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The Key Pieces of My Application

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The Key Pieces of My Application

This is where the actual, concrete storytelling begins. Your recommendations, resume, essays, and short answers are where the admissions committee has the first opportunity to hear your unique story and truly understand what differentiates you from everyone else in the candidate pool.

What is an MBA resume?

To-Dos Covered:

- Create your 1-page MBA resume

Equipped with your ‘MBA story,’ you can use your resume to highlight all the accomplishments that have shaped you and your career path. Your resume is a snapshot of the achievements you are most proud of, therefore, it needs to be carefully crafted to illustrate those aspects. It’s also likely to be the first document that the admissions committee examines thoroughly. Think of it as a comprehensive introduction to you and your first opportunity to shine!

Our Top 10 Resume Tips

- 1. MBA resumes are one page.** Whether you have been in the workforce for 10 months or 10 years, all the admissions committee wants to see is one page. The information does not need to be as comprehensive as traditional professional resumes or Curricula Vitae (CVs).
- 2. Keep your language simple.** Your language should still be readable to someone completely unfamiliar with your company or industry, especially if you work in a highly-specialized role or technically complex field. Stay away from complex jargon or acronyms an outsider wouldn’t understand!
- 3. Be wise with your bullets.** As one admissions consultant says, “the bullets are the heart of the resume.” Put the most bullet points in your most important areas (e.g., your current job) and aim to keep each bullet to two lines.
- 4. Make sure each bullet point shows an outcome.** Schools are less interested in what exactly what you have done and are more interested in the impact you have made with your actions. Don’t just simply say, “built sales program,” instead say, “built sales program that increased revenues by X.”
- 5. Go easy on the margins and spacing.** No one wants to read a resume that doesn’t have some white space. Don’t squish everything together and always aim for 0.75 to 1.0 inch margins.
- 6. Stay away from small or funky fonts.** Try to keep the body font around size 11 and do NOT use a non-standard font. Stick with the classics – Arial or Times New Roman.
- 7. The majority of the page should be for your ‘must have’ sections.** These sections are for ‘Work experience’ and ‘Education.’ In the ‘Education’ section, you can list more than just your degree and your GPA, especially if you have been out of college for less than five years. Make sure to include select college leadership activities and awards.
- 8. Remember ‘Helpful’ sections.** Don’t forget to include 1-2 sections that highlight your extracurricular activities or additional abilities, labeled ‘Hobbies,’ ‘Community Leadership,’ ‘Skills,’ or simply use an ‘Additional Information’ section to contain all three. They help to showcase your personality and commitments you’ve made.
- 9. Ruthlessly prune your content.** Ask two questions for each bullet point: (1) does this contribute to telling my story? (2) will this differentiate me from other business school candidates? The answer should be yes to at least one question!
- 10. Ask someone else to review your resume.** Your resume is the easiest place to make small errors. Have someone else proofread it to ensure there are no grammar or spelling mistakes.

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TIP:

Resumes for US business schools do not ask for information that can be common in other countries. For example, personal details, such as age or marital status are not considered appropriate to include.

TRY IT OUT:

List the key bullets for your two most recent jobs.

[Company Name]
[Your Title]

[Company Location]
[Start month/Start year - Present]

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

[Company Name]
[Your Title]

[Company Location]
[Start month/Start year - Present]

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

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How do I prepare my recommenders to write a letter?

To-Dos Covered:

- Identify your recommenders
- Create materials to prepare recommenders and share with them

Think of your recommenders as additional storytellers for you. Their role is to confirm and complement the story you are telling. Although they should always be the ones to do the letter writing, there is some work you can do to help prepare them for this important task, especially if they have never written a business school recommendation before.

Your first task is to select your recommenders. Most schools ask for two recommendations, one of whom is a current supervisor. The other recommendation is often also professional (e.g., someone who knows you from work), however, it can also be someone who has been in a leadership role with an organization that you have volunteered with, on a consistent basis. Recommendations do take some time to complete, so be sure to ask your recommenders early.

Next, you'll want to prepare materials to help them understand your story. Fortunately, you can leverage a lot of the work you already did in steps 1 and 2 to develop these materials. Consider preparing a Word document or a PowerPoint slide deck with a one page/slide dedicated to your 'MBA story' and all the work you did in [Step 1](#) and another page/slide for [Step 2](#) about each school – why you want to go there and what the relevant deadlines are.

The best recommendation letters cite specific examples of when you were a strong performer rather than just stating that you are a strong performer. Consider an additional page/slide that lists some specific examples of when you were a strong leader, when you acted upon feedback well, which weaknesses you have improved upon, etc. Be sure to give these materials to your recommender at least five to six weeks ahead of the application deadline to give them adequate writing time. It may also be helpful to set up a call or in-person discussion with them to answer any questions before they start writing, and to actively manage them prior to the deadline. Recommenders are often busy professionals, and even the most well-meaning person might forget about an upcoming deadline! For this reason, you may also want to have backup recommenders in mind. Should your first choice have a chance of circumstance where they are unable to deliver, it will make you more confident to have a clear backup option in mind.



