.

Questions you should consider preparing for are at the end of this post. At the very least, practice the first 15. Yes, they overlap a lot. Get used to a question coming from you in different directions.

Advice for the interview itself. First, whenever you hear a question, restate it in your own words. You want to be sure you've understood. Spending 5 minutes answering something you thought was asked but wasn't, wastes an awful lot of precious air time. Second, get accustomed to and be OK with silence. Don't be afraid to collect your thoughts for a moment before answering. Remember, what feels like 30 seconds of dead air was probably 3.

Finally, and this is the most important - practice this a million times if you can... Transition. Transition. Transition. You cannot prepare for every single question they might ask you - there's just no way. Instead, prepare different answers for questions that you are likely to get, and practice RECASTING the question you receive into one you have thought about. Come up with a handful of stories you can tell, and practice redefining a question so that the story fits. This doesn't mean that if they ask you for a story on leadership you talk about your stamp collecting hobby. There has to be a link - but the more you practice it, the better you will get at it. For instance, if they asked you something like "Tell me about what drives you" - you might reply "You know, that's a good question. I'm motivated by a lot of things, obviously, or else I wouldn't be here today, but I think the thing that motivates me most is seeing those around me succeed. I get a lot of joy from that. For example.... BIG TEAMWORK STORY". Suddenly, instead of coming up with something entirely new right there on the spot, you've taken an existing teamwork story and recast it to fit the question.

### **So, what stories do you need?**

You absolutely need: leadership, teamwork, biggest weakness (that you continue to address), cultural story, outside of work story, analytic ability story, ethics story. Come up with your best leadership story and your best teamwork story...

This brings me to my next tip. You will have a pad of paper with you in all likelihood. Have cues on the pad.

For instance, I might write:

*"L: X story. Antici prob w/ ABC, picked 2 prs, exec ask me to lead, did X, did Y,.... "*

The idea would be that I could glance down at the page, and if I'm drawing a blank, I could quickly remember what my leadership story was... "Oh yea, its the X story, the one where I anticipated that problem with ABC, picked those 2 people the execs had asked me to lead ..."

Odds are you wont have to look at the page, and if you are prepared, you won't have to.

But... better to have it, and take 2 or 5 seconds to glance at it than to just start talking when you can't remember your points.

So, I had a one line description at the top of my pad of paper for Leadership, teamwork, analytic, ethical, cultural etc... I also had a few tidbits on why school X. For instance, for Kellogg I had "WHY K: GIM, JV, balanced approach"... This was to remind me to talk about the GIM programme, the Joint Ventures programme, etc. It's easy to forget these details, and having one or two word reminders is helpful.

Of course, don't rely on the pad unless you have to. It's best to know your stories cold. Don't be afraid to write down questions you have for the interviewer either.

Finally, a good way to practice if you have a long commute.... tape the questions into mp3 format, burn them on a CD and slap them in your car stereo on the way to work. Practice answering them on your way there and back and you'll do well. If you really really want to test yourself, record your own answers, and listen to yourself. It's painful, but can help. Consider timing yourself as well. A ten minute answer to "Tell me about yourself" is too long.

### **Some general practice questions:**

1. Discuss your career progression
2. Give examples of how you have demonstrated leadership inside and outside the work environment
3. What do you want to do (in regard to business function, industry, location)?
4. Why the MBA? Why now?
5. Describe an ethical dilemma faced at work?
6. Describe your career aspirations
7. What would you do if not accepted?
8. What are your long- and short-term goals? Why?
9. Why are you applying to business school?
10. Why does this school appeal to you?
11. What is an activity you are involved in? Why is it important to you?
12. Talk about experiences you have had at work.
13. Why are you interested in a general MBA program?
14. Why did you choose your undergraduate major?
15. Discuss yourself.

