

**personal
MBA
Coach.**

A photograph of a desk setup. In the center is a silver laptop with a black screen. The screen displays the text 'Personal MBA Coach's Top MBA Application Tips'. To the left of the laptop is a potted cactus in a grey, textured ceramic pot. To the right of the laptop is a stack of books on a black surface. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**Personal MBA Coach's
Top MBA Application Tips**

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ABOUT PERSONAL MBA COACH

Personal MBA Coach has helped hundreds of applicants around the world get into top MBA, EMBA, part-time MBA and graduate programs including HBS, Stanford, Wharton, Chicago Booth, Kellogg, Columbia GSB, Dartmouth Tuck, MIT Sloan, London Business School, INSEAD, Yale SOM, UVA Darden, Duke Fuqua, Berkeley Haas, NYU Stern and many more with a 96% success rate. Last cycle our clients earned \$10M in total scholarships.

Personal MBA Coach was founded in 2008 by Scott Edinburgh, a former management consultant and industry strategist with an MBA from Wharton and a BS from MIT. With a boutique and personalized approach, Scott helps turn analytical, general management and client services experiences into the powerful and convincing stories that admissions committee members are looking for. Personal MBA Coach helps clients through all aspects of the application process, including application strategy, pre-application planning, GMAT/GRE/EA prep and school selection. Scott is on the Board of Directors and is a Committee Chair of AIGAC (Association of International Graduate Admissions Consultants: an organization that meets annually with admissions directors of the top 25 schools globally). Learn how Personal MBA Coach can make your dreams a reality by walking you step by step through the entire process.

SERVICES OFFERED

- Comprehensive Packages
- GMAT/GRE/EA Tutoring
- Interview Preparation
- Waitlist Support
- Gut Check
- Early MBA Planning

WHAT SETS PERSONAL MBA COACH APART

- Founded by Scott Edinburgh, a Wharton MBA, member of AIGAC Board of Directors and industry veteran with 17 years of admissions consulting experience
- Scott presents globally and was invited to present to admissions directors at GMAC conference
- Prior corporate experience to inform your essays and goals, including consulting, banking and strategy
- Former M7 admissions directors and M7 MBA interviewers on our team
- Flexible scheduling and fast turnaround times
- Personalized and customized GMAT/GRE/EA tutoring
- One point of contact
- Direct, honest feedback
- Internal network of former clients at all top schools

Comprehensive Packages Overview



1. Application Strategy & Story Development

Personal MBA Coach consultants learn more about your background and develop a thorough application strategy for you to follow, helping fine-tune your educational goals and articulate your distinct story. This includes compiling a list of schools you want to attend. Your consultant will review your credentials and work experience to help you identify what programs make sense for you based on factors like your test score, grades, scholarship desires, ideal study location and more.



2. Resume Review

Structure your MBA resume using our provided templates. We will go over your education and career accomplishments to paint an accurate picture of you on paper and make sure to turn your professional resume into an MBA resume that resonates with admissions directors. Our experts will help edit your resume so that it follows the correct format and uses effective language throughout. The Personal MBA Coach team knows what top schools are looking for when admitting students into their programs, so we make sure you stand out by including only important resume details.



3. Essay Brainstorming and Unlimited Essay Editing

Building from your personal story, you will partner with your admissions consultant to brainstorm topics and develop award-winning essays that allow you to stand out among other applicants. We provide you with school-specific insider knowledge as to what MBA programs are looking for in MBA application essays. You can submit your admissions essay and short-answer responses to us as many times as it takes to get them right. We provide you with feedback in two days and work seven days a week. We will check that you answer questions fully and provide enough detail to impress application essay reviewers. Count on Personal MBA Coach to catch spelling and grammar mistakes before the final submission of your personal development pieces.



4. Video Essay Feedback

Some of the leading MBA programs in the U.S., Europe and Canada require a video essay submission. For the live videos, we will send you software that you can use to practice sample video questions on your own.

Personal MBA Coach comprehensive packages involve sharing feedback on sample recordings to improve your confidence and perfect your video delivery.



