

# Manhattan Review®

Test Prep & Admissions Consulting

## MBA Admissions in a Nutshell

Joern Meissner, PhD (Columbia Business School)  
[www.manhattanreview.com](http://www.manhattanreview.com)

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# Manhattan Review®

Test Prep & Admissions Consulting

## MBA Admissions in a Nutshell About MBA Admissions

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## **About the Company**

Manhattan Review's origin can be traced directly to an Ivy-League MBA classroom in 1999. While lecturing on advanced quantitative subjects to MBAs at Columbia Business School in New York City, Prof. Dr. Joern Meissner was asked by his students to assist their friends, who were frustrated with conventional GMAT preparation options. He started to create original lectures that focused on presenting the GMAT content in a coherent and concise manner rather than a download of voluminous basic knowledge interspersed with so-called "tricks." The new approach immediately proved highly popular with GMAT students, inspiring the birth of Manhattan Review. Over the past 15+ years, Manhattan Review has grown into a multi-national firm, focusing on GMAT, GRE, LSAT, SAT, and TOEFL test prep and tutoring, along with business school, graduate school and college admissions consulting, application advisory and essay editing services.

## **About the Founder**

Professor Joern Meissner, the founder and chairman of Manhattan Review has over twenty-five years of teaching experience in undergraduate and graduate programs at prestigious business schools in the USA, UK and Germany. He created the original lectures, which are constantly updated by the Manhattan Review Team to reflect the evolving nature of the GMAT GRE, LSAT, SAT, and TOEFL test prep and private tutoring. Professor Meissner received his Ph.D. in Management Science from Graduate School of Business at Columbia University (Columbia Business School) in New York City and is a recognized authority in the area of Supply Chain Management (SCM), Dynamic Pricing and Revenue Management. Currently, he holds the position of Full Professor of Supply Chain Management and Pricing Strategy at Kuehne Logistics University in Hamburg, Germany. Professor Meissner is a passionate and enthusiastic teacher. He believes that grasping an idea is only half of the fun; conveying it to others makes it whole. At his previous position at Lancaster University Management School, he taught the MBA Core course in Operations Management and originated three new MBA Electives: Advanced Decision Models, Supply Chain Management, and Revenue Management. He has also lectured at the University of Hamburg, the Leipzig Graduate School of Management (HHL), and the University of Mannheim. Professor Meissner offers a variety of Executive Education courses aimed at business professionals, managers, leaders, and executives who strive for professional and personal growth. He frequently advises companies ranging from Fortune 500 companies to emerging start-ups on various issues related to his research expertise. Please visit his academic homepage [www.meiss.com](http://www.meiss.com) for further information.

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# Chapter 1

## MBA Admissions in a Nutshell

### 1.1 Overview of MBA

A Master's in Business Administration (MBA) is an advanced degree offered by most business schools to college graduates who (preferably) have a few years of work experience. MBA coursework teaches students essential skills for the corporate world by focusing on both technical (e.g., finance and economics) and personal (e.g., leadership and management) abilities. Earning an MBA has become an essential step in establishing a successful career in the business world. Some companies are willing to sponsor their employees' education, either while they are working part-time, or during a hiatus from their employment (with a contract to return afterwards).

Today most business people in management positions have MBAs. While it is possible to achieve success in the business world without an MBA, not having a degree from a top business school can be a severe handicap because so many people continue their education and training. Both the quantitative and qualitative skills taught in MBA programs are qualities that are in high demand in the real business world. If you decide not to pursue an MBA, it is possible that you are making a decision that will hinder your future success in the corporate world.

Although the MBA is the common name for a graduate management degree, many institutions offer the same program with another name such as Master of Management (MM), Master of Public and Private Management (MPPM), Master of Administrative Science (MAS), and Master of Science in Business Administration (MSBA), to name a few.

#### 1.1.1 Why MBA

There are a multitude of reasons why so many people now consider an MBA to be an integral step in their career paths. Just having an MBA can make the difference between a high-paying, high-power job, and an endless cycle of unsuccessful interviews. Statistics show a pronounced difference in salary between graduates of top MBA programs and the MBA-less (on average the former earn as much as twice the latter). There is also a substantial gap in pay between those with MBAs from top schools, and those who graduate from lower-ranked institutions. Because the stakes are so high, seeking expert advice and meticulously preparing your application are essential for your future success at a top business school.

Increased salary is only one of the benefits of an MBA from a top business school. Job flexibility and security, the opportunity to make important connections, enhanced upward mobility, and the satisfaction of doing more interesting, significant work are just a few of the reasons why hundreds of thousands of applicants attempt to gain admittance to business school each year.

Entrepreneurs often seek MBAs before they strike out on their own so that they can learn from business professionals who have already succeeded. This gives them a greater chance of success in the real world. An MBA provides both a qualification that will help further your career path and a body of practical knowledge. This combination of credentials and expertise will help you achieve your goals regardless of the profession you choose.

During your years in business school, you will meet many people, some of whom may prove to be valuable contacts later in your career. The establishment of a broader network of contacts is one of the reasons why it is important to go to a top business school. The better the business school, the more valuable those contacts are likely to be.

Interacting with a network of well-trained and educated business contacts while in school is also excellent practice for your re-entering the business world full-time post MBA. Working closely with others and finding common ground with your fellow students provide you with training for any future positions with much higher stakes. By then your business and interpersonal skills could mean the difference between winning and losing a multi-million dollar contract with an important client.

### **1.1.2 Academic Offerings**

Business schools, in general, make special efforts to simulate the actual business world in the classroom by:

- Creating lessons from actual situations
- Using the very computer programs you will need to use in the business world
- Involving you and your fellow students in active discussion of problems so that you will better understand how to interact with people and be more skilled at working in a team to develop the best solutions.

Academic expertise varies from program to program. There are some basic topics in the areas of management and business which all schools will cover. But if your area of interest is less common, you will need to inquire about the course offerings at each specific school. For example, some schools have a focus on Operational Management while other schools are known for their MBA training for non-profit organizations.

In addition to detailed curricula which you can either find on-line or directly request from schools, there are three major teaching methods used by business schools: lecturing, the case method and the project method.

Once you begin your initial research on business schools, you will often hear the term “case method.” The case method, developed by the Harvard Business School faculty in the 1920s, refers to creating a more authentic business environment in the classroom through the study of actual cases in which business decisions were required.

The case method involves classroom discussion of situations in which students are required to face and react wisely to the challenges of the business environment. This is now the preferred method of teaching at many business schools around the world. However, depending on the subjects and the level of courses, some schools offer more of a lecturing method than the case method.

This is certainly something to consider when making your business school decisions. By using the case method, the professors facilitate discussion, give their observations, and lead the class but do not focus on lecturing. A significant portion of classroom time will be taken up by students, and their answers to the professor's questions and analysis. If you are not comfortable in an interactive classroom environment and are not interested in becoming more comfortable in such an environment, it may be wise to consider schools that do not use the case method so much. However, if you are interested in a classroom setting in which you actively discuss cases and develop and analyze possible solutions verbally, then consider schools that emphasize this teaching style. This information should be readily available either in brochures or on school websites or from conversations with students, faculty, alumni or admissions officers.

Developed on a similar premise to the case-method form of study, the project course involves the creation of solutions in addition to decision-making and discussion on the part of students. These courses are generally devoted solely to the analysis and research of one project and the solving of that project for a hypothetical business entity. Needless to say, such courses require a great deal of time and hard work.

You may have heard a lot of discussion regarding student project teams. Depending upon the school you attend, you will spend lots of time working with other students to develop solutions to class assignments. Teamwork allows students to better understand themselves and how to interact with colleagues. It often leads to the development of well thought out and interesting solutions to problems.

In addition to curricula and teaching methods, you will want to assess what the faculty will offer you. In general, the quality of the faculty can be determined by the reputation of the school itself. Yet, you may also want to consider the amount of time faculty spends on teaching vs. pure research, the priority the school assigns to teaching vs. research, and the major research areas in which faculty members are specialized. In order to make an accurate assessment, you must explore and evaluate the classroom experience of students.

You may find a wide spectrum of elective courses within each business school that go beyond the typical business school fundamentals. You may also want to consider some joint overseas study or internship programs through your business school. In your investigatory research, you will find that each program has its special features that distinguish it from others.

Another possibility you might want to consider during your MBA is simply taking courses outside of the Business School at which you are studying. The opportunity that you are granted during the MBA program is in part simply the opportunity to return to an academic environment and explore. Do consider, even if you are not going to commit yourself to a dual-degree program, expanding your horizons by taking or sitting on courses outside of the typical Business School curriculum. However, you should not engage in outside courses if they significantly digress from your current studies.

### 1.1.3 Pre-MBA Checklist

If you are considering a more intensive, for example, one-year or 18-month program, it is likely that you will be expected to come in with a solid background in certain relevant subjects, such as Economics and Math. Many schools provide summer boot camps prior to the start of official coursework to refresh the memories of students in those areas. The traditional two-year MBA programs also expect you to be comfortable with Calculus and Economics and even certain elements of Accounting prior to the start of their programs. For this reason it is important that you are aware of prerequisites for courses and possibly take some courses on your own before your MBA.