16. What contributions would you make to a group?
17. Name three words or phrases to describe yourself to others
18. What is most frustrating at work?
19. How would co-workers describe you
20. Describe a typical work day
21. Have you worked in a team environment? What were your contributions to the effort?
22. Discuss any experience you have had abroad.
23. How did you choose your job after college
24. What do you do to relieve stress
25. It's two years after graduation, what three words would your team members use to describe you
26. Describe a situation where you brought an idea forward, and it failed.
27. How do you define success?
28. What would you do if a team member wasn't pulling his own weight?
29. Is there anything you would like to ask me/us
30. Give an example of leadership that you didn't discuss in your essays
31. What is your leadership style?
32. What are the pros/cons of your style?
33. What did you learn from experience XYZ (that was discussed in my essays)
34. Tell me about a time you had to deal with conflict in the workplace
35. Tell me what you do in your daily job
36. How are you a leader in your job
37. Have you thought of other schools?
38. What accomplishment are you most proud of?
39. What role do you usually take in a team setting?
40. Tell me about a time when you exhibited leadership.
41. How do you work in teams?

42. What would your colleagues miss least about you?
43. What makes you unique?
44. Tell me about a standout academic experience.
45. Tell me an important thing that you learned from your work and school experiences.
46. Tell me about a specific situation in your professional career where you solved an important problem.
47. Why do you want to be in senior executive role?
48. When was your belief challenged
49. What books do you read
50. When did you lead a team? What is the hardest part of leading a team
51. Would you have any regrets if the market tanked next year and you were unable to get a premier job
52. Where else have you applied and what was the result
53. What do you/don't you like regarding your job
54. Second largest, third largest failure



## Interviewing Strategy

When the time comes for you to interview with your target MBA program(s), you may inevitably find yourself fretting and wondering, “What if I don’t know the answers to my interviewer’s questions?” The good news is that a business school interview bears no resemblance to a TV quiz show. The admissions officer, alumnus/alumna or student who interviews you will not ask you about esoteric topics and will not expect you to answer questions pertaining to management disciplines. The vast majority of the questions you will encounter in your interview will pertain to your life and experiences—in other words, the interviewer will be asking you about you—so you will already have all the answers in hand from the beginning.

As your first step in preparing for your interviews, take time to reacquaint yourself with your own story, especially as you have presented it to the school thus far in your application. Go back and reread your essays, contemplate pivotal moments in your life and consider your major accomplishments and failures. By doing so, you will be sure to have this basic knowledge fresh in your mind so you can perform at your very best during your interview.

While most business school interviews are straightforward opportunities for an admissions representative to learn more about a candidate’s personal and professional background, goals, reasons for selecting a specific school and leadership/team experiences, interviews can vary dramatically from school to school and sometimes include a few peculiarities. So, what constitutes a “tough” interview, and how can you best navigate one?

**Stoic interviewer:** Some interviewers can be unemotional, refusing to give the candidate any indication as to whether he/she is making a positive impression or not. Of course, when an applicant is under intense pressure, this perceived lack of approval can be misunderstood as a sign of disapproval. The key in managing such an interview is to tune out the interviewer’s lack of emotion. Focus on your answers and do your best to not be distracted by anything about the interviewer, tuning out everything except the questions he/she is posing. “Reading” the interviewer in real time can be challenging—concentrate instead on showcasing your strengths.

**Philosophical questions:** Most candidates expect to discuss their experiences and accomplishments in their admissions interview, but not their values and philosophy on life. Harvard Business School in particular likes to understand applicants’ motivations and will ask questions like “What is your motivation to succeed?,” “What drives you?” and “What gives you purpose in life?” The key to answering these sorts of questions is pretty simple: expect and prepare for them in

advance (after all, you are being warned right now). Do not assume that all the questions you will receive during your interview will be experiential.

**Persistent questioning:** Sometimes a tough interviewer will continuously delve deeper into a subject, such as by repeatedly asking, “Can you be more specific?” or “Can you tell me more about that?” These kinds of pressure tactics can be disconcerting, but the key is to simply stay on topic. No matter how persistent he/she is, the interviewer is always essentially asking you about a subject that you know quite well—you! Just stick to your agenda, and you will be fine.

**What about scheduling interviews?** Many schools will give applicants a significant window in which to schedule their interview, so you may wonder whether the date you choose will send some kind of message to the admissions committee. Does scheduling an interview early convey that you are too aggressive and do not have any other irons in the fire, or that you are eager to act and impress the admissions committee? Does scheduling an interview later give the impression that you are less interested in the program, or that you are very serious about your applications and are taking your time to prepare and inform yourself thoroughly before each step of the process?