TIP:

If you are looking for specific advice to offer your recommenders, along with the materials you're going to share, you can direct them to [this guide](#), prepared by the Association of International Graduate Admissions Consultants, in collaboration with a number of business schools.

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TRY IT OUT:

Now it's your turn to start thinking about your recommenders by filling out the table below:

Recommender name and job title	Elements of your story you want them to cover	Specific examples of you as a strong performer
1.		
2.		
3.		

How do I tackle essays?

! To-Dos Covered:

- Read online advice about specific school essay prompts
- Create story map for essays
- Draft and refine essays

The first step in tackling essays is to read the free essay tips found on mba.com. They can provide great advice on how to navigate the specifics of each schools' essay prompts. This will help you avoid the common mistake of not actually answering the prompt. Your 'MBA story' should come across in any essay you write, but your priority should be to fully address the question(s) asked in the prompt.

Once you learn about the prompts, but before you start writing, we suggest going through a story mapping exercise. To communicate the themes of your 'MBA story' in your essays, you want to demonstrate these themes through examples, not merely with direct statements like "I am a leader" or "I want to work in operations." For example, if your career goal is to work in management consulting, think about stories of when you helped friends build their businesses or when you worked on a consulting-type project at your current company or to help a non-profit organization. The admissions committee will be much more convinced by your application if you can back your story up with specific examples.

When you've mapped out the stories to use as examples in your essays, you're ready to begin writing! Many candidates report that this process took longer than they anticipated. Although you may be able to draft a 500+ word essay in a matter of hours, you may need to spend double or triple that time editing or even re-writing the essay to make sure it really stands out.



TIP:

If you ask friends or mentors to read your essay drafts, ask them if the essay reflects who you are and if your 'MBA story' comes across clearly. Since some essay topics can be quite broad, it's important to be clear about the key points of your candidacy and not ramble on about disconnected topics.

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TRY IT OUT:

Now it's your turn to do some simple story mapping as you brainstorm for your essays:

Possible 'MBA story' themes to communicate in your essays	Specific examples and stories to support themes
[Insert key personality characteristic #1]	[Insert a few stories of you demonstrating this trait] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____
[Insert key personality characteristic #2]	[Insert a few stories of you demonstrating this trait] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____
[Insert theme from your career background]	[Insert a few stories of you having an impact in your current career function/industry] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____
[Insert post-MBA career goal]	[Insert a few stories of how this career goal developed] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____

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...And what about those short answer questions?



To-Dos Covered:

- Start and refine short answers

One element of the application that candidates frequently put on the back burner is the short answer section – the minor questions asked within the application form itself. Some examples of common questions may include, ‘Greatest Accomplishments’ or ‘Reason for Leaving a Job.’ While this section may not seem as important as your essays and resume, you still want to put your best foot forward. Be concise, as many schools put strict word limits on their short answer questions! Our advice is to draft your answers early and then come back to refine them once you have finished your essays and resume.

How do I know when I am ready to press submit?



To-Dos Covered:

- Carefully review every detail of your application
- Submit and send your application – breathe a huge sigh of relief!

When you think you are ready to press submit, do yourself a favor and read everything one last time. Make sure that every word is spelled correctly, and every period, comma, and semicolon is in its proper place. Many schools allow you to print out a PDF version of your application before you submit. Do this and then take a red pen and identify any errors. Consider giving the document to a friend or mentor to double check everything as well.

Once you’ve double and triple checked it, go ahead and press submit. Congratulations! You’ve put in so much hard work and now you are done with your application! But one more question....

How will you treat yourself after submitting your application?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



TIP:

If you are applying to multiple schools, make sure you have the correct school name in the essay. We’ve heard from admissions officers that this silly, yet fatal, mistake is more common than you’d think.

Everything About Interviews

If completing your application is about telling your story on paper, the MBA interview process is about telling your story in person. The interview gives you the opportunity to bring your story to life for the admissions committee and to show them what a great fit you would be in their program.

How do I prep for my interviews?



To-Dos Covered:

- Schedule interviews
- Refine and practice answers to ‘Why an MBA?’, ‘Why now?’, and ‘Why this school?’
- Familiarize yourself with the STAR method
- Create stories with the STAR method
- Conduct 2 – 4 practice interviews

Some schools offer interviews to all applicants and other schools use invite-only interviews. Either way, be sure to schedule your interviews as soon as you can. This will allow you to select a comfortable interview time that gives you enough prep time.

The first step in preparing for your interviews is to refine your answers to ‘Why an MBA?’, ‘Why now?’, and ‘Why this school?’ You will likely be asked some form of these three questions in an MBA interview and your answer needs to be confident and well thought out. As you refine your answers, be sure to practice what you would say aloud and in front of a mirror. You can have the best answer to ‘Why an MBA?’ on paper, but it doesn’t matter unless you can communicate that answer in a live interview, clearly and confidently.