You will be expected to have solid computer skills when you arrive at a school and to further develop and enhance them during your tenure in your program. If you are not completely comfortable with computers and computer programs, it will be helpful to you to have some crash course on Microsoft Office applications before entering school. Communication and people skills are two most important skills required of a good manager. Refreshing your fundamental grasp of English to make yourself articulate, well-spoken, and well-versed in business expressions will make you fit in faster and better in a variety of settings including group meetings, conference calls, and presentations.

Manhattan Review is keenly aware of these pre-MBA training needs and therefore has developed a series of intensive courses to help the entering MBA students become well prepared for all the challenges ahead during their MBA study and job search. Please email us at [info@manhattanreview.com](mailto:info@manhattanreview.com) or call us at (212) 997- 1660.

## 1.2 Program Types

### 1.2.1 Traditional Model

MBA Programs are designed in several different ways. Each program has its own unique rules and philosophy.

The traditional MBA model requires its students to take certain core requirements in their first year and to take elective courses in their second year. This model enables student to establish a solid background in the fundamental areas of the study of business and explore particular areas of interest in their second year of study

Generally, schools identify themselves with certain areas of expertise. In order for you to specialize in a particular area, you typically will need 5 courses within a specialty. For individuals with strong math and accounting backgrounds, it is possible for them to be exempted from certain courses and thus be able to finish their degree more quickly, but such exemptions occur strictly on a school to school basis. Such an exemption allows you either to finish early or to take more advanced level courses. Again, this will depend upon the specific guidelines of a particular program.

### 1.2.2 Accelerated Programs

One year programs, despite the name, typically last a year to a year and a half. In general, all students in your program are on the same track. They have the advantage

of making smaller investment of time and money than two-year programs. However, they often lack the opportunity to specialize. Many European business schools offer one-year programs. In the US, some top business schools also offer accelerated MBA programs in addition to the traditional two-year track. For example, Johnson Business School of Cornell University offers a one-year MBA program for students with other advanced degrees. Columbia Business School offers a one-and-half year MBA program for students with significant work experience or other advanced degrees.

### 1.2.3 Part-Time MBA

Besides traditional full-time MBA programs, some schools also offer part-time, dual degree and distance learning programs for you to earn your MBA in the most optimal way based on your interests, lifestyle, and individual preferences.

Some students choose to do their MBA part-time while working full-time. We recommend that you take time to thoroughly consider the pros and cons of this approach.

Part-time status has the following main advantages:

- You can lessen the financial burden of getting an MBA by working your way through school.

Part-timers have the opportunity to gain marketable skills from business schools without the large financial sacrifice full-timers make. Part-time study accompanied by full time work may be an option, if the financial commitment required by Business School is larger than what you are prepared to make. Some employers assist employees who are willing to work and study in funding their tuitions.

- You can advance along the same career path on which you started.

Individuals who don't wish to change careers may find the part-time MBA an excellent option. But if you are entering Business School with the intention of changing careers or even if you are just open to changing careers, keep in mind that it is difficult for part-time students who have been consistently working in one field to change fields. Part-time students rarely have the opportunity to do summer internships and thus prove themselves in a new area. They also frequently are not given as much attention by the career services centers of business schools, as they are, at least, working. In addition, when companies conduct on-campus recruiting, frequently part-time students as a result of their working schedule are unable to attend.

Before settling on part-time study, you will also want to consider the long and hard hours of homework and classroom time and the difficulties that can arise when you combine work and study. Be certain that your company is supportive of the endeavor. For example, when you have a paper due or a final exam, will you be able to devote time to studying and writing or will you be given, regardless of your involvement at school, a consistently large load of assignments? In addition, you will need to consider the stress of your current position as well as the time commitment.

Remember: There are only so many hours in a day. In addition, a part-time MBA can take as many as four years to complete.

Please be aware that part-time students tend not to get the same treatment as full-time students. Sometimes full-time students are privileged in terms of spots in courses and, simply as a result of having more time and a flexible schedule, they are able to get to

know professors better. In a similar sense, part-time business school students have fewer opportunities to network and their jobs tend to prevent them from enjoying all that a program has to offer (i.e. opportunities to actively participate in clubs, opportunities to attend events (recruiting events, parties, lectures)).

As a means of making the part-time MBA status work well for you, we suggest

- Excellent time management
- Do not drag out the process, take enough classes (though not excessive) to enable you to finish in a timely manner
- Make friends, especially attempt to connect with some fellow part-time students
- Remember that if part-time is too frustrating, you can switch to full-time status
- Make time for yourself to relax. Three to four years without weekends is too much to take.
- Try working from home occasionally.

| Pros  | Cons   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save Money</li> <li>• Keep Job</li> <li>• Do Not Have To Move Your Family</li> <li>• Earn MBA</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer Career Options</li> <li>• More Limited Network</li> <li>• Smaller Increase in Salary</li> <li>• Lots of Work; Maybe Very Stressful</li> </ul> |

If being a part-time makes sense financially and professionally, you should do it. You will in the end have the same degree as your fellow full-time students. You will also have accomplished the not-so-easy task of balancing work and study, a marketable skill. You will have had the opportunity to get to know your fellow part-time students and through them to develop some valuable connections.

Another option is to begin as a part-time student and end as a full-time student. That way you can make yourself more available at the end when it seems to be the most intensive period for seeking post-business school positions.

#### 1.2.4 Dual Degree MBA

Joint-degree programs offer you the opportunity to get through two degrees at once, much faster than you would finish them separately. More than that, dual-degrees offer you the unique opportunity to diversify your background through the study of two disciplines in which you have an interest and witness where and how these disciplines overlap. A JD/MBA program is a very common dual-degree. But there are many others.

There is a variety of dual-degree programs from which you may choose. Some students view the dual-degree program as an opportunity to gain expertise in range of disciplines. From school to school, the programs vary. You can combine a Public Health master's degree, a Medical degree, a Law degree, or an International Affairs degree with an MBA. Certain schools have established excellent dual-degree programs.

One thing that dual degrees do offer is the opportunity to specialize— an opportunity so rarely available in a typical MBA program. Dual degree programs provide you with the ability to have more of a focus on something. This is particularly useful for candidates who know precisely what they want to do.

The dual-degree in another sense offers greater flexibility. You may find yourself uncomfortable in the business world but, with your JD/MBA, you have the luxury of being able to fit in faster with more ease. Though a dual degree is more expensive than a straight MBA, it is less expensive than attaining the two degrees separately.

Keep in mind also that there are not many slots allotted for dual degreed individuals. In addition, be aware that depending on the particular fit and position a company is looking for, hiring managers sometimes do not consider a dual degreed individual to be a more qualified candidate than the straight MBA graduate. Instead they consider dual degree as more of an alternative path and therefore less of an appropriate fit for their opening.

Take a moment and consider what you will do with a dual-degree before jumping into one. This will be both a financial commitment and a commitment of additional time in school. You will need to consider where you want the degree to take you and if the combination will suit those needs. Will this combination provide you with additional opportunities or limit them? Will the degree increase your earning potential or limit it?

For some students, the financial commitment in itself may be enough to deter them from engaging in a dual degree program. But for others, they may find that the dual degree offers them a diverse experience, a chance to be a part of two worlds and an ability to gain knowledge in a field that will work as a complement to their business and management skills. On average, less than 10 percent of MBA students seek an additional degree. However, the dual degree may be just the thing you want.

### **1.2.5 Distance Learning**

Many schools offer distance-learning programs. In these programs you attend courses, often online, or through occasional trips to campus throughout the year. The duration of MBA programs can vary greatly but generally they are self-paced.

While distance learning programs lack direct exposure to and interactions with faculty and students, they can have the benefit of allowing you to be flexible about where you live and work as you pursue your MBA.

Distance learning MBA programs also grant you the same degree as your full-time MBA or part-time MBA colleagues earn and often at a lower cost.

## 1.3 MBA Programs

### 1.3.1 US MBA Programs

Traditional Business School programs in the United States are two years (actually 21 months) long. From the Ivy-League to lesser known regional business schools, high quality business education is available to individuals with a range of different backgrounds. MBA programs in the US generally require an undergraduate degree and some work experience.

The following is a list of some the most well-known US business schools:

Columbia Business School  
Cornell S.C. Johnson Graduate School of Management  
Dartmouth College Ð Tuck School of Business  
Duke University Ð Fuqua School of Business  
Harvard Business School  
M. I. T. Sloan School of Management  
Northwestern University Ð Kellogg School of Management  
NYU Leonard N. Stern School of Business  
Stanford University Ð Stanford Graduate School of Business  
UCLA Anderson School of Management  
University of California, Berkeley Ð Hass School of Business  
University of Chicago  
University of Michigan Ð Stephen M. Ross School of Business  
University of Pennsylvania- The Wharton School  
University of Virginia- Darden School of Business  
Yale University Ð Yale School of Management

Compared to these top MBA programs with nationwide brand name recognition, regional schools are the kind of institutions that enjoy a significantly higher profile and recognition in their local region than across the country. If you are interested in working in a particular area, it may be wiser seeking out a school that is highly regarded locally than going for a top-ranked Ivy League MBA program. This may allow you to both save money on the education itself and be able to establish the right connections to achieve your professional goals. In some regions the alumni networks of certain local institutions may prove to be highly supportive and effective in a job search process.