5. Letter of Recommendation Support

To enhance your overall application, we will guide you through the process of selecting which of your contacts is best suited to write your letters of recommendation. Our consultants will help you develop the best timing and approach for reaching out and determining how much information and guidance your contact will need to write a letter that aligns with your overall application.



6. Interview Preparation

Personal MBA Coach organizes mock interviews with former M7 and T10 admissions interviewers from our team. Our interviewers provide you with written feedback to help you hone your skills. You have the option to participate in group interviews as well as to grow your skills for all interview structures. For Wharton, we will conduct mock group interviews with former group interviewers.



7. Pre/Post Interview Essay Editing

Harvard Business School, Chicago Booth and MIT Sloan ask that some candidates selected to interview submit an additional essay or video for their MBA program applications. Our personalized MBA admissions services in our comprehensive package include editing your follow-up written or recorded pieces. We will verify that your writing and speaking tone is consistent during the application process so that everything you submit is of the highest quality.



8. Waitlist Strategy & Post Acceptance Support

Our relationship does not end when you hit submit. Whether you are accepted or waitlisted, we will continue our personal support. Find out how and when to reach out to get off the waitlist, receive guidance on your waitlist update and get our advice on which school best suits your goals. We will connect you with former clients at your future school and across all schools as you join the small Personal MBA Coach alumni family.



Interview with Personal MBA Coach Founder, Scott Edinburgh

Question: Based on your experience and expertise, what is the value of pursuing an MBA?

There are countless benefits of earning an MBA. The most obvious, of course, is the technical knowledge you will gain. In addition to traditional courses in fields such as finance, accounting and marketing, nearly all MBA programs offer specialized courses covering a variety of industries and functional areas. Whether you are planning to go into finance, real estate, marketing or healthcare, you will have the chance to learn the fundamentals from industry experts.

Equally as important as these technical skills are the “soft” skills you can gain during an MBA. Both inside and outside of the classroom, MBA programs emphasize skills such as leadership, teamwork and communication, all crucial skills for future leaders. In addition, the countless volunteer and travel programs offer students further opportunities to stretch themselves personally and professionally.

The business school classroom also provides students the chance to take risks in an open and trusting environment. Often students enter business school with one goal, but they use this unique and safe environment to try classes or programs in other fields. In many cases, this leads students down an unexpected path as they find a field that is a better fit.

Finally, business schools provide students with great networking opportunities, both while on campus and beyond. In addition to learning from classroom peers, students find alumni to be invaluable resources as they seek their first post-MBA jobs. Alumni not only can provide crucial insider knowledge, but they also often help fellow alums secure roles in their companies. MBA graduates will then continue to rely upon this network throughout their careers for partners, mentors or even investors.

Question: What was the greatest impact attending Wharton had on your professional and personal life?

Naturally, given my line of work, my MBA experience changed my career. While I started my post-MBA career in a more traditional strategy role, the MBA was so transformational for me that while I was in school, I began helping my friends with their applications so they, too, could have this valuable opportunity. Sixteen years later, helping others enjoy the transformative experience of the MBA has become my life’s passion.



Interview with Personal MBA Coach Founder, Scott Edinburgh (cont.)

Tactically, at Wharton I learned to think more strategically and to develop stronger presentations. I also expanded my negotiation and decision making skills and became an overall better leader. Leadership is tough and while I am still learning now, a lot of the skills that have helped me succeed today, I developed at Wharton.

Personally, I now have friends (even very close friends) from around the world. While you meet a lot of people and develop great friends as an undergraduate, everyone is still somewhat immature. Business school is a great time to develop lasting relationships. I still cherish and leverage these relationships today, using many of my peers as sounding boards, both personally and professionally. Plus, the opportunity to attend global weddings is not a bad perk, either.

Question: What is the main challenge that MBA candidates face in getting accepted to their target MBA programs?

The main challenge that Personal MBA Coach and our team help clients tackle is figuring out how to truly tell their stories. Developing the personal story may be the hardest and the most important part of the application. This story should be compelling and somewhat unique (more on this in our [Articulating Your Personal Story blog](#)). MBA admissions directors see countless similar profiles each year, particularly for students who work in overrepresented industries or who come from overrepresented demographics. Personal MBA Coach helps candidates to stand out and clearly articulate the value they will add on campus. For instance, if you are applying from a consulting background, it may be difficult to differentiate yourself in the pool of applicants.