The reality is that the timing of the meeting does not matter. Neither scheduling early nor choosing a later date confers any advantage or disadvantage (nor does selecting any day in between). The MBA admissions committees recognize that you, like all candidates, are busy and that your schedule is in flux as a result of work, community and personal commitments. The committees focus on the interviews themselves, not on when they are scheduled. So pick a date that works for you—a day and/or time when you know you can be comfortable and relaxed, not distracted—and start preparing!

### **What should I wear?**

Always follow any guidelines the school provides on proper interview dress. If “business casual” is specified, wear business casual; if “business attire,” dress in business attire. Jeans, T-shirts and ripped or unclean clothing are never appropriate. If the school does not specify a dress code, wear business attire for any on-campus interviews as well as for an off-campus interview with a member of the admissions staff. Business casual is often best when meeting an alumnus/alumna off campus, though you may consider politely asking the person you are meeting about proper attire in advance. Showing some creativity and style with your clothing is okay, but do not go overboard—remember that your meeting is a professional one, and your first impression is vital.

### **I am meeting my interviewer at a coffee shop. Who pays?**

If you are meeting an alumnus/alumna at a café or similar establishment for an interview, you can avoid the awkward “who pays?” scenario by arriving a few minutes early, purchasing your own beverage and then offering to pay for the interviewer’s selection when he/she arrives. If your interviewer arrives before you, you might politely offer to pay for his/her drink, but if the interviewer declines, you should not insist.

### **Should I send a thank you note?**

Yes, you should always send a brief thank you note after your interview. Write and send the note as soon as possible after your meeting—the same day or the next is ideal—and be sure to mention specifics from your conversation or your visit. Emailing the thank you is fine. Interviewers usually need to submit their feedback on candidates within 24 hours, so you want your message to be received quickly.

### **If I am not sure how I did, can I ask for feedback?**

No! Feeling anxious about how you performed is natural, but do not ask your interviewer for feedback. Doing so will not establish you as professional and mature and will instead leave the impression that you lack good judgment (not to mention confidence). Just be patient and wait for the admissions committee to make its decision!

As interview decisions begin to be released, do your best to remain calm and let the admissions committees do their work. Becoming a little apprehensive is natural if you have not yet received an interview invitation, but you will certainly not increase your chances of receiving one by calling the admissions office and asking if they have all your files or if an interview decision has been made. In fact, such calls can have a negative effect on your candidacy, inadvertently framing you as pushy or even belligerent.

Admissions offices are increasingly transparent and should be taken at their word. If they say they are still releasing decisions, then they are in fact still doing so. If they say that the timing of your interview decision does not signify an order of preference, then it does not. As painful as it is, unless something has changed materially in your candidacy, all you can really do is wait patiently and try not to think about the decision or second-guess your status.



## Common MBA Interview Questions

### *THE BIG 9: VERY COMMON QUESTIONS*

- Could you walk me through your resume?
- Why MBA?
- Why do the MBA now?
- Why our school?
- What are your short term/long term post-MBA career goals?
- What are your 3 greatest strengths?
- What are your 2 greatest weaknesses?
- What do you think will be the biggest concern of the Admissions Committee in evaluating your application?
- Do you have any questions for me?

### *OTHER QUESTIONS*

#### *Academic Experience*

- What was the most rewarding aspect of your undergraduate experience?
- What are you most proud of about your undergraduate period?
- Why did you select this undergraduate major? Would you have changed your decision today?
- To what do you attribute your strong academic performance?
- In which campus activities did you participate? What did you learn or gain from this involvement?
- Have you ever dropped a class? Why?
- Which college classes did you like the best/least? Why?
- Do you think you received a good education?
- Do your grades accurately reflect your ability?

#### *Work Experience*

- Describe your work experience (in general or with specific employers).
- What did you find most frustrating at work?
- What kinds of changes would you make at your work if you could?
- Do you have any opportunity for innovative thinking?
- Could you describe an incident where you disagreed with a superior? How was this settled?
- What aspect of your job do you most enjoy? Why?
- Of what accomplishment at work are you most proud?
- Could you compare your experience in these two jobs you had?
- If I ask your manager what he/she values in you, what will he/she say?
- What did you enjoy most/least about position X?
- Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
- What problems have you solved in your previous positions?
- What have you disliked in your job with employer X?

- What are some recent responsibilities you have taken on?