### 1.3.2 International MBA Programs

If you are interested in working internationally, you may want to consider the possibility of earning your MBA degree outside the United States. It will open your horizons to new places, new cultures and new professional and personal networks. You may have the opportunity to learn another language. Attending business school abroad in itself will make your MBA a unique experience. It will potentially enable you to get positions which require a degree of international expertise more easily than your counterparts from US business schools could. You will not only have lived abroad but also studied business abroad.

You may also have the opportunity through US schools such as Wharton, Chicago and Columbia to do a portion of your MBA abroad. This may also help you gain some degree of real life international exposure in addition to developing international connections while studying for an MBA in the US.

There is a wide range of different kinds of institutions overseas. Each institution carries its own unique philosophy and organization. A wide range of companies recruit at European and Canadian business schools. Again each school is different and you are going to want to check the specific school you are interested in to get information on who recruits at that school.

The following is a list of some well-known European and Canadian business schools:

Bocconi University School of Management & SDA Bocconi

Copenhagen Business School

Cranfield School of Management

ESADE Business School

HEC - Montreal

HEC & Paris

Henley School of Management

IESE University of Navarra

IMD & International Institute of Management and Development

INSEAD

Instituto de Empresa

London Business School

Oxford Brookes University

University of Cambridge Judge Institute of Management

University of Lancaster & Lancaster Business School

University of Manchester & Manchester Business School

Oxford University Said Business School

University of Strathclyde Graduate School of Business UK

Warwick School of Business

Western Ontario

### 1.3.3 MBA Rankings

Rankings provide a simple way of determining the quality of education of a variety of programs. The most prominent Business School rankings are the following:

- *Business Week*
- *Financial Times*
- *US News and World Report*

However, applying to schools simply based upon rank is not the best way to judge the excellence of MBA programs or whether a particular program is appropriate for you. Rankings do not tell the whole story. We recommend that you look beyond rankings to make your decisions about business schools.

- Rankings benefit nationally known schools.

*U.S. News and World Report* and *Business Week* do not rank regional programs. If you are interested in working in your region, it may be just as beneficial to seek out a school that is highly regarded in your local area. This may allow you to both save money on your education itself and be able to make the connections necessary to achieve your professional goals. In some regions, the alumni networks generated by certain local institutions may carry greater weight than a degree from a nationally ranked school.

- Ranking statistics are not as precise as one might like to believe.

If graduates of one school are making average starting salaries of \$100,000 in London, and graduates of another school are making average starting salaries of \$70,000 in St. Louis, what does 100,000 tell you as an average? As costs of living vary so much from location to location, a dollar amount indicating average salaries is somewhat misleading.

- Most rankings present some degree of bias.

They rely on the opinions of individuals. The biases of corporate recruiters or of alumni themselves will no doubt be reflected in rankings.

With regard to rankings, please keep in mind:

- Many items are left out of the analysis.
- A lot is not accounted for and disregarded.
- AND things change.

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*Us News and World Report 2006 Business School Rankings*


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|   |    |
|---|----|
| Harvard University                              | 1  |
| Stanford University                             | 2  |
| University of Pennsylvania (Wharton)            | 2  |
| Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Sloan)   | 4  |
| Northwestern University (Kellogg)               | 4  |
| Dartmouth College (Tuck)                        | 6  |
| University of California—Berkeley (Haas)        | 6  |
| University of Chicago                           | 8  |
| Columbia University                             | 9  |
| University of Michigan Ann Arbor (Ross)         | 10 |
| Duke University (Fuqua)                         | 11 |
| University of California—Los Angeles (Anderson) | 11 |
| New York University (Stern)                     | 13 |
| University of Virginia (Darden)                 | 14 |
| Cornell University (Johnson)                    | 15 |
| Yale University                                 | 15 |
| Carnegie Mellon University (Tepper)             | 17 |
| Emory University (Goizueta)                     | 18 |
| University of Texas—Austin (McCombs)            | 18 |
| University of Washington                        | 18 |
| Ohio State University (Fisher)                  | 21 |
| University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill        | 21 |
| Purdue University—West Lafayette (Krannert)     | 23 |
| University of Minnesota—Twin Cities (Carlson)   | 23 |
| University of Rochester (Simon)                 | 23 |
| University of Southern California (Marshall)    | 26 |
| Georgetown University (McDonough) (DC)          | 27 |
| Indiana University—Bloomington (Kelley)         | 27 |
| University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign         | 27 |
| University of Maryland-College Park (Smith)     | 27 |
| Arizona State University (W.P. Carey)           | 31 |

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*Business Week 2004 US Business Schools Rankings*

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|                       |    |
|-----------------------|----|
| Northwestern          | 1  |
| Chicago               | 2  |
| Pennsylvania          | 3  |
| Stanford              | 4  |
| Harvard               | 5  |
| Michigan              | 6  |
| Cornell               | 7  |
| Columbia              | 8  |
| MIT                   | 9  |
| Dartmouth             | 10 |
| Duke                  | 11 |
| Virginia              | 12 |
| NYU                   | 13 |
| UCLA                  | 14 |
| Carnegie Mellon       | 15 |
| UNC Chapel Hill       | 16 |
| UC Berkeley           | 17 |
| Indiana               | 18 |
| Texas                 | 19 |
| Emory                 | 20 |
| Purdue                | 21 |
| Yale                  | 22 |
| Washington University | 23 |
| Notre Dame            | 24 |
| Georgetown            | 25 |
| Babson                | 26 |
| Southern California   | 27 |
| Maryland              | 28 |
| Rochester             | 29 |
| Vanderbilt            | 30 |

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*Business Week 2004 International Top 10*

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|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Queens                 | 1  |
| IMD                    | 2  |
| INSEAD                 | 3  |
| ESADE                  | 4  |
| London Business School | 5  |
| Western Ontario        | 6  |
| IESE                   | 7  |
| HEC-Paris              | 8  |
| Toronto                | 9  |
| HEC - Montreal         | 10 |

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*Financial Times 2004 Global Rankings*

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|   |    |
|---|----|
| University of Pennsylvania: Wharton     | 1  |
| Harvard Business School                 | 2  |
| Columbia Business School                | 3  |
| INSEAD                                  | 4  |
| London Business School                  | 5  |
| University of Chicago GSB               | 6  |
| Stanford University GSB                 | 7  |
| New York University Ð Stern             | 8  |
| MIT: Sloan                              | 9  |
| Dartmouth: Tuck                         | 10 |
| Northwestern University: Kellogg        | 11 |
| IMD                                     | 12 |
| IESE Business School                    | 13 |
| Yale Business School                    | 14 |
| Instituto de Empresa                    | 15 |
| Cornell University: Johnson             | 16 |
| Georgetown Uni: McDonough               | 17 |
| University of N Carolina: Kenan-Flagler | 18 |
| University of Virginia: Darden          | 19 |
| Duke University: Fuqua                  | 20 |
| University of Toronto: Rotman           | 21 |
| Emory University: Goizueta              | 22 |
| Rotterdam School of Management          | 23 |
| UC Berkeley: Hass                       | 24 |
| York University: Schulich               | 25 |
| University of Oxford: Said              | 26 |
| University of Maryland: Smith           | 27 |
| Carnegie Mellon University              | 28 |
| University of Western Ontario: Ivey     | 29 |
| SDA Bocconi                             | 30 |
| University of Michigan                  | 31 |
| UCLA: Anderson                          | 32 |
| Warwick Business School                 | 33 |
| University of Cambridge: Judge          | 34 |
| University of Rochester: Simon          | 35 |

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## 1.4 Application Strategy

The value of an MBA from a top school is indisputable. Therefore, you should give yourself the best chance for success by putting as much effort as possible into your applications. But first, you need to evaluate your personal strengths and weaknesses to determine which schools fit you best.

### 1.4.1 Where to Apply

From the US to Asia to Europe and other locations, you have a number of business school options. We recommend that you consider where you want to be before beginning the actual application. Schools have their own particular atmospheres, climates, geographies, cultures, in addition to having unique curricula, expertise, and rankings. Before simply applying to the highest-ranking schools according to *U. S. News and World Report* or *Business Week* or the *Financial Times*, take a moment to consider the following questions.

Where would you like to spend a few years? Often the pursuit of prestige and the attempt to be accepted at the highest ranked school possible (though important in some respects) get in the way of selecting a school that is right for you. What areas would you like to specialize in? How do you learn best? Do you prefer teamwork to working alone or vice versa? Are there individuals at a particular school with whom you are interested in interacting? What are your chances of getting in?

You should weigh carefully what a school offers both academically and environmentally. This may require some degree of thought and research. Ultimately, the decision will involve analyzing the uniqueness of the programs that you are interested in applying to and thinking about who you are and how MBA programs are related to your professional and personal inclinations. A good method of analysis is simply prioritizing the most important features you are looking for in an MBA program and then creating charts and/or lists with columns dedicated to those criteria.

