

Graduate Business School...the MBA

Why Business School?

Information provided by Kaplan Test Prep - Kaptest.com

One of the most common essay questions on business school applications is "Why are you pursuing an MBA?" Although you are not expected to map out your entire life plan, you should be able to provide at least a thoughtful, well-reasoned response.

There are plenty of good reasons to pursue an MBA. Higher starting salaries, fast-track to management, career change, and starting a business are just a few. However, it's important that you establish why attending business school is the right choice for you. An MBA can open up a world of opportunity but attending business school is hard work. Whatever your reason for attending, you should be prepared to make a serious commitment.

A World of Opportunity

Business school graduates are in hot demand. Traditionally, an MBA meant entree into the top businesses and financial institutions in the country. Although that's still true, many recent b-school graduates have found themselves starting their own businesses or joining a start-up. Yes, even the most seat-of-the-pants Internet companies are now looking for well-educated managers to build and grow the business and make it profitable - especially since many are now answerable to shareholders.

An MBA can equip you to:

- start your own business.
- become a consultant.
- be an investment banker.
- issue an IPO.
- become a brand manager.
- form an exit strategy.
- be a venture capitalist.
- launch a product online.

What Can an M.B.A. Do for Your Career?

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For many purposes, an M.B.A. is the fastest road between where you are now and where you want to go. Examine your goals-and the suitability of an M.B.A. to attain them-with as much critical detachment as you can.

Career Advancement or Career Change

You may want to gain a position of greater responsibility in your current field. Or you may want to switch from one area of business to another-from marketing or sales to strategic planning or finance, for example.

You could be looking to change your career path altogether. Using an M.B.A. to switch career focus is a typical strategy. Many people seek a management position after acquiring expertise in a different field altogether-such as nursing, teaching, performing arts, or engineering-because they want to shift to a management position in their area. An M.B.A. can help you make a major break or leap in your career path-with a concomitant leap in income.

You may aspire to an area that "requires" an M.B.A. as an entry. An M.B.A. signals a prospective employer that you've got the knowledge and skills a demanding job requires, as well as persistence, energy, and even time-management skills to handle it.

Specific Management Training

Obtaining specific management training and expertise is another common reason for pursuing an M.B.A. Although the M.B.A. is a general management degree, most programs provide opportunities to study one or more areas in greater depth. Investment bankers typically concentrate on finance in their M.B.A.s, for instance. But if you have a very singular focus on a particular field, you may want to consider some alternatives such as a specialized master's program, course work as a nondegree student, or nonuniversity-based courses, seminars, and workshops.

If you need to learn something about a few specific topics, consider an executive education program. Typically conducted as workshops or seminars lasting from a few hours to several days, an executive education program may provide the training you need.

More Money

M.B.A.s generally have higher average salaries than workers with similar work experience who hold only a bachelor's degree. But the road to this higher salary has a cost. While you're working on your degree, you may need to leave your job, so say goodbye to your full-time paycheck for a couple of years! With the hefty amount of time you'll have to devote to classes, studying, and related activities, you won't have much time or energy left over for personal, family, or leisure activities.

Your M.B.A. is an investment in yourself, and as with any investment, you need to decide whether the potential return is worth the time and money spent. The M.B.A. degree does not guarantee a fabulous job at a fabulous salary. When you look at placement and salary reports from schools or in the media remember that half of the salaries fall below the average, and that salaries are influenced by local conditions.

Salaries tend to be higher in areas with high living costs and lower where it's cheaper to live. An M.B.A. grad's salary is also influenced by his or her salary profile prior to entering the program. Obviously, someone who earned \$70,000 a year before pursuing an M.B.A.-and had the kind of work experience to command this income-is more likely to be offered \$120,000 a year after graduating than someone who was earning \$25,000 a year at the same point.

Look at the financial costs and benefits realistically. But your decision to get an M.B.A. may not depend on the bottom line. There are returns beyond financial ones. The degree may give you greater job mobility, access to positions that offer greatly enhanced job satisfaction, or other nonfinancial advantages.

The Application

An increasing number of schools last year offered online applications, making the process more efficient and convenient for schools and applicants. MIT required you to apply online--no paper accepted.

The GMAT*

Although official numbers have yet to come in, data suggests that the number of GMAT* test-takers last year increased for the first time since the 1995-1996 admissions cycle. 98% of GMAT* test-takers last year were 22 or older, and more than half of test-takers last year were over 26.