### Career Path

- Why did you leave job A for job B?
- What will you do if you are not accepted to any of the MBA programs you applied to?
- What will you do if you are not accepted to our MBA program?
- Why did you choose to do X?
- Describe your ideal job after completing the MBA.
- How does your education or work experience relate to your career goals?

### Leadership

- Give me two cases where you demonstrated leadership.
- How would others describe your leadership style?
- What do you think is the right way to get things done through others?
- What would you do if a team member wasn't pulling his own weight?
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- Have you ever spoken to a group of people? How large?

### Teamwork

- What role do you usually play in group situations? Could you give an example?
- Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
- Give me an example of your teamwork experience.
- Have you worked under deadline pressure? When?
- Do you prefer large or small companies? Why?
- What kinds of people do you enjoy working with?
- What kinds of people frustrate you?
- How do you contribute to groups?

### Personal and Ethics

- Tell me about yourself.
- Describe a time when you had to bend the rules a little in order to accomplish a goal.
- What do you like doing outside of work?
- Tell me about something in your life you would have done differently if you had the opportunity.
- What 3 adjectives would others use to describe you?
- Can you recall a creative/innovative activity of yours?
- Tell me about a time you took a risk and what the experience was like.
- If you were to establish a set of values and beliefs on which to build a business, what would they be?
- Is there anything specific/else that you would like the admissions committee to know about you?
- Define success/failure.
- Tell me about a time in which you failed.
- What would you like to change about yourself?
- Discuss any experience you have had abroad.
- Describe a life experience that had a strong impact on you?

### Extracurricular / Volunteer Work

- Have you ever done any volunteer work? What was it?

- Were your extracurricular activities worth the time you put into them? What have they taught you?

#### The MBA Program

- What are you looking for in our program?
- What can you contribute to your class?
- Why do you think you would enjoy your chosen area of study?
- What clubs are you considering joining?
- It's two years after graduation, what three words would your MBA team members use to describe you?

#### *Typical "Behavioral Interview" Questions*

- In dealing with a customer, think of your most difficult situation and tell me how you handled it.
- Give an example of a case when you felt your boss made a bad decision and explain how you would have handled it differently.
- Describe a situation where 20 different things had to get done at once and how you handled it.
- Describe a disagreement you had with your boss. What did he say? What did you say?
- Describe a major problem you have faced on the job and how you handled it

See the updated list of questions here: <http://www.aringo.com/ClientInfo/InterviewQuestions.htm>





## Waitlist Management

Well it is that time of year again, where admissions, waitlists, and dings start rolling out for most of the top schools. If you were **Admitted** then congratulations to you! If you recieved a **Ding** I hope you got some good news from another school! Now if you were put on the **Waitlist** then this is not the time to give up! There are still some things that you can do to get yourself off that waitlist and into your dream school. You should consider all the following tactics and figure out which direction you should concentrate all your energy. Remember, you only have a short amount of time, so not enough to complete all these task. But even completing 1 or 2 of them might be that extra boost to get your name at the top of the waitlist!

### 1. Get a promotion at work

I know, I know, easier said than done right!? Well for some of you, you might be RIGHT on the cusp of that promotion. Or who knows, maybe you were promoted while your application was being reviewed and you never though to update the Adcoms. This is your chance! Anything you can add, might help.

### 2. Retake the GMAT and score higher

If you believe you left some points on the table when you took the GMAT, this might be the time for you to give it another go. Especially if your Quant abilities might be the concern. If you did not have undergrad quant classes, did not do well, or scored below the 70th percentile on the GMAT, this might be a huge opportunity. I would recommend giving it another go, BUT only if you really know or believe you will raise your score. Practice on a GMATprep test from MBA.com before you go in to make sure you're scoring higher. You don't want to end up hurting your chances for reapplications b/c you will have many months to retake if you want for next year.

### 3. Enroll in a Statistics, Calculus, or pre-MBA style math course

This might let the adcoms know exactly how committed you are to their university. Maybe even take these classes from your desired school (if available, maybe online). This will show your commitment, and show them that you are overcoming any quant weakness they may think you have.

### 4. Attend school functions (if you live around there) and get to know the admissions director or team

Now this is a tough one, and hopefully you've already been doing this. But if for some reason you believe "Hey, if they get to know me, there is NO WAY they will say no". Try to attend an open house, or a recruiting event and let them know your position. Tell them how committed you are, and how much you hope that you'll be attending this year. Again, who knows, this could be the boost you are looking for!