For example, Joanne is interested in the following criteria: (1) class size, (2) rank, (3) curriculum, (4) length of study, (5) location (East coast), and (6) expertise in finance. In order to measure her options in an organized fashion, she selects several business schools and inputs their characteristics on a chart. You may want to try filling in Joanne's chart as a practice assignment.

| <i>School</i> | <i>Class Size</i> | <i>Rank</i> | <i>Curriculum</i> | <i>Length of Study</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>Expertise in Finance</i> |
|---------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Yale          |                   |             |                   |                        |                 |                             |
| Wharton       |                   |             |                   |                        |                 |                             |
| Stanford      |                   |             |                   |                        |                 |                             |
| INSEAD        |                   |             |                   |                        |                 |                             |
| Columbia      |                   |             |                   |                        |                 |                             |
| NYU           |                   |             |                   |                        |                 |                             |
| UT Austin     |                   |             |                   |                        |                 |                             |
| UC Berkeley   |                   |             |                   |                        |                 |                             |

We do not recommend applying to too many programs. The crafting of too many applications can act as a hindrance to your own ability to create customized applications for each program. In addition, every application incurs a financial cost. However, how many is too many will vary from applicant to applicant.

The students with whom you will be studying are often just as important to your overall MBA experience as the faculty. Most schools post on their websites and in their informational brochures statistical information on their entering class, outlining where students are from, what professions they have been involved in, their age range and years of professional experience. From these statistics, you can gain a basic understanding of how well you will fit in to the school's environment. Think about yourself in relation to these class profiles. Do you see yourself thriving amongst these individuals? Do you fit in? In addition, you may want to keep in mind the class size. Do you enjoy the energy of lots of people or prefer intimacy of a smaller learning group? We recommend that you visit the school and observe the atmosphere in order to better understand whether or not you will be comfortable there.

As a means of scaling down your list of programs, we recommend the following tactics:

- Try to eliminate those programs that are poorly suited to your strengths and weaknesses.

If a program is geared toward international business and you have every intention of returning to your hometown to run your father's restaurant, then that program can be omitted, as you may not gain what you are looking for from that program.

- Gauge your likelihood of acceptance.

No precise formula exists to determine if you will be admitted. Talking with admissions officers, individual students enrolled in a program, or your own friends and colleagues will aid you in measuring your likelihood of acceptance. Manhattan Review's Admissions Consulting staff is at your service to assist you in this matter.

- Do not be afraid to apply to a few schools that you doubt you will get into.

Your doubt could merely be a symptom of your own lack of confidence.

### 1.4.2 When to Apply

As a rule, apply as early as possible. At most schools this will increase your chances of admittance. Many schools have very few spots available for the third round of admissions.

Some schools make public the numbers of applicants they accept per round. You may want to examine such statistics to help you determine when the best time to complete your applications is.

If you have already submitted applications to MBA programs and were not accepted at the schools you wanted to attend, you should consider applying again. In fact, second-time applicants tend to have a better chance of admittance to B-School than first time applicants do. But in order to reapply successfully, you will have to reconsider how you want to present yourself to the admissions committee.

The best way to increase your chances of success is to improve your application. This could mean diversifying your work experience or preparing for and retaking the GMAT, a very important factor in MBA admissions, or it could mean choosing different individuals to write recommendations for you. If you applied late the first time, reapplying early significantly increases your likelihood of admittance.

In this matter, every individual is different. You must take some time and consider your whole application and what you could do to improve it. Most likely you will notice strengths and weaknesses. You will need to think about how the weaknesses could

be improved. If, for example, your GMAT score is in the low range for the school, preparing for and retaking the GMAT is a good idea. You may want to ask someone you trust to evaluate your application and point to problem areas. Manhattan Review's GMAT Preparation courses provide you with the skills and strategy you need to do your best on the exam.

Reapplying is easier than applying for the first time. Often schools allow you to carry over references and reapply with just one new reference letter. However, you may consider more than one depending on what you think will best help you in this process. In your essays you will want to point to how you are a better candidate now. What have you learned in the time since you last applied? How have you grown? In what ways have you changed so that the school will value you more?

Manhattan Review's Admission Consulting team is made up exclusively of graduates from top Ivy League schools. Our team is ready to carefully guide you through the admissions process.

### **1.4.3 Program Materials**

When you request information, we advise you to request not only a brochure but also a course catalog if possible. This will enable you to gain a deeper sense of the school's academic offerings and what it focuses on. Then you can compare that to other schools you are interested in attending. Some of this information may be accessible online. Some schools offer CD-ROMs with such information. In general, we recommend that you get as much information as possible so that you will be able to make as informed a decision as possible with regard to where you apply.

Visiting the school is perhaps one of the best ways to make your decision. When visiting, we recommend that you take the opportunity to speak to current students, tour around the campus and make detailed observations. Could you imagine yourself studying there?

Part-time students may have the opportunity to take a course before enrollment. This may be a good idea especially if you are uncertain of whether you want jump into an MBA at this point in life.

### **1.4.4 Talking to the Right People**

It may also be helpful to speak with corporate recruiters regarding the strengths of an individual program and the degree to which they favor candidates from certain programs over others. After all these are the individuals who will be making the ultimate hiring decisions. It is also useful to understand why these recruiters value individuals from certain schools. It may be because of the expertise of the schools or simply their reputation.

One of the best means to determine the quality of a program is to measure the success of its graduates and assess their reputation in the corporate world. If you have the opportunity to do so, the best way to find them out is to consult with business people, inquire about which graduates they find impressive and which they do not. This will offer you insights into the long-term and short-term successes of graduates. Keep in mind that success varies from individual to individual, but business schools should

ideally grant their students the means to progress, change, grow, adapt, and move towards career goals. The more solid a program is in terms of content and reputation, the more successful its graduates are.

The following questions may prove useful in more casual or exploratory conversations with students, alumni, faculty and recruiters as well as in your interview.

- What kind of impact has your MBA had on your career?
- In what ways does the material you studied in school assist you in your position?
- Are you confident about hiring people who attended your program?
- Were your professors approachable and open to student contact?
- In terms of administrative support did you find the school supportive? Did you and your classmates find positions easily?
- What were the other students in your program like?
- What were those most challenging experiences during your MBA years?

One of the most attractive reasons to do an MBA is the quick improvement in salary and in career opportunity. It is for these reasons that you must find out which companies recruit at which business schools. Statistics on post-graduate salaries do not tell the whole story. You must inquire into where MBA graduates are working immediately after graduation and how their careers progress years down the line.

You should also inquire about the following areas:

- Internship Opportunities and Job Placements
- Recruiting Companies & Industries
- Salary Potential and Ranges
- Reputation in the Business World
- Variety of Career Options & Sectors and Mobility
- Long-term Career Path
- Short-term Career Opportunity

In your consultations with admissions committee members, students, faculty, and alumni, you should also try to determine how helpful the alumni network is and the types of opportunities offered by alumni.

#### **1.4.5 MBA Books and Forums**

There are a number of books out there that offer suggestions as to how to engage in the process of applying for an MBA. Most of these books only brush the surface of MBA experience and potential MBA programs. However, these books may offer some assistance in familiarizing yourself with the process and the reputation of certain schools.

One good way to learn about MBA programs is through large MBA forums organized by various organizations. For example, TopMBA offers World MBA Tours all around the globe. Going to a forum is an excellent way to improve your knowledge of MBA admissions procedures, to encounter representatives from schools, to meet other interested students, to simply gather brochures and application materials for programs that interest you, and to directly ask school admissions staff specific questions.

In addition, schools host their own information sessions in various international cities where you can speak directly with school representatives, attend seminars, get an interview, and familiarize yourself with the school's philosophy and interests.

### 1.4.6 Funding Options

One of the most difficult aspects of the MBA decision is money. How in the world can you afford it? We in general advise you to apply for any scholarships you happen to be qualified for and then devise a plan for funding your MBA once you know how much money you have available to you and where you have been accepted. An MBA in the US can cost up to \$60,000 a year. But you have options. To support yourself and cover some of your own expenses, you should consider part-time work. Summer internships between your first and second years are often very well-compensated in terms of helping you save up for your cost. There is a tremendous number of scholarship opportunities overlooked every year as well.

Most MBA students take out loans. Counting on the greatly increased earning potential after completion of the MBA, students tend to find loans the simplest funding option. Federal loans are the best type of loan you can get. You may take out no more than \$18,500 from the Federal government per school year and the rest will need to come from private institutions, such as Citibank, Access group and the GMAC.

The financial aid offices of the schools you are applying to are in general quite helpful in assisting students in locating the best option. Scholarships, grants, and part-time work are all options to help finance your MBA.

### 1.4.7 Women Applying for MBA

The ratio of men to women in MBA programs across the nation is far from equal. Not many women elect to apply for MBAs despite the opportunities an MBA provides, i.e. high salaries, effective connections and career advancement. Why not? Why go to other professional schools and not Business School? Some women have hesitated to pursue MBAs as a result of the competitive nature of the programs, despite the fact Law School and Medical School are perhaps more competitive. Ultimately, it seems that it is the time and the commitment required of traditional post-MBA consulting or investment banking careers that most family-minded women find hard to accommodate.

Despite various hesitations and doubts women may have about pursuing an MBA, they rarely find their experience to be an inadequate one. In general, the overwhelming majority of women find themselves satisfied with their business school experience and their new opportunities. More and more women are pursuing MBAs.

## 1.5 MBA Applications

Business school applications generally contain 8 basic elements:

- (1) GMAT Scores
- (2) TOEFL scores (for non-native English speakers)
- (3) Essays
- (4) Recommendation Letters (2-3)
- (5) Undergraduate/Graduate Transcript(s)
- (6) Interview
- (7) Resume
- (8) Application Form

These application elements are not listed in any particular order, as some schools pay far more attention to a particular aspect (e.g., the GMAT score) of your application and other schools give greater weight to another portion of the application (e.g., the essay portion). However, all items are an integral part of the package you present to the school of your choice, and therefore, all items must be taken seriously. The entire application should aid the admissions officer in developing a clear vision of you, identifying your strengths and weaknesses, where you have been and are going, and the difficulties you have overcome.