GMAT* scores have increased steadily throughout the nineties and scores at the top business schools are up significantly from 1996. How competitive are the top schools? Although, just 2 percent of all GMAT* test-takers scored a 725 on the GMAT*, that score was the 1999 average for the incoming class at Stanford Business School!*** A sample of average GMAT* scores from top business schools*:

School GMAT* Score

One important piece of advice from GMAT* takers last year: remember to figure out the admissions calendar far in advance. It is easy with the computer adaptive test to put it off until it is too late to retake the exam if you do not like the score. Plan ahead! For information on registering for the GMAT*, go to: [GMAT* Online](#) .

Schools	Score
Stanford	725
Columbia	725
MIT	700
Wharton	691
Chicago	690
Harvard	690

Business School Essay Secrets

Information provided by [Petersons.com](#)

Business school students face a uniquely difficult challenge, because most programs require a series of essays rather than a single, comprehensive personal statement. This fact alone should indicate the importance that business schools place on your written responses. Part of the reason for this extra required writing is that business schools also place a stronger emphasis on practical experience. Academic ability may still be the number-one factor, but it's not enough to get you into a

school, just as it's not enough to guarantee your success in the business world. Business schools pay close attention to personal qualities, including your leadership, communication skills, initiative, vision, and many more. Grades and scores do not explain this side of you, and neither does a resume.

Thus your admission will depend largely on your ability to convey your experiences and goals in written form. Self-assessment is a significant part of this process, as is a careful review of both your life and what you have done professionally. Many successful professionals have simply never had to articulate their accomplishments before and now for the first time must communicate this information in a very clear, concise, powerful manner that is accessible to anyone, even without knowledge of their field. Being able to convey both the substance and significance of one's work life is crucial for all applicants.

As the founder of EssayEdge.com, the Net's largest admissions essay prep company, I have seen firsthand the difference a well-written application essay can make. Through its free online admissions essay help course and 300 Harvard-educated editors, EssayEdge.com helps tens of thousands of student each year improve their essays and gain admission to business schools ranging from Harvard to State U.

Having personally edited over 2,000 admissions essays myself for EssayEdge.com, I have written this article to help you avoid the most common essay flaws. If you remember nothing else about this article, remember this: Be Interesting. Be Concise.

Why MBA?

Nearly all applications will feature a question that asks about your reasons for wanting to obtain an MBA at this stage of your career. Some will explicitly ask you to tie these reasons into your background and your goals. Even for schools that don't offer this specific direction, you should plan on such a discussion of past and future, as it provides essential context for your application.

"Why MBA?" is often the first question asked and without a doubt the most important essay you will write. It includes essential information about whether you're qualified, whether you're prepared, and where you're headed. The other essays fill in details about these fundamental points, but a strong answer about, for example, how you overcame a failure will not revive a candidacy that failed based on a lack of career focus.

Every answer should contain the following elements, unless the application has separate questions addressing them individually:

1. Your long- and short-term goals.
2. Your relevant past experience.
3. An assessment of your strengths and the gaps in your experience/education.
4. How an MBA program will bridge your past and future and fill in those gaps.
5. Why this particular MBA program is a good match for your needs.

There are no groundbreaking reasons for pursuing an MBA. This is not a place to aim for bold originality. Rather, you should focus on articulating detailed reasons that are specific to your situation. Moreover, there is plenty of room to distinguish yourself when discussing past experience and future goals; the reasons themselves, however, come from a more limited set. That said, you should not try to drop buzzwords for their own sake. Make sure you tie your specific objectives to other aspects of your application.

TOP 10 BUSINESS SCHOOL ESSAY WRITING TIPS

1. Don't Use Company Jargon.

As a prospective business student, you have probably spent the past few years in a corporate environment with its own in-house terminology. Remember that you are writing for a reader who hasn't attended your company's meetings or contributed to its products. You should certainly describe various aspects of your professional life--your leadership skills, your career trajectory, your triumph in the face of obstacles, and so on--but do so in language that is as accessible to your reader as it is to you. Imagine that you are composing a document for a customer who must decide whether to buy a particular product: you. Write clearly and personably.

2. Don't Bore the Reader. Do Be Interesting.

Admissions officers have to read hundreds of essays, and they must often skim. Abstract rumination has no place in an application essay. Admissions officers aren't looking for a new

way to view the world; they're looking for a new way to view you the applicant. The best way to grip your reader is to begin the essay with a captivating snapshot. Notice how the slightly jarring scene depicted in the "after" creates intrigue and keeps the reader's interest.