We advise candidates to start this process months, if not years, in advance to develop a story that is focused, logical and unique. When I meet with a new candidate, I start by asking a lot of questions. We talk about everything the applicant has done, often starting from childhood. I advise you to start with a similar process.

Make a list of everything you have done in your life and take the time to write it all down. Think carefully about the decisions you have made, activities you enjoy and, most importantly, why you made those choices. Think about your future goals. What do you want to do after you earn your MBA and, again, why? Next, look for a theme! What single idea ties all this together? This is the hard part, so give it time.

Interview with Personal MBA Coach Founder, Scott Edinburgh (cont.)

Question: What is the profile of an MBA candidate?

There is no one profile of an MBA candidate. Each year we work with more “typical” candidates, including management consultants, investment bankers and private equity professionals. We also help many clients coming from and/or returning to family businesses. However, we also work with clients who are opera singers, musicians, nonprofit leaders, teachers, marketing professionals, restaurateurs, physicians, family business professionals — the list goes on. Strong business and leadership skills can be an asset in any industry as supported by the diversity of MBA applicants.

Question: After completing the MBA, what comes next?

That answer is up to the applicant. The fields that MBA graduates enter are as diverse as the fields they worked in prior to business school. In certain careers MBA graduates feed into common roles – for example, consulting firms start MBA graduates in a “class” of their peers.

Other firms provide leadership development programs for recent graduates. In general, however, there are countless roles a graduate can fill. MBA programs dedicate an entire career services department to helping graduates reap the benefits of an MBA and find their ideal jobs.





How to Write Winning MBA Application Essays

Effective MBA admissions essays can be different from any other type of prose. Knowing how to approach them can significantly boost your chances of MBA application success. Before going into specific essay writing tips, let's look at the most common types of MBA essays. Understanding the type of MBA essay (and their ultimate purpose) will help you determine which personal and professional examples are most relevant, what tone you should choose, and how you can use the question to demonstrate your candidacy in the best light (and ultimately get into your dream school).

Types of MBA Essays

Goals Essay

The purpose of this type of MBA application essay is to discuss your post-MBA career goals and prove that you need an MBA to achieve them. In a goals essay, depending on the word limit, you may share some career highlights as well as your specific short-term and long-term goals. For instance, one of the Wharton MBA admissions essays invites MBA candidates to lay out their professional aspirations. When drafting this type of essay, make sure to be specific and focused. While no one expects you to commit to these goals post-MBA, you should demonstrate to the admissions committee that you have thought about your career goals and determined that an MBA is the ideal steppingstone on your path to achieve them.

Personal Story Essay

Varying in word count, this type of MBA application essay tends to be more personal. The main goal of a self-reflection essay is to get to know the real you. These essays can range from the 900-word, open-ended Harvard Business School MBA application essay to the 100-word questions Michigan Ross asks. Personal MBA Coach's expert tip here is to stay true to yourself and consider your Personal Story. Do not write what you think the admissions committee wants to read. Write about your passions, values, failures—nothing is off limits. At the same time, you want to keep a positive mindset. If you are discussing your failure or something tragic that happened to you, make sure to present it as a story of growth. This is not a creative-writing contest—remember that you are writing your MBA application essay, and the main goal of this essay should be to convince the admissions committee that you will add a unique perspective in the classroom and on campus.

How to Write Winning MBA Application Essays (cont.)

Contribution Essay

The goal of the contribution MBA application essay is to demonstrate how you will enrich the MBA experience for your peers. A number of top MBA programs currently require a contribution essay. The most notable examples of such an essay are Duke's "Based on your understanding of the Fuqua culture, what are 3 ways you expect to contribute at Fuqua?" and Wharton's 2nd essay: "Taking into consideration your background – personal, professional, and/or academic – how do you plan to make specific, meaningful contributions to the Wharton community?" The most effective contribution essays will give admissions committee members insight into your achievements and passions while demonstrating how you will positively impact your peers.