Before you begin applying to an MBA program, ask yourself whether or not you are ready to apply. Admissions committees typically like to see a few years of work experience prior to filing your application, so if you are fresh out of college, you might want to consider putting off your application for a few years until you have some experience under your belt. Next, consider which schools you should be applying to. Take a look at [Where to Apply](#) (Section 1.4.1).

The length of the MBA application process varies for every individual. It is preferable to begin this process early. This enables you to have enough time to make each element of your application the very best it can be. The range of time spent on the entire application process spans anywhere from 6 months to 2 years. Preparation usually means first taking the GMAT and TOEFL (for non-native English speakers), gathering applications, beginning the process of thinking about why you want to engage in this commitment and what you will have to offer to business schools, deciding where to apply, updating up your resume, writing essays, and preparing for interviews.

We recommend the following basic method of completing the application process:

- (1) Prepare for the GMAT / TOEFL (for non-native English speakers) exam(s)
- (2) Take the GMAT / TOEFL (for non-native English speakers) exam(s)
- (3) Gather applications
- (4) Determine which schools to apply to. Research, visit, talk to students, alumni, admissions etc.

- (5) Update and polish your resume
- (6) Solicit recommendations
- (7) Write essays
- (8) Complete other application items—personal information, resume, short answer questions etc.
- (9) Proofread and edit application with a high degree of attention to detail
- (10) Send in applications on time

Essays are probably your greatest opportunity to stand out among candidates being seriously considered for admission to top business schools (those with sufficiently high GMAT scores). Take this portion of the GMAT seriously. Think long and hard about how you want admissions boards to see you, and then think about how to best convey that image.

Since job experience is an important consideration for admissions committees, you should give yourself at least a couple of years of business-world experience before applying. In your essay, be sure to carefully portray your job experience in a unique and exciting light. A very small percentage of top B-school classes are comprised of students with two years or less experience. A surprisingly high percentage of top B-school classes are made up of those coming from non-conventional backgrounds. Even if you do have conventional experience (e.g., consulting or finance,) play up aspects of your job experience that are unique - highlight job experiences that surpass the work a consultant or investment banker does in the first five years on the job.

Your undergraduate GPA plays a surprisingly small role in your admission to B-school. Of course, graduating magna cum laude from Harvard would be helpful, but even if your undergraduate career was not stellar, you can still gain admittance to a top business school. Use your essays to show why you will excel at business school, and display your aptitude by scoring high on the GMAT.

The last pieces of the admission puzzle are recommendations and interviews. These provide the same sort of opportunity that the essay does. They help to provide a subjective picture of who you are. If you excel at face-to-face conversations, or are able to produce well written and convincing recommendations from qualified individuals, either one could set you apart from the pool of candidates who you are competing against for admission.

The final decision regarding your application will be made based not on one element alone but upon the application as a whole. For example, perfect essays alone will not get you in. There is no precise formula for predicting whether or not you will get into to a particular program. A lower range GMAT score does not equal rejection nor do a few bad grades in undergraduate courses.

Many factors play into admissions decisions such as essays, recommendations, GMAT scores, transcripts, work experience and personal experience. So try not to sell yourself short. In addition, there are some helpful rules to go by in the MBA admissions process. The admissions officers are looking for individuals who have attained excellence in the workplace, in academia, and in their private lives. You have the opportunity

to demonstrate your full capacity through the elements highly valued by admissions officers.

We recommend you apply to no more than 6 schools per round of admission and those schools should be a good blend based on your various priorities and likelihood of acceptance. This will allow you to give your best to those applications and customize them to the programs to which you are applying. Being able to dedicate your time to the specifics will make the difference between acceptance and rejection.

Our Admissions Consulting staff members are all recent graduates of top Ivy League schools and committed to getting you into the schools of your choice.

### **1.5.1 Application Form**

Each school requires an application form. The form requests general personal information (e.g., your address, phone number, name, short answers to background questions). We recommend that you familiarize yourself with the application form early in the admission process. Most forms can easily be filled out online or in print.

Within the application, other application information (recommendations, essays, resume, etc.) is also required. Please be advised that early awareness of any unique information required by the school will allow you to avoid last minute panic.

You should begin your application by first deciding on a systematic approach. Manhattan Review's admissions consulting staff can help you to develop the appropriate method for customizing your application.

### **1.5.2 Transcripts and Test Scores**

All schools require copies of your transcripts.

We recommend requesting undergraduate as well as graduate transcript(s) early in your application process. Some institutions take up to 8 weeks to process requests for transcripts.

Be aware of the precise way the schools you are applying to want to receive transcripts. Do the schools want the registrar to sign across the seal of the envelope? Do the schools want the transcript mailed directly from the undergraduate/graduate institution? If there are any particular requests, do let your undergraduate/graduate institutions know about them in advance.

Besides the GMAT scores which are required of all applicants (please refer to our GMAT in a Nutshell for more information), non-native English speakers also need to take The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to attend undergraduate and graduate institutions at which English is the primary language of instruction, if they don't have a diploma from these types of institutions already.

The TOEFL test has recently gone through some major overhauls. Since September 2005, the TOEFL can be taken as an Internet Based Test (iBT) at certified test centers in the United States, Canada, France, Germany, and Italy. This new form of the exam has been gradually disseminated to testing centers throughout the world. Unlike the old version of the exam which includes four sections: Grammar, Listening Comprehension, Reading, and Writing, the new version includes: Oral, Listening, Reading and Writing.

According to the ETS (Educational Testing Services), the creator of the TOEFL, the new version is designed to allow universities and colleges to better evaluate the performance and academic readiness of non-native English-speaking students in English-speaking classroom and campus settings.

The main changes in the TOEFL include the addition of an oral section to test your pronunciation and conversational skills by asking you to (a) read a short passage, (b) listen to a response, and then (c), make an oral response. Furthermore, it did away with the Grammar section and incorporates the four traditional and basic areas of English skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) across all sections. Throughout the new TOEFL, students' integrated academic skills, such as analysis and synthesis and the ability to organize an argument, will be tested as well.

In the TOEFL, the written English texts are typically collected from textbooks and course materials, while the main tested topics in the Oral and Listening sections include lectures and interactive classes, labs, office hours, study groups, everyday service interactions (for example, at the bookstore or registrar's office).

Although the TOEFL exam is largely a test of language ability, there are certain test-taking strategies that will ensure that you do your best on the exam. You can improve your English and your TOEFL score through expanding your vocabulary, listening and watching educational software programs, and concentrating on areas of grammar and usage that are particularly difficult for you. Read, listen, speak, and write more, take some specialized courses, and always learn from your mistakes!

Remember that the actual exam is on the computer. For many test-takers, this is not easy because reading large amounts of material on the screen not only dries out their eyes but makes it hard to absorb the material. Simply practice reading on the computer. When preparing for the TOEFL exam, you should:

- Create a study environment that is as similar as possible to the actual testing environment. It means a quiet space, possibly a computer room or office-type environment. Force yourself to sit still for an extended period of time and focus on practicing.
- Eliminate distractions and be conscious of time. Especially when you are taking practice tests, try to be as aware of the clock to monitor your pace.
- After completing a practice test, be sure to go over the answers you missed. This is the only way to improve.

### 1.5.3 Resume

Not every school requires a resume. However, most schools offer the option of including a resume with your application. A resume may help you further match yourself with the school.

- **A resume should use strong verbs.**  
Use words like 'founded, started, created, developed, managed.' You also want to be sure to diversify your use of verbs throughout your resume.
- **Make sure that your resume highlights the strongest elements of your work experience, educational experience and activities.**

If, for example, you attended prestigious institutions and/or worked for prestigious companies, make sure the admissions officers notice this. Or, if the positions you held at particular firms were noteworthy, this should stand out on your resume.

- **Your resume should ideally be 1-page.**  
Do not repeat yourself. Each word should add to the overall impression you are seeking to give the admissions committee.
- **A resume should look appealing to the reader.**  
The formatting and font should be easy on the eye and help give the reader an idea of who you are.
- **The resume should be a flawless, error-free document.**  
Your resume must demonstrate a consistency or dedication so that reviewers can follow your progress or transition in a profession or some special interest. For example, it may be a consistent involvement with France, a consistent position in finance, or consistent extracurricular pursuits.

Of equal importance is the breadth of your experiences and interests. Use your resume to demonstrate your interest in and commitment to a variety of disciplines or areas, as diversity and expanded horizon are highly valued by business schools. The goal is to show an admissions committee precisely what you have accomplished in your academic, professional, or personal lives.

You may also consider including slightly more information than you normally would in your resume. If your former employer is not well recognized nationwide or by admissions officers, we suggest that you offer some brief description of company background and its major milestones. For example, you should emphasize its most important business aspects such as its revenue size, personnel size, products, services, international locations, rankings, among others.

In addition to describing the company, describe your role within the company. Include your individual responsibilities and accomplishments. The more specific description, the greater the likelihood it will differentiate you from other applicants.