In addition, many interviews contain behavioral questions to learn more about your experiences. You will likely be asked questions, like “Tell me about a time when you did X?” The STAR method is a great framework for answering these behavioral questions. It works like this:

- **Situation:** Describe the situation you and/or your team was in.
- **Task:** Describe the task that you and/or your team was given in light of the situation.
- **Action:** Describe the action that you specifically took to address the situation.
- **Result:** What outcome happened as a result of your actions.

This framework helps keep you from rambling as you answer behavioral questions, but most importantly, it drives you to think about the result or impact of your actions. Admissions committees ask you these types of questions because they want to understand how you impact the teams and organizations you are a part of. We suggest developing a few STAR examples for some key MBA interview questions, which we have provided on the following page.

In addition to practice sessions in front of your mirror, we suggest you conduct between two to four practice interviews with someone who is familiar with the MBA admissions interview process. If you do too many practice interviews, you run the risk of seeming too ‘artificial’ or ‘scripted’ in your actual interview. If you don’t do enough practice interviews, you run the risk of not seeming polished enough on interview day. Two to four should be the sweet spot!

Everything About Interviews

TRY IT OUT:

Now try building out STAR method stories for some common questions:

Tell me about a time when....

... you demonstrated leadership

Situation	Task	Action	Result

... you failed at something

Situation	Task	Action	Result

... you worked with a difficult teammate

Situation	Task	Action	Result

... you persuaded someone

Situation	Task	Action	Result

Everything About Interviews

TRY IT OUT:

Now try building out STAR method stories for some common questions:

Tell me about a time when....			
... you set a goal and achieved it			
Situation	Task	Action	Result
... you thought outside the box to solve a problem			
Situation	Task	Action	Result
... you received feedback that surprised you			
Situation	Task	Action	Result

Everything About Interviews

How do I ace my interview?



To-Dos Covered:

- Conduct actual school interviews
- Your application is completely done – breathe a huge sigh of relief again!

If you can interview on campus, we highly suggest going and making the most of your day there. Schools often allow you to visit classes or have programming you can participate in before your interview. Take advantage of these opportunities to learn about the school and try to relax before your upcoming interview.

That being said, don't worry if you cannot make it to campus for an interview. Schools are aware that this travel may not be possible, and you will not be penalized if you do an interview via a Skype call, in another city, etc.

Once you're about to start the conversation, here is our most important interview advice yet – don't forget to breathe and smile! You know who you are, you know why you want to go to business school, and you have thought about several great STAR examples that demonstrate your abilities and your uniqueness. If you seem like you are relaxed and enjoying your interview, chances are your interviewer will reciprocate the feeling. After it's over, don't forget to send a thank you note to your interviewer.

Now you can breathe another huge sigh of relief. You are completely done with your application to business school!

So, what will you do to celebrate the great job you've done as you wait to hear decisions from schools?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



TIP:

Share the accomplishment of completing the application process and connect with other candidates who have done the same by tagging #MBAJourney on Facebook and Twitter.

The Ultimate Application Checklist

Use this list to stay on track as you prepare and keep the application process stress-free.

Step 1 | Your Early Profile

- Develop your answer to ‘Why an MBA?’
- Develop your answer to ‘Why now?’

Step 2 | Schools and Your Story

- Assess your background and personality
- Track down your undergraduate transcript
- Develop your ‘MBA story’
- Visit schools and observe a class
- Choose and finalize list of school preferences
- Review online admissions criteria at each school
- Develop your answers to ‘Why this school?’
- Register for the GMAT™ exam
- Study for and take the GMAT exam
- Re-take the GMAT exam (if needed)

Step 3 | Your Application

- Create your 1-page MBA resume
- Draft and refine short answers
- Identify your recommenders
- Create materials to prepare recommenders and share with them
- Read advice on writing essays on mba.com
- Create story map for essays
- Draft and refine essays
- Carefully review every detail of your application
- Submit and send your application
 - breathe a huge sigh of relief!

Step 4 | Everything About Interviews

- Schedule interviews
- Refine and practice answers to ‘Why an MBA?’, ‘Why now?’, and ‘Why this school?’
- Familiarize yourself with the STAR method
- Create stories with the STAR method
- Conduct 2 – 4 practice interviews
- Conduct actual school interviews
- Your application is completely done
 - breathe a huge sigh of relief again!

Conclusion

Your application process is finally complete! You have put everything you have into this – time, effort, creativity, and not to mention, the months of studying, weeks reflecting on past experiences for your MBA story, and days preparing for interviews. But you must admit, all that work, introspection, and preparation has been a revealing and personally rewarding process. You can now speak with confidence about who you are, your unique story, what you can accomplish, and where you want to be in the future. With that, you are equipped for an exhilarating journey toward attending your dream school, maximizing your impact and, hopefully, changing the course of your life.

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