### 5. Take on big leadership type projects or roles at your current job if possible

If you take on, or are finishing up a HUGE project that was not included in your application, this might be time to show them your leadership. Just make sure that this project is noteworthy enough to make them say "wow, that's impressive" and possibly get them to reconsider your position on the waitlist.

**Finally**

If you are able to complete any of the above, send them an update and continue to show how interested you are. You only get ONE chance at an update, and it should be extremely well crafted, professional, impressive, and with the correct timing. Your goal should be to get your name as HIGH up on that waitlist as possible b/c it might be the difference between getting in and not getting in.

I do not represent any admissions consulting companies, but it would be my opinion that you speak with one of them about your specific situation, and figure out a way to craft this letter and get yourself to the top of the list. This is your last chance, and you should definitely get a professional opinion! Plus, you might be able to get some well deserved feedback as to why you didn't get an Admit in the first place. Check them out here: [ask-admission-consultants-124/](http://ask-admission-consultants-124/) And also, here is a professional opinion on the topic: [http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/01/how-to ... situation/](http://gmatclub.com/blog/2012/01/how-to...situation/)

PS. Only send ONE update. You do not want to be the person bombarding them otherwise they will consider you "that crazy guy" and that will definitely earn you a ding. So make sure to be tactful with your only update. So pick the right time, right info, and right way to update them.

PSS. Contact your school directly if they have not given you a way to give the Adcoms an update. Normally this is done through the internet or letter.

**GOOD LUCK TO ALL WAITLISTERS!**





## Re-Applying to Schools

So, you got dinged last year from your dream school(s) and instead of settling for your second or third choice (or fourth or fifth as may be the case), you have decided to hold fast to your MBA dream and re-apply to the same school(s) again this year. Recognizing you are likely scarred, but smarter, there are still a few things you should know before diving in. With a nod to your resiliency, you hopefully have first spent some time formulating a plan B for this go-round. It's fine to re-apply to your dream school, but you if you happen to get rejected again, you need to have a fallback this time—a program you'd be satisfied attending even if it's not your top choice. Life is too short to spend three years trying to get into grad school, and if you haven't been able to impress the committee for two years in a row, it may simply not be in the cards for you to go there. Often we see clients becoming enamored with a particular school, when in reality, they could receive the same or very similar education and tools (and networks and contacts and jobs) from another school. We are all for dogged determination, but at the end of the day, we want to see you get your MBA and not spend half your career applying to school.

### **With that, let's talk about a reapplication strategy.**

One of the most valuable things you can use in this situation is feedback on why you didn't make the cut last time. Some schools will actually provide this information if you ask for it, so don't be shy about reaching back to them. If you are applying to a school in the top 10, you may not be able to get specifics from the admissions teams on why you didn't get in due simply to the number of applications they receive, but you can still seek this information from outside sources by confiding in a colleague or contact who has their MBA or perhaps some insight into the process. At the very least, you should sit down with your application and try as objectively as possible to see where you may have come up short. If you have trouble finding such shortcomings, it may simply be the case that there were too many applicants similar to you in the pool last year, and the resulting mathematical odds did not go your way.

Assessing your weaknesses is critical to a reapplication, since you may find favor with the same admissions committee that rejected you in the past if you can somehow inoculate the concern. Of course there are the obvious weaknesses such as a sub-par GMAT score or low GPA, or perhaps you went to a low-ranked state college (nothing you can do about that now of course except to maybe take a course or two at a better school). The tricky part comes in the more subtle components of the application. Perhaps your career vision was not clearly connected to what you did in your past, or maybe you failed to convey a passionate, compelling case for why you need the MBA. Often, it comes down to a failure of message. It could be that the overall picture you painted was not articulated in a way that captured the attention of the committee.

**How was your fit with your target programs? Was there something in your application that communicated a poor match with their culture or curriculum? These**

**are the questions that can truly drive you crazy, since it's largely guesswork.**

Whether or not you can isolate and address weaknesses in your application, however, is not nearly as important as communicating to the committee what you have done since last year to make you a better candidate this year. This is the number one most important issue to consider when re-applying. In fact, many schools will only require one essay for a re-applicant, which is basically some version of "what has changed to make you a more viable candidate?" This is where you should focus, and hopefully you recognized this task soon enough after your rejection last year so that you have spent the past 12 months making things happen to improve your candidacy. From bettering your GMAT results, to getting a promotion at work, to seeking out new leadership opportunities, there is really no limit to what you can do to improve your profile. If those efforts happen to directly address an identified weakness, even better.