In general, your resume provides another way to further develop and emphasize those qualities and subject matters you are seeking to highlight in your application. If time allows, spend some time working on tailoring the resume to fit each institution. Emphasize the aspects of yourself that the school seeks. Certain schools will indicate precise items they want in the resume. Be sure to be attentive to those items and include all information they request. Again the resume should stress the overall skills and traits that all business schools look for:

- Ability to prioritize and manage time
- Academic achievement
- Adaptability
- Critical thinking skills
- Dedication

- Eagerness to participate
- Enthusiasm for Business / Management Study
- Goal-Oriented
- International/Global exposure
- Management Experience / Leadership / Entrepreneurship
- Optimism
- Originality / Creativity
- Qualitative and Quantitative Skills
- Sincerity/Integrity

#### 1.5.4 Recommendations

Recommendations are often a source of stress for even the most qualified of applicants. It is an important part of your application, that is, to some degree, out of your hands. But do keep in mind this is a variable all applicants must encounter, not just yourself. It is important that you develop relationships with your superiors both in the professional and academic realms so that you have some individuals upon which you can rely for recommendations. As a general rule, it is best to select people who know you well and like you and then do your best to make it easy for them to get the recommendation done as soon as possible. If you can, sit down and talk with them about your plans and send them all the necessary material.

Be sure they have your resume indicating your past activities so that they are aware of your past achievements and your future goals and plans. You might even want to send them an essay from your application stating your purpose in applying.

You may want to select individuals who know a variety of positive aspects of your personality. For example, you might select someone who has witnessed your management abilities in the business world, another individual who has seen your intellectual capacity and communication and writing skills in an English course, and another who knows of your quantitative abilities from an Engineering course. Or you may select those individuals who know a particular aspect of your character. Like your essays, your recommendations should also be matched to the schools.

Make sure your recommenders are aware of your deadlines. Contact them every so often to make sure they have all the necessary information.

#### 1.5.5 Essays

Essays are important. It is in your essays that you are able to explain yourself. All the time you spent thinking about why you want to attend Business School and why you feel ready to do so now will pay off in the essays.

We **recommend** the following method of tackling your essay:

- Match yourself to the school.

- Determine what the question is asking.
- Consider how to answer the question: Brainstorm.
- Organize. Select the aspects of yourself to emphasize and back them up with examples / stories / anecdotes from your experience. Put this information into an outline format which you find comfortable.
- Write the essay, paying attention to format.
- Make revisions.
- Have someone read it over.

Manhattan Review’s admissions consulting team can offer you expert advice on essays and the application process.

The guidelines around which we suggest engaging in the essay writing process are the following:

- Convince your reader
- Distinguish yourself
- Demonstrate sincerity
- Write in a fashion that keeps the reader’s attention

To do this we suggest the following:

(1) Select different and unique, but honest experiences. You may want to expand upon an experience to make it seem more unique. Try to select those experiences that make you a unique candidate.

(2) Convey your experience honestly. The admissions committee will notice the difference between extreme embellishment and sincerity and depth.

(3) It is in your writing that you have the opportunity to demonstrate your personality. One important way of doing this is through your style. Within your essays you want to continue to keep the reader’s attention. Try to use the 1st person singular, use “I” and avoid “we”. Avoid using the passive voice as well as the ‘to be’ verbs.

### 1.5.6 Interview

Nowadays interviews are, if not required, highly encouraged. It is not necessary to be interviewed on campus. In general, interviews are easily arranged in most major cities in the US and abroad. In general, interviews are scheduled to be 30 minutes long but many applicants find the meeting going longer especially at schools to which they are accepted. Performing well at an interviewing is a skill; it must be practiced. By focusing on some of the likely questions you may be asked, reviewing your applications, so as not to contradict yourself, and thinking over again how your experience has led you to want to go business school, you will be able to come across as an intelligent, committed, knowledgeable individual, ready to be a part of the schools for which you interview.

An interview is a test of those skills not so readily apparent in the other parts of your application—are you a good communicator, are you charming and able to relay your

passion to others verbally? Schools seek applicants who are strong on paper as well as in person. Following the interview, the interviewer generally sends his or her recommendation and/or evaluation to the school.

Schools are interested in discovering your degree of interest in them and whether you are truly a candidate who has something to offer the school at this point in your career. Here is a summary of **the most important things** you have to know about interviewing with a business school.

- **As you have already done for your application, make sure you have done your research.**  
Your interviewer will quickly be able to distinguish between an applicant that has developed some understanding of a school's background and one that has not.
- **Practice interviewing for Business School with a friend or colleague.**  
Talk to people on the admissions staff to learn more about the school. This will also help you become more comfortable discussing the school and yourself.
- **Think of good questions to ask your interviewer.**  
This is a good opportunity for you learn as well! Think of interesting questions and match them to your interviewer.
- **Write a Thank-you note.**  
Be sure to mail a thank-you note either on the day of the interview or the day after your interview.

Important things to Avoid:

- **DO NOT BE DISHONEST.**  
People can read through such dishonesty quickly.
- **DO NOT BE UNPREPARED.**  
Do your research. Talk to people. Practice interviewing.
- **DO NOT DEMONSTRATE INCONSISTENCY.**  
Both in your answers at the interview and in your application, do not give the interviewer and thus the school any reasons to think you are flaky and fickle.

## 1.6 Application Techniques

Applying for business schools involves a huge amount of research, preparation and organization. Knowing where to apply, when to apply and how to apply successfully is the essentials of the task. It is also a process of self-evaluation and self-marketing. Your ultimate success not only is dependent on who you are, what you have done and where you want to be, but also based on how to highlight your most unique experiences in your applications and how to tailor your approach to each school of your choice.Ê

In general, we recommend you first take stock of your major strengths and weaknesses with real-life evidences to substantiate each quality you list. Then you should stop for a moment and ponder on your current stage of life and your short-term and long-term personal and professional goals. Also think about how a business school could enrich

your experiences, knowledge and skills and how an MBA degree could help you further your career path. A thorough process of self-exploration will help you prioritize your major deciding factors for choosing schools to apply for. It will also help you tackle the essays and the entire application in a much more organized and effective way.É

We typically recommend you to tier the schools of your choice before you start to apply according to your preference and your likelihood of acceptance. In other words, it will be wise to cover all of worst-case, normal-case and best-case scenarios when you select a short list of schools to apply for. However, it will require the same amount of commitment, dedication and hard work for all applications. You should give every application your best effort!

### 1.6.1 Stay Organized

First, be as organized as possible. By being organized we mean creating a systematic approach to putting together your application. Do not leave anything out. In the absence of just one element of your application, your application will go unread. By implementing an organized approach to the process, you can bypass last minute panic. By missing an application item, you significantly hurt your chances of admittance into a program. For that reason, please be as organized an applicant as possible from the beginning: make lists, track steps and create an approach that works well for you.

Below is an example of a table that you may consider using as an organizational guide. You can make it a checklist or include in it more detailed information such as the particular essay questions or the names of the individuals who are writing your recommendations for those particular schools etc.

| <i>School</i> | <i>First Date of Preparation</i> | <i>Deadline</i> | <i>Transcripts</i> | <i>GMAT</i> | <i>Essays</i> | <i>Recommendations</i> | <i>Resume</i> |
|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Yale          |                                  |                 |                    |             |               |                        |               |
| Wharton       |                                  |                 |                    |             |               |                        |               |
| Stanford      |                                  |                 |                    |             |               |                        |               |
| INSEAD        |                                  |                 |                    |             |               |                        |               |
| Columbia      |                                  |                 |                    |             |               |                        |               |
| NYU           |                                  |                 |                    |             |               |                        |               |
| UT Austin     |                                  |                 |                    |             |               |                        |               |
| UC Berkeley   |                                  |                 |                    |             |               |                        |               |

### 1.6.2 Explore Ideal Candidacy

You should emphasize the right aspects of your personality. As each school is looking for different strengths in their applicants, you need to look into what the school

focuses on or is best at or is famous for in order to determine what aspects of yourself to underscore. However, there are certain qualities which all business schools find important.

- Ability to prioritize and manage time
- Academic achievement
- Adaptability
- Critical thinking skills
- Dedication
- Eagerness to participate
- Enthusiasm for Business / Management Study
- Goal-Oriented
- International / Global exposure
- Management Experience / Leadership / Entrepreneurship
- Optimism
- Originality / Creativity
- Qualitative and Quantitative Skills
- Sincerity
- Strong communication skills

You should present these positive personal traits of yours clearly and powerfully in your applications by tailoring the content for each school. For example, you lived in Lebanon and Kenya as a child and have been working in Tokyo for the past 4 years after receiving an undergraduate degree in the US. Now you are applying to a school that highly values international exposure. Even if you listed those international experiences in your resume or other parts of your application, you probably would be making a huge mistake by not underscoring the exposure, the learning and new values you have gained from those unique journeys.

Most business schools tend to look for a class that represents a variety of professional and personal backgrounds, but some schools favor applicants who come from specific areas of expertise. For example, financial backgrounds may be favored by Wharton whereas international experience is favored by Columbia.