Leadership Essay

While evidence of leadership should be included in many different essay types, some MBA essays directly ask candidates about their leadership experience. Kellogg's first MBA essay is a classic example of this: "Kellogg Leaders are primed to tackle today's pressing concerns everywhere, from the boardroom to their neighborhoods. Tell us about a time in your life where you've needed a combination of skills to solve a problem or overcome a challenge. Which skills did you use?" While it is great to show how you have led your peers, do not forget about humility. It is expected that your leadership style is still a work in progress. In fact, in some leadership essays, you will want to tell the reader how you wish to fine-tune your leadership style during your MBA.

Video Essay

Video essays are becoming increasingly popular among business schools' admissions committees. For instance, Berkeley Haas introduced a video essay this year. Other schools, including MIT Sloan, have required a video essay for many years. Some schools, such as Chicago Booth, require a video essay for applicants offered an interview.

The video essay is a completely different format, and unlike all the essay types above, this is the one where you should not overedit. A few bullet points in preparation are great; however, writing out the whole script will make you appear less natural. Video essays are rather more personal, so you want to come across as approachable and show that you would be great to have in the classroom. Appearing too rigid and rehearsed will hinder your chances.



How to Write Winning MBA Application Essays (cont.)

MBA Essay Writing Process

Now, let's talk about the basics of the essay writing process. We advise our candidates to follow a 5-step process as they develop their application essays, leaving adequate time for each stage.

1. Brainstorm

Brainstorm each essay question one at a time. Now that early decision deadlines have passed, you are free to begin with the essay that seems easiest or comes most naturally to you, as your writing will improve throughout the process. In developing potential topics, consider your relevant strengths, experiences, and accomplishments: Choose those that bring the most to the table.

2. Outline

Before you begin to develop prose, outline the key points you hope to cover in a sequence that flows logically. Pay special attention to the length you will allot to each section of the essay.

3. Draft

Once you have a solid outline, begin to put together your first draft. At this stage, it is ok if your writing is not perfect. Most first drafts will be a bit longer than the final product, but make sure you have the substantive points in place and that they flow together well.

4. Edit Again & Again

Editing is the most time-consuming part of the essay writing process, particularly if you have written too much in the initial draft. Be critical of what needs to be there and what does not, and make sure you remove extraneous or superfluous material. Fine-tune your writing to make sure that the structure, verbs, and vocabulary all serve to make your thinking clear. Avoid repetition and be concise.

5. Proof

And finally, proofread. If you are not great at spelling or grammar or even generally at writing,



How to Write Winning MBA Application Essays (cont.)

ask someone who is good at those things to read your essay. A fresh set of eyes is priceless for catching mistakes. Personal MBA Coach uses proofreaders for each MBA application for this reason.

5 Tips for Writing a Successful MBA Essay

1. Answer the essay question

This seems like a no-brainer, but many candidates write beautiful essays that do not answer the essay question. Instead of writing what you want to show off, answer the question (or make sure that what you want to show off answers the question!). While we do advise thinking a bit outside of the box and considering the why behind an essay prompt (what are they really trying to get at?) first and foremost you must answer the question. That is one reason recycling essay copy from one school to the other is often not a great idea: While it works sometimes for schools whose essay questions are nearly identical, most often it obscures the whole objective of answering the question. Good MBA essay editing should address this, refocusing the material. So, go through your copy and make sure the answer is in there. If you are using the essay you wrote for another school, make sure you tailor it to fit and answer the pertinent essay prompt.

2. Write authentically

Do not write what you think admissions committee members want to read. There is no one perfect candidate profile. Instead, your uniqueness will be one of your greatest selling points. Your essays should paint a clear picture of who you are, what motivates you, and what you are passionate about—genuinely. Do not feel compelled to show how you fit the mold that seemingly makes up the “ideal” candidate. If you have no desire to run a non-profit, that is ok. If you are not motivated by improving the environment, do not pretend you are. Readers will see right through this, and you could end up doing more harm than good.