Many schools show favor to re-applicants. Some say your odds go up 30% when you reapply. Maybe schools like the determination they see, or appreciate the demonstration of passion for and commitment to their program. Or perhaps re-applicants simply work harder in the 12 months between seasons to sharpen their attractiveness as a potential MBA candidate. Whether it's self-fulfilling prophesy or statistical advantage, there are good reasons to try again at your target schools, so long as you give some thoughtful analysis to why you didn't make it and apply some concerted effort into new achievements to enrich your profile.





## Comprehensive Re-Applicant Guide

**Was last year a total dud? Did you put together your strongest application only to be denied from your top choices? Have you come back for another try? Let me first congratulate you for having the strength, commitment, and drive to give the application process another try. As a re-applicant, some may say that you face an uphill battle for the next application season. But, again and again we see success stories of re-applicants making it into their top schools! This post will serve as your guide to help you improve your chances as a re-applicant. This process requires a level of dedication and self-reflection that many people don't possess. So go into this process with 110% commitment, and you might just be matriculating at your top choice this season!**

### Re-evaluate your application

This is where you should start. This step can be one of the most challenging steps because it requires self-reflection and an unbiased opinion of your total application. You should consider a professional ding analysis, and also take a look at our [Ding Analysis Thread](#). It's easy to be angry when you get denied and say "I did everything I could! My application was perfect!" But remember, there was something missing or off about your application or profile that didn't earn you a spot. Let's look at every aspect of the actual online application component to show you what questions you should ask yourself. Once you find your weakest areas, it's up to you fix them this year and make them PERFECT.

**Essays** - Your essays are one of the most important aspects of your application. You should review if you put everything you could into those essays. Did you stay within the word limits? Did you have a peer or professional review your essays? Did you make sure there were NO errors or omissions? Did you sell yourself? Did you make your essays engaging (aka enjoyable to read)? Did you take a certain level of risk? Did you make them personable? These are all questions you should ask yourself, and if any of the answers are "no" you didn't have the best essays you could. Your essays are your chance to make yourself JUMP off the page. With weak essays, a strong profile can easily be overshadowed. GMAT Club recommends that at the very least you have a trusted colleague or friend review your essays, and quite honestly we recommend a professional review. Check out our [marketplace](#) for our partners and decide which company might be able to help you take those essays to the next level! [Marketplace](http://gmatclub.com/marketplace/admissions.xhtml)(<http://gmatclub.com/marketplace/admissions.xhtml>) Also, check out GMAT Club's free essay tips here: [essay-best-practices-58748.html#p422565](http://gmatclub.com/essay-best-practices-58748.html#p422565) **REMEMBER:** Really sell yourself in your reapplicant essay, and show EVERYTHING you have done and improved on since last year. This will really show the Adcoms your dedication.

**Resume** - Business schools want to know that you are capable of landing a solid job out of their MBA program. One of the most important aspects of business school rankings is solely based on their ability to place their students in jobs. But placing students has more to do with the student themselves than the school. Your resume is your chance to sell your work experience, skills, and other aspects in 1 page. It can be extremely challenging, and

should not be taken lightly. A weak resume can show low potential for top jobs. A weak resume gets tossed in the trash. So make sure that you spend the required time and effort to make the resume jump off the page. Some of the best ways to improve your resume are to have a trusted friend or colleague review this document, or again, have a professional review. Another way is to search our forums for "Resume tips" ([search-results.xhtml?cx=009332468639467955845%3Ah-z9cduzcoi&cof=FORID%3A10&ie=UTF-8&q=resume+tips](#)), or google "MBA Resume Books" to see what your competition looks like. And last, but not least, many colleges offer free resume reviews for their alumni. So contact your college and see if you can get some help!

**Interview** - So you did well enough on the application to land an interview. Great job! Now, I know it can be very disappointing knowing that your interview didn't close the deal. But remember, there could have been many other aspects that factored into this decision. But you should definitely consider improving your interviewing skills if you're able to get another interview. Check out our post here: [rhyme-s-totally-fallible-guide-to-interviewing-55030.html](#) for some of the top interview tips to earn yourself an admit. Also, practice in the mirror, on your webcam, or with a friend so you can get feedback.