The following table provides a sample list of most sought-after qualities of MBA applicants from hypothetical business school programs.

| <i>MBA Programs</i>    | <i>Quality #1</i>   | <i>Quality #2</i> | <i>Quality #3</i>        |
|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Elite Business Schools | Dedication          | Creativity        | International Experience |
| West Coast B-Schools   | Quantitative Skills | Entrepreneurship  | Communication Skills     |
| Euro B-Schools         | Leadership          | Management Skills | Academic Achievement     |

You must do a good amount of work to determine how to rank these qualities. You will in effect create a ranking system yourself. Rankings, such as those done by *Business Week*, *U.S. News and World Report* and the *Financial Times*, may provide a useful starting point.

In order to better understand the preferences of particular business schools, it is helpful to spend ample time researching their websites, looking at the student profiles of their incoming classes, visiting the schools and discussing with admissions staff or current students the things they feel the school values most. Evaluate the direction the school is taking you through its application requirements as a whole, in particular, with its essay questions.

Please do your homework thoroughly on each school and be mindful of the particular traits and professions valued by the school. This is an important process. If you fail to precisely gauge what a school most values, it is unlikely that your application will match with what that school is looking for. Meantime, uniqueness is always appreciated. Please always highlight the specific aspects of your uniqueness in all your applications. In addition, Manhattan Review's Admissions Consulting staff is made up exclusively of graduates of top Ivy League business schools and they are committed to your success. Their expert advice will help you discover which schools are right for you and enable you to get in to those programs.

### 1.6.3 Tailor Your Approach

You will need to define a method to match your qualities, values and desires to those of the schools. The process of defining this method and writing essays that highlight these elements will be beneficial to you for the business school application process as well as for your own personal and professional growth.

You will need to think further to define those parameters precisely. For example, dedication has different meanings for different schools to which you are applying. You also need to explore how important each school thinks dedication is in relation to the many qualities an applicant might possess. Dedication can have a variety of meanings: perseverance, commitment to certain values and principles in life such as work ethics, commitment to carrying through a task with high quality, commitment to detail, among others. But it is your task to find the meaning that is right for the schools to which have chosen to apply.

After engaging in the process of research and discussion with alumni, students, faculty and admissions staff, we discovered that it is dedication that the Elite School of Business and Management most values. Here for illustrative purposes, we will start the process of tailoring an application around the emphasis of dedication.

For the Elite School of Business and Management, to be dedicated, one must:

- Commit to a short-term or long-term goal or task
- Continue to do it for a long time
- AND ideally achieve or exceed the objective.

We also list out our definitions for other qualities highly valued by Elite.

| <i>Qualities</i>         | <i>Definitions</i>  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Dedication               | Commitment to a goal; Stay persevere by continuing working towards the goal for an extended period; Demonstrated ability to achieve the goal. |
| Creativity               | The ability to think out of the box and come up with new and executable ideas.  |
| International Experience | Extensive travel or work experiences aboard with an open mind to different cultures.  |

After coming to an understanding of which qualities a school values, in what particular order they value them, and how that particular school interprets the meaning of those qualities, you can begin to match their ideal profile to your personality, interests and experience.

#### 1.6.4 Evaluate Your Experience

Now you must perform a thorough self-evaluation and think deeply on your past. What are those experiences you should highlight in your application? Brainstorming may help you recollect personal experiences that might be highly valued by the school. The goal is to generate a detailed list of your relevant experiences.

In the initial brainstorming stage, neither limit nor judge yourself. Simply jog your memory for unique challenging experiences and you may be surprised by what you remember. Experience means both personal and professional experience. It is often the more personal aspect of experiences that a school will find unique. Do not limit yourself to the business world. Take some time to think about particular elements of those experiences. It will be useful to detail each element in writing. If this selection process proves difficult, ask for help. Consider talking to parents, friends, siblings, mentors, relatives, as they may remember elements of your past that you have forgotten. In addition, Manhattan Review's admissions consulting staff is made up exclusively of graduates from the top Ivy League business schools and committed to your success. Their expert advice will help you recall and select the experiences that will be most favorable to your application.

For example, Joanne made a summary of relevant experiences as a result of her brainstorming exercise. The following table provides an example of both experience and hobbies associated with dedication in the order of priority.

---

| <i>Relevant Experiences</i>                                   | <i>Rank<br/>Based on Relevancy<br/>to Dedication</i> |
|---|--|
| Accounting Firm (from junior auditor to manager)              | 1  |
| Volunteer work (a summer teaching the disadvantaged children) | 2  |
| President of Rugby team (after reorganization)                | 3  |
| Tennis coaching (at club)                                     | 4  |
| Study of Philosophy   | 5  |
| Worked while in college on construction site                  | 6  |
| Competed in Marathon  | 7  |
| Volunteered at Food Kitchen                                   | 8  |
| Volunteered at Hospital                                       | 9  |
| Volunteered at environmental cleanups                         | 10   |

---

In general, you are going to want to select the experience that is the most closely matched to the qualities that the program to which you are applying seeks. It must in and of itself speak to the reader, without an in-depth description of why this experience demonstrates this quality. However, you must elaborate on the uniqueness of that experience in your writing.

### 1.6.5 Prove Yourself through Essays

You will need to consider who you really are. You should present yourself in a truthful manner. Any dishonesty or stretching of the truth will not lead to a coherent application. Thus, you must determine what your true strengths are and match those traits with the schools to which you are applying. If your strengths really do not resemble the ideal student profile of a school, we suggest that you seriously consider applying elsewhere.

You must understand what each question is truly asking. One major mistake applicants often make is not answering the question. This should be avoided at all cost. If the question asks: “How did your past experiences lead you to want to attend Harvard Business School?” Do not simply list your past experiences. You must explain them and how they caused you to make Harvard Business School a committed choice of yours.

This may appear rather simple but some schools write questions that require a greater attentiveness to the way the question is phrased than others. Other questions require leaps of imagination to demonstrate creativity. In such situations, it is wise to be creative and to say something that other applicants would not, again within the bounds of your own particular background. This will make you a more unique applicant.

Design a way to answer the question. If, for example, you are answering the question asked on Stanford’s application for its 2005/2006 entering class: “What matters to

you most and why?" You are going to reflect on your true passion. Is it running your own firm, helping people, achieving your goal, making a difference, or others? You should also be able to substantiate your choice of passion with concrete and consistent examples of your past efforts.

Once you have selected aspects of your character to emphasize and established solid examples to back them up, it is recommended that you compile this information into an outline before writing. The outline will help to guide your writing.

Now you are ready to write. The writing itself needs to be readable and clear. Be conscious of what you are trying to express. If you get lost, refer back to your outline. In your essay, you should emphasize the setting of the place where your experience took place, the challenges you were facing over a period of time, and your plan and actions to overcome the hurdles. You must also indicate what you gained from it. Do your best to explain at greater length how you personally dealt with the hardships of the position. This explanation in itself will lead the admissions committee to an appreciation of what you learned.

As a result of your work and devotion, you will need to show what came of it. Over your time with the accounting firm, did you receive compliments from clients? Were you staffed on assignments of higher profile or with greater challenges?

By thoroughly accounting for what you have done and achieved and showing difficulties you have overcome, you will develop fitting, interesting, and well-supported answers to questions. Everyone has his or her own uniqueness. You must discover it, explore it, and develop it in your essay.

Keep in my mind that you have a limited amount of space to explain yourself. Be efficient with that space. Repetition should be kept to a minimum. But every aspect of yourself you are seeking to highlight should be explained in full. Don't be afraid to delete portions of your essay that prove to be redundant.

When you begin writing, format your essay in a clear manner. For some applicants this means bullet points, for others lists, for others creating subheadings. You must allocate an exclusive period of time to concentrate on the writing. There are many things to remain aware of when moving from a rough draft to a final version.

- Use several different types of sentence structures/words. Again do not repeat yourself too much.
- Be sure you are using strong verbs (not too many 'to be' verbs)
- Pay attention to the style, the voice. Read the essay aloud to yourself to make sure it sounds good.
- Do not neglect format
- Correct all spelling errors
- If you have not already done so, tailor the essay to the school. Mention the schools' particular curriculum, professors, location and your relationship to it.
- Be sure there are no inconsistencies among different essays and between the essays and the rest of your application
- Correct any punctuation/grammar mistakes

- In addition, though application essays often contain personal information, it is advised that you let at least one friend read it over for content, clarity and grammar.

### 1.6.6 Ace Your Interview

After you have submitted your application, the Admissions Committee writes you a letter inviting you to an interview with one of their highly regarded alumni. The Admissions Committee gives you the names of 3-5 individuals to call. You decide whom you would like to call based purely on their names and the year of graduation. Or perhaps you will have to call several in order to come up with a meeting time that works for both of you.

We recommend that you schedule your interview as soon as possible in order to avoid later conflicts.

Here is an example of an interview notification letter.

Dana Miller  
2020 Sunset Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90210

Dear Dana,

After receiving your application, we have decided that we would like you to meet with one of our highly successful alumni. Please contact:

Heather, class of 1990, 700-700-7000  
Shannon, class of 1995, 800-800-8000  
David, class of 2004, 900-900-9000

We ask that you schedule the interview as soon as possible so that we can give you our decision as early as possible.

When you have contacted one of the individuals listed above, please let us know online or via email the name of the person with whom you are meeting and the time and date of your meeting.

We will make our decision after receiving feedback from your interviewer and reviewing your application again. In general, our decision will come approximately 8 weeks after we have received your application. Please call if you experience difficulties in scheduling with these alumni.