Before: I am a compilation of many years of experiences gained from overcoming the relentless struggles of life.

After: I was six years old, the eldest of six children in the Bronx, when my father was murdered.

3. Do Use Personal Detail. Show, Don't Tell!

Good essays are concrete and grounded in personal detail. They do not merely assert "I learned my lesson" or that "these lessons are useful both on and off the field." They show it through personal detail. "Show don't tell," means if you want to relate a personal quality, do so through your experiences and do not merely assert it.

Before: If it were not for a strong support system which instilled into me strong family values and morals, I would not be where I am today.

After: Although my grandmother and I didn't have a car or running water, we still lived far more comfortably than did the other families I knew. I learned an important lesson: My grandmother made the most of what little she had, and she was known and respected for her generosity. Even at that age, I recognized the value she placed on maximizing her resources and helping those around her.

The first example is vague and could have been written by anybody. But the second sentence evokes a vivid image of something that actually happened, placing the reader in the experience of the applicant.

4. Do Be Concise. Don't Be Wordy.

Wordiness not only takes up valuable space, but also confuses the important ideas you're trying to convey. Short sentences are more forceful because they are direct and to the point. Certain phrases, such as "the fact that," are usually unnecessary. Notice how the revised version focuses on active verbs rather than forms of "to be" and adverbs and adjectives.

Before: My recognition of the fact that we had finally completed the research project was a deeply satisfying moment that will forever linger in my memory.

After: Completing the research project at last gave me an enduring sense of fulfillment.

5. Do Address Your Weaknesses. Don't Dwell on Them.

At some point on your application, you will have an opportunity to explain deficiencies in your record, and you should take advantage of it. Be sure to explain them adequately: "I partied too much to do well on tests" will not help your application. The best tactic is to spin the negatives into positives by stressing your attempts to improve; for example, mention your poor first-quarter grades briefly, then describe what you did to bring them up.

Before: My grade point average provides an incomplete evaluation of my potential and of the person I am today, since it fails to reveal my passion and determined spirit which make me unique and an asset to the _____ School of Business.

After: Though my overall grade point average was disappointing, I am confident that the upward trend in my undergraduate transcript will continue in business school. Furthermore, my success on the GMAT and in the corporate world since graduation reinforces my conviction that I have a keen business sense—one that I hope to develop at the _____ School of Business.

6. Do Vary Your Sentences and Use Transitions.

The best essays contain a variety of sentence lengths mixed within any given paragraph. Also, remember that transition is not limited to words like *nevertheless*, *furthermore* or *consequently*. Good transition flows from the natural thought progression of your argument.

Before: I started playing piano when I was eight years old. I worked hard to learn difficult pieces. I began to love music.

After: I started playing the piano at the age of eight. As I learned to play more difficult pieces, my appreciation for music deepened.

7. Do Use Active Voice Verbs

Passive-voice expressions are verb phrases in which the subject receives the action expressed in the verb. Passive voice employs a form of the word to be, such as was or were. Overuse of the passive voice makes prose seem flat and uninteresting.

Before: The lessons that have prepared me for my career as an executive were taught to me by my mother.

After: My mother taught me lessons that will prove invaluable in my career as an executive.

8. Do Seek Multiple Opinions.

Ask your friends and family to keep these questions in mind:

- Does my essay have one central theme?
- Does my introduction engage the reader? Does my conclusion provide closure?
- Do my introduction and conclusion avoid summary?
- Do I use concrete experiences as supporting details?
- Have I used active-voice verbs wherever possible?
- Is my sentence structure varied, or do I use all long or short sentences?
- Are there any clichés such as "cutting edge" or "learned my lesson?"
- Do I use transitions appropriately?
- What about the essay is memorable?
- What's the worst part of the essay?
- What parts of the essay need elaboration or are unclear?
- What parts of the essay do not support my main argument?
- Is every single sentence crucial to the essay? This must be the case.
- What does the essay reveal about my personality?

9. Don't Wander. Do Stay Focused.

- Many applicants try to turn the personal statement into a complete autobiography. Not surprisingly, they find it difficult to pack so much information into such a short essay, and their essays end up sounding more like a list of experiences than a coherent, well-organized thought. Make sure that every sentence in your essay exists solely to support one central theme.