3. Look at the application comprehensively

Essays are just one part of the overall MBA application. In addition to submitting a resume (unsure how to write an MBA resume? [Check out these tips](#)), you fill out a detailed application whose value you should use in every detail. Many schools require short essays and short answer questions and video essays as well. In addition, you have [letters of recommendation](#).



How to Write Winning MBA Application Essays (cont.)

Those also should be used to your advantage to include material you may not have other opportunity or space to talk about. This means there are other places to list and highlight things such as extracurricular activities. There is no need—or space—to try to fit this all into your essays: Focus on a few chosen facets of your passions or accomplishments to answer the essay questions and use other material in other places.

4. Keep your language approachable

You should assume that terms you regularly discuss at the office—what is commonly referred to as industry jargon—are foreign to others, including admissions committee members, and they do not want to have to wade through it, trying to understand, as if it were a foreign language. The best MBA essay editing will eliminate jargony language entirely and translate to readily understandable English, which helps convey what you are talking about and who you are. Particularly when it comes to showing off an accomplishment or how you added value in a business scenario, you want to make sure that technical language does not get in the way and impede your ability to clearly communicate what you did.

5. Limit flowery prose

Similarly, we often read complex flowery prose. By flowery we mean prose that is overly ornate, rambling, and verbose. While showing off your writing style may be the point when applying to a writer's program, in applying to business school you should write well but practically and in a straightforward manner. Most schools want direct, substantial, detailed answers to the questions—not rambling prose. Everyone, from your grandmother to a professor of microfinance, should be able to understand your essays. In sum, your essays should convey why you are someone others would want to study with, learn from, and eventually be inspired by. That type of person is human and down to earth. Your essays should show this. Finally, be concise. Write to the word count. If you are having difficulty making a choice between two options, you can vet that choice, but once you have chosen your topic, during the outline process eliminate material that is not needed. It is very hard to cut 200 words from a 500-word essay and not change the overall intended impact and meaning. Trimming 30 words is one thing—though it is very time-consuming, it can be done artfully without losing much—but you cannot cut an essay in half and not lose substance that should be included.

6 Tips for Career Changers

Many candidates pursue an MBA with the hopes of altering their career paths. However, applicants looking to change careers should put in some extra work now to show that their desired career is both authentic AND attainable. This is even more true for applicants who might have been laid off recently (particularly if you do not plan to apply for a few months or more).

Here are some actions you can take now to increase your chances of success!

1. Do your research.

Know the role and industry that you aspire to join and understand the skills required for success. All too often we read vague goals statements that show candidate do not really know their future industry. Check LinkedIn to see where MBA graduates are going and talk to friends or former classmates who work in the space. Understand the industry's career pathing. The more you know about your future industry, the more authentic your essays will sound as you begin to articulate your goals.

2. Look for extracurricular work in your target industry.

Volunteering in your future industry or function can be a great way not only to solidify your interest but also to show the reader that you have truly given this future career some serious thought and consideration. This will help add cohesion to your overall story. If you cannot find work in your target industry, you can think broadly as you consider related activities, as long as you can draw a clear connection for the reader.

3. Seek out related projects in your current role.

In some cases, this is easy to do. For instance, if you are a consultant seeking to transition to the technology space, ask to be staffed on a project in the industry. In other cases, you may have to be more creative. Even experiences such as working on cross-functional projects or leading internal initiatives can expose you to related departments, so do not be afraid to think outside of the box. If you are unemployed, consider an unpaid internship to cover any resume gaps or even asking for a project at your friend's startup.





6 Tips for Career Changers (cont.)

4. Create a personal tie to your future career.

As you begin to explain your career aspirations, think about whether you have a personal connection with this career. Remember your applications should explain your story and what makes you unique, so your career goals can demonstrate a personal fit, even if the professional one is not immediately apparent. This is the type of one-on-one storytelling Personal MBA Coach works on with our clients.

5. Point out similarities between your current role and future goals.

It is important to show admissions committee members that you are set up to succeed. Even if you are not able to gain experience in your future industry, there are likely past experiences you can draw upon. Think about the most important criteria for success in your future role and point out how you have already developed and demonstrated these