

The Precision Essay Guide

to Elite MBA Admissions



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Crash Course: The MBA Landscape

What is Business School?

Contrary to popular belief, MBA programs do not focus on the stock market, math problems, or even economics. Business schools seek to train leaders who will one day become extremely successful. These leaders will change the world (hopefully for the better), and in turn do all they can to support their alma maters.

Take for example, Harvard Business School's mission statement: *The mission of Harvard Business School is to educate leaders who make a difference in the world.* So at HBS, we are trained to LEAD. To be fair, every school has a different character, and sizes range from 350 per class up to 900+. Some schools focus on leadership (HBS), numbers crunching (Chicago, Wharton, Stern, Columbia), non-profit work (Yale, Duke), and entrepreneurship (Stanford, HAAS, MIT).

What do business schools need?

MBA programs have three primary needs, all interrelated:

1. Prestige
2. Cash
3. Ranking

Prestige

Schools gain prestige by having successful, famous graduates. It's that simple. Therefore, admissions committees are particularly interested in those "most likely to succeed," and those most committed to success. Every applicant will claim to be ambitious, but some seem desperate for success, and therefore destined for it.

Winning candidates KNOW what they want, and HOW to get it. These are the people that will actually achieve their goals. This becomes especially important in the Career Essay (more about this later). While it is typical for MBA students to change careers mid-way through the program on account of their education and exposure to new ideas and people, nothing is more critical to an application than creating the sense of an overall inevitability of success.

Cash

High-caliber business schools are also high-caliber businesses; they need to make money. Schools become rich by churning out successful students who in turn become generous donors. Once again, the applicants more likely to succeed at an MBA program and therefore later on in their careers are the ones to snatch up, from the adcom's perspective.

Rankings

Schools that are ranked highly receive more applicants. Period. More applicants equates to more and better candidates for the school, as well as prestige. Familiarize yourself with the rankings. They change every year. Poke through US News and World Report, Businessweek, Financial Times,

The Economist, The Wall Street Journal, and Princeton Review. Although each has a different system of ranking (and while the majority tends to put the most credence in the US News list), the principles are the same: better stats and a better brand = higher ranking. Schools will always seek to increase their rankings.

All business school applications are not created equal. Whereas law school and undergrad applications all seem to have the same main components, business school apps are all different. Each asks different essay questions. Some give applicants over 3,000 words to write, where others cap applicants at 1,800 or fewer. Regardless of these specific differences, all applications do share some BASIC components.

Anatomy of a Typical Application

- ❑ Online Application Form
- ❑ CV/Resume
- ❑ Transcripts
- ❑ GMAT
- ❑ Essays (3-6, generally); 1,800-3,200 words
- ❑ Recommendations (1-3)

Because applicants' resumes are often so similar, it is critical to *stand out*.

GMAT

The best, simplest proxy for whether or not an applicant will be accepted at an MBA program is his GMAT score. There is no better gauge for your chances at acceptance. So for example, if your GMAT score is 670, Kellogg will be a stretch for you; its average GMAT score is 706. Might you get in? Of course—but the school is a stretch, no matter how you slice it. Conventional wisdom has it that in order to be considered at a top-ten program, you want to break 700. And for the most part, this is true.

For applicants from foreign countries (an under-represented one such as Indonesia, in Eastern Europe, or Africa) GMAT scores could run a bit lower. If you are from an over-represented demographic group (India and China especially) your GMAT would likely need to be higher than it would for your American counterpart. If your experience is very unusual, you might overcome the mean GMAT test; but still, there is no better proxy for school admission.

The GMAT is important only in that applicants need to meet a certain hurdle (depending on the factors above, average scores, etc.) After a certain score has been met, the role of the GMAT decreases significantly; that is, many folks who score a 750 will NOT get in.

Grades

As opposed to law school and college applications, grades don't account for much in the MBA application process. Of course ideally, your GPA will be in at 3.5 or better, but applicants should

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How to Write Precision Essays

Here's how to take your applications from awkward and unclear to smooth and focused.

Results

The single thing that will make any achievement impressive is its *results*. It is a great way to quantify a positive trait. Great results SHOW more than merely telling that "I succeeded at task X." Results make your case bulletproof. There are two types of results:

1. Non-relative

- Sold \$3 Million to a new client

2. Relative

- Made the largest sale in company history
- Made the largest sale that year from my team of 25

The best results are the ones that are impressive on both counts. So "I sold \$100 Million of products in one year, the largest sale in the 150 years of the company's history, and tripled the previous largest sale." This is what we call a "holy-crap dude!" result. How can anyone ever possibly argue with this kid's achievement?

Very often accomplishments will have two types of results. We can call them:

1. Project-Specific Results

- Like the examples above, these are the results and numbers related to the actual story

2. Global Results – these are results that affect applicants' lives, such as:

- Promotions
- Bonuses
- Awards
- Perks
- Good reviews
- Feedback from management

All of the above can be baked into the results of an achievement to make it seem even more impressive, and milk it to the max.

Example 1

→ BAD

After 12 months of hard work we finished the project successfully.

→ BETTER

After 12 months of hard work, we launched the new product in over 100 stores.

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[a] career essay

Survey of Major Essay Types

No MBA essay is more important than this one. If this essay is off-track, the kid's gonna fight an uphill battle. Period.

Example 1

What are your career aspirations? How will your education at Stanford help you achieve them?

Example 2

Think about the decisions you have made in your life. Describe the following: (2 pages maximum, double-spaced, 12-point font)

- What choices have you made that led you to your current position?
- Why pursue an MBA at this point in your life?
- What is your career goal upon graduation from the NYU Stern? What is your long-term career goal?

Example 3

Describe your career progress to date and your future short-term and long-term career goals. How do you expect a Wharton MBA to help you achieve these goals, and why is now the best time for you to join our program? (1,000 words)

In a nutshell, the career essay (no matter what school or version you are answering) will have the following:

- Clearly-stated goals that are...
- Linked to the candidate's career past and show...
- A logical progression into the future with...
- Very impressive goals that...
- Show us your passion and...
- Show us why SPECIFICALLY you need an MBA and...
- Why specifically THIS PARTICULAR SCHOOL is the best place to get one.

Easy, right? Let's slow down a tad.

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