10. Do Revise, Revise, Revise.

- The first step in improving any essay is to cut, cut, and cut some more.

SAMPLE ESSAY

Please discuss the factors, both professional and personal, influencing the career decisions you have made that, in turn, have led you to your current position. What are your career goals for the future, and why is now the appropriate time to pursue an MBA at NAME? How will you avail yourself of the resources at NAME to achieve these goals?

Turkish news nowadays carry vivid images which have become terrifyingly commonplace: the surface of the sea littered with dead sheep; a landfill explosion leading to a number of deaths; vendors offering radiation-contaminated tea for half-price; a little girl's death resulting from her fall through an open sewage manhole in her schoolyard; radioactive waste sold to unsuspecting scrap dealers; a twenty-year-old tanker breaking into pieces, spilling hundreds of tons of crude oil into the ocean and killing sea life all around.

The frequency with which these environmental disasters fill Turkish news broadcasts -- along with the obvious insensitivity of the authorities towards both environment and health issues -- prompted me to learn about ways to prevent these types of disasters. At the age of fifteen, I decided to focus my studies on environmental sciences in order to equip myself with the technical tools I would need to make a real contribution.

After earning a master's degree in environmental sciences, I completed a professional international management certificate program in order to gain a management perspective of the field. I then realized that, in order to effectively combine my technical knowledge and management skills, I needed to accumulate real-world experience. Specifically, working at a

large company would allow me to develop insight into various industries, as well as an overarching vision of the international business arena.

I have now worked for nearly two years in the energy and environment group of Koc Holding, Turkey's first and biggest diversified conglomerate. As a project engineer, I am mainly responsible for our holding companies' environment and energy sector investments. This position has given me the opportunity to interact with businessmen from all over the world, thereby expanding my international perspective. Because of my outstanding work performance, I was chosen to attend various meetings with local and international governmental bodies such as OPIC, IFC, and the World Bank. It is highly unusual for a young associate to represent the company at such events, and my self-confidence -- as well as my management skills -- was further enhanced by that successful experience.

While working in various business lines, including the automotive industry, consumer durables, and the energy sector, I have realized that the root cause of many environmental problems is financial. I believe that many people in the environmental sector are so ignorant or insensitive that they will cheat customers to increase profits. Furthermore, businesses do not prioritize environmental investments; as a result, insufficient funds are allocated to adequately prevent problems. For instance, despite a population over eight million people, Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, still lacks a properly operating sewage system. In most of the areas of the city, waste water is discharged directly into the Bosphorus.

In the long term, I hope to help solve my country's problems by starting my own environmental-services business in Turkey. The company will serve both local and international customers by providing cost-effective, adaptable solutions ranging from waste management to safety management. In order to accomplish this goal, however, I must deepen my knowledge of the field. Despite my experience, I still lack some important knowledge and management skills, especially in finance, marketing, and entrepreneurship. I am also aware that my knowledge of American environmental issues is insufficient. Since dealing with aspects of international business will be an integral part of my job as an entrepreneur, it is essential that I fill in these gaps.

The NAME School's MBA program is the perfect bridge from where I am to where I want to be. I am attracted by the inventiveness and uniqueness of its entrepreneurial and finance programs, and believe that I will increase my practical knowledge of entrepreneurship by interacting with my classmates. I value the fact that at NAME entrepreneurial education does not stop at the classroom, but rather continues through internships and extracurricular activities. I feel that a business school for entrepreneurs should balance a dose of theory with real-world application, and NAME's curriculum and hands-on experiences through associations, internships, and the management field study provide such balance.

I am also drawn to NAME because of the school's emphasis on teamwork and technology, reflected by such exciting courses and programs as High Technology Entrepreneurship, International Finance, 12-week field application projects, and the global immersion program directed to teach global thinking and global action. Additionally, the school's profusion of student groups and its flexible entrepreneurial program -- with electives from 200 courses -- will allow me to tailor my course of study directly to my career interests. It is precisely this flexibility that I plan to draw on while at NAME and beyond, by taking advantage of (and contributing to) the school's strong international alumni network.

Above all, a NAME MBA will help me strengthen both the finance knowledge and the entrepreneurial skills necessary to secure a position as an environmental specialist in a multinational American-based firm. Such a position, in turn, will prepare me to accomplish my long-term ambition of building my own company. By developing and maximizing the technical knowledge and managerial skills I have already accumulated, NAME will allow me to ultimately make a concrete and substantial contribution to Turkey's environment.