Regards,

James Jaffy  
Interview Coordinator

Your interviewer may ask you for a copy of your resume at the interview and may not. Your interviewer, provided the interview is during the week, will be dressed in professional clothes. You should wear appropriate interview attire regardless of the time of day or the day of the week.

You should be prepared to answer at an interview. As in the other sections of your applications, establish the qualities you want to emphasize before the interview. This will add to the coherence and consistency of your interview and entire application. Your answers should be thoughtful, reflective and consistent. They should demonstrate the personal traits in you that are highly valued by admissions officers. Prove yourself to be an easy person to talk to and be able to explain your background and your interest in business school with ease.

**General Background Questions:**

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your short-term and long-term goals?
- What sets you apart from the rest applicants?
- Why B-School? Why now? What do you think you will gain from it?
- Why are you interested in applying to our school?
- What are those major criteria when you selected the schools?
- Why did you choose your undergraduate major?
- How will an MBA from our school help you specifically?
- Where else are you applying?
- Why those schools?
- Why did you decide to apply to x number of schools?
- What school is your first choice and why?
- If you are not accepted anywhere you applied this year, what will you do?
- Do you have any specific questions or concerns about our school?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- How will you improve your weaknesses?
- Who do you admire and why?
- What books are you reading?
- What is your favorite book or film and why?
- What do you do with your free time?
- What do you enjoy doing most? Why?
- What leadership roles have you taken on outside the business world?
- What have you accomplished in these roles?
- What obstacles have you encountered?

**Questions Related to Prior Work Experience:**

- Have you spent much time abroad? Tell me about an important experience you had away from home.
- What did it teach you?
- In your personal life, name a moral dilemma you encountered and explain how you resolved it.
- What is your current occupation?
- What do you do there?
- What are your responsibilities?
- What is difficult about your position?
- Describe a typical day.
- What are the driving factors of your choice of your current job and your planned career path as a whole?
- Why did you pursue this position?
- Do you like it?
- What do you dislike about it?
- What have you accomplished in your current role?
- What have you failed at?
- What could you do better?
- What leadership roles have you been in at your current position?
- What have you done or suggested that resulted in a change in your company / department / group?
- How do you rank among your peers?
- How do you relate with your superiors?
- Where do you see your company and industry moving in the future?

**Questions Related to Prior Educational Experience:**

- What undergraduate institution did you attend and why?
- How did you do?
- What did you study?
- What were you best at?
- What if anything would you change about your undergraduate experience?

- What did you most appreciate about your undergraduate experience?
- What clubs, sports or activities were you involved in as an undergraduate?
- What accomplishments did you have as an undergraduate?
- Did you work to support yourself as an undergraduate?

It is also likely your interviewer will ask you some out-of-the-ordinary questions. There is no way to be prepared for every question. For this reason, you should be yourself and simply ready to think. Ask the people with whom you practice interviewing to ask you some strange stuff. This will help prepare your mind to answer tougher questions. Here are some examples:

- Why should we take you?
- How would those who work under you describe you?
- What do you think about the war in Iraq?
- What do you think about Mayor Bloomberg?
- Tell me how you would like to help the world. What charities do you see yourself donating to as a successful businessperson?

Again, despite your lack of preparedness for certain questions, you will want to speak honestly and confidently, prove yourself to be a person who is informed about the Business School and able to answer questions spontaneously and thoughtfully.

Interviewers prefer questions in which you demonstrate knowledge of the particular MBA program as well as an interest in the interviewer. That means, be sure, in as natural a way as possible to ask questions about the interviewer's experience at that business school or an informed question about the program. Here are some examples, though we strongly encourage you to come up with your own original questions:

- How do I best prepare for the program at your school?
- What did you like most about your time at the school?
- What were those best courses you attended at the school?
- How involved the faculty members are in teaching?
- What was your class like? Was there a strong sense of community?

Here is an example of an interview.

**HEATHER (INTERVIEWER):** Tell me about yourself—professionally and personally.

**DANA (APPLICANT):** I am from Los Angeles. I was born and raised here, went to XYZ college after graduating from ABC high school, and have worked for three years after college. I spend lots of time doing volunteer work in my old neighborhood. Initially, I worked on a local program to help kids make it through high school and then I took over managing that program and then

I started a similar volunteer program at School #51 nearby. But I have done a good deal of traveling. As a college junior, I studied abroad in China, and during high school, spent a semester in France . . .

**HEATHER:** I see you attended the University of Southern California, and there, you studied Economics. Why did you choose USC and why did Economics appeal to you at age 18?

**DANA:** Yes, I went to USC because my father went there and I have always had a deep respect for him. Also I am committed to this community and wanted to stay nearby.

And Economics, well, it was new to me and I enjoyed the course. One particular professor really made those graphs come alive for me and I was good at it. I did take a variety of other courses in the sciences mostly.

**HEATHER:** What are the strengths and weaknesses of USC and the Economics Department? If you had to study again, what courses would you take that you did not take? Languages? Sciences? What clubs would you participate in that you did not?

**DANA:** The economics department was strong in econometrics, but weak in developmental economics. . . I began volunteering in college and eventually became president of the volunteer association. I am a bilingual in Spanish and English. But I studied lots of Science—Biology, Chemistry and Physics in school. If I had to study at the college again, I would take more Humanities courses, more Philosophy and Literature, as I have recently come to understand the value of such disciplines in understanding human nature.

**HEATHER:** Why do you want an MBA from AAA Business School? Why now?

**DANA:** I have chosen AAA Business School because of its strong expertise in the area of General Management, Corporate Ethics, its location, and its reputation of academic excellence.

**HEATHER:** What other schools have you applied to? Why these?

**DANA:** I have applied to BBB Business School because of their reputation for strong international studies. I am interested in working in this community, but that does not preclude seeking knowledge of other places and expanding my horizons. I think it's wise to learn about others as well as ourselves. However, AAA remains my first choice as I feel there is a stronger fit between the program and myself.

**HEATHER:** Describe any management positions you have been in and how you met the difficulties.

**DANA:** During the time I managed the volunteer organization located in West Hollywood, I encountered a lot of different kinds of people. Different ages, nationalities, and class and racial backgrounds. Each person required a slightly different approach. Through patience and perseverance, I have learned how to improve my interpersonal skills, how to make them feel comfortable, how to understand their concerns and goals, and how to encourage them to work with you.

**HEATHER:** If you came to AAA Business School, what activities do you see yourself being apart of?

**DANA:** I see myself start up a volunteer club at the school perhaps teaching or tutoring in the public schools. I am also interested in becoming apart of the Society Club and hosting gatherings and fundraisers.

**HEATHER:** And where do you see yourself in 20 years?

**DANA:** I see myself playing a significant role in a local responsible company with strong values of corporate responsibility and fairness.

**HEATHER:** Anything else you would like to tell me about yourself.

**DANA:** I am not purely optimistic and idealistic. I realize the problems existent in the corporate structures today and realize that on these will be very difficult to changeÉ

**HEATHER:** Well, Dana, what questions do you have for me?

**DANA:** Why did you choose AAA? ... How has your MBA helped you in your career path?

After your interview, your interviewer is supposed to contact the admissions committee and submit feedback very shortly after the interview. For this reason, please be advised that you should send your thank you notes the day of the interview or at the latest the day after the interview.

Your interviewer will offer commentary on your ability to communicate thoughtfully and clearly and present yourself well. They may comment on your English skills, if you are a non-native English speaker. This does not mean you should worry about every grammar mistake you make. But simply take time to speak as freely and as well as you can. They may comment on whether or not you come across uncertain, confident or arrogant about your self-assessment and future plans. Other areas the interviewer needs to assess include your knowledge of the program, your competitiveness as a prospective job applicant, your team-working skills, and the value you will bring to the class as a student and to the school as an alumna/e. At the end, the interviewer needs to rank you on a scale against the applicant pool and write a recommendation to the committee including any specific reservations, if there are any.

Here is a hypothetical case. Suppose Dana did an excellent job in his interview with Heather. Within 2 days of the interview, Heather submitted her assessment report to the admissions committee:

Dana was articulate, enthusiastic, confident, convincing, well-prepared, and realistic. He has demonstrated his managerial abilities through the successes he has had in his professional positions and his organization of volunteer programs. I was especially impressed by his enthusiasm coupled with his insights of the issues currently facing corporations and governments today. I believe he would make an excellent MBA student at AAA and recommend him wholeheartedly. One of his goals is to work in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility. Though, often times, a more extensive liberal arts background or knowledge may be required in that area, I think that he demonstrated a sincere interest in and a strong dedication to creating a more responsible corporate culture through his own volunteer work. He also applied to a few other institutions in the same league as AAA. He indicated that AAA is his first choice due to its

location near his family and friends, its focus on Corporate Ethics and its diverse student body. I think he would make a valuable contribution to his class. Professionally, I felt that due to his young age, he may need more working experience, but with that experience I see him growing into an excellent colleague. I highly recommend Dana to the Admissions Committee of AAA Business School. È



To summarize, here are some **golden rules about interviews**.

- **Practice a few basic questions in advance.**
- **Speak clearly and intelligently.**
- **Dress appropriately.**
- **Be polite, courteous, and natural.**
- **Send a thank-you note.**

*Student Notes:*

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