**Recommendation letters** - Recommendation letters are a chance for the Adcoms to get a feeling for what others think about you. It's a huge opportunity, because a strong recommendation can really make the Adcoms want you in their class. Check out my post here: [how-to-pick-a-recommender-129379.html#p1061688](#) on our top ways to choose your recommenders. Make sure to tell them that you want the most glowing review they can offer, and make sure that you trust them to do that.

### **Analyze your profile**

Were you really qualified for the program you applied for? Our initial advice is that you collect the "class profile" for your school's website to really determine if you were within reasonable striking distance of the class. If you were way above the average in most areas, then you know that you should concentrate more on the application. If you were below the class profile, then you should consider trying to improve in the following areas.

**GMAT Score** – So there are two things to consider about your GMAT score. First, was your overall score ATLEAST within the 80% range. You want to make sure that your score was within that range otherwise your application might not even get the appropriate lookover. Second, was your quant score high enough? Typically, Adcoms want to see a quant score into the 75% + or preferably even higher. If you were able to get that great overall score, but the quant wasn't very high, you might need to address this issue. Our advice, is retake it if you think this was a contributing factor. If you are considering retaking, check out our post here: [should-i-retake-gmat-thread-retaking-gmat-strategies-83339.html#p624689](#). And if you decide to retake, begin your studying again here: [new-to-the-gmat-club-start-here-130870.html#p1075374](#) to revamp your GMAT studying.

**Low GPA** – If your GPA was significantly below the average GPA at your school of choice, the Adcoms may be concerned that you can't handle the educational challenges of an MBA. If your GPA is low (below 3.1) you should consider an alternate transcript. An alternate transcript would be any classes that you've taken after college. You should consider taking some online or in-person classes at a reputable university to help offset your low GPA. Some of the best classes to take would be Calculus, Accounting, Micro/Macro Economics, Statistics, etc. MAKE SURE to get A- or better in all of these classes.

[www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide](http://www.gmatclub.com/MBAguide)

The lower your GPA, the more classes you should consider taking. This can take LARGE amounts of time, so make sure that your return on investment of time is worth it. If you have other areas you believe you can improve with this time, then an alternate transcript isn't always the best choice. If your GPA is below a 3.0, even just a class or two can help.

**Work Experience** – Work experience can be very challenging and timely to make any changes to. But you should consider a couple things, did I have too much or too little work experience? Applying with no work experience, or over 10 years of work experience, you may not fit into the typical business school profile. For a young applicant, you can definitely improve your profile by working more. For an older applicant, you may consider an executive or part-time MBA since these draw older applicants.

**Extracurricular Activities** – Bschools want to know that you aren't just a book worm. That want to see that you have leadership potential, philanthropic mentality, and are involved in your community. Extracurriculars are a great way to show that you're a normal person! Schools don't only want the brightest and best students on paper, they want people that can succeed in the real world. If you are light on the extracurriculars, you should consider getting more involved. Most important, a leadership position would be the most beneficial. See what groups, clubs, and organization are in your community, and join them. It's another way to improve your application. And if you're so lucky to achieve a leadership position then it will be even stronger. This can take a long time, so start early!

### **Re-evaluate Your Application Timing**

Did you apply in round 3 or round 4? This alone could have put you at a big disadvantage. Those rounds are generally considered more competitive and more of a gamble. For many reasons, we would encourage you to apply round 1 and round 2 for your new application season. So this means that you should start improving yourself ASAP after you were dinged. Sometimes you won't have much time. But remember, as a re-applicant, you have a lot to prove! So make sure that you make big strides everywhere you can to show the Adcoms how much better you are this year.

### **Re-evaluate Your School Choices**

Not everyone is cut out for Harvard, Stanford, and Wharton. In fact, even for the most qualified of applicants, these schools can be a long shot. You have to remember that no one will give you an admission to a top school. So one of the hardest steps in this process is to sometimes shoot lower or broaden the school list. If you are dead set on a top school and won't attend a lesser school, then by all means don't waste your time on applying to lesser schools. But if you just want to go to a school, then make sure that you don't leave yourself with nothing at the end of the season. Apply to a wide range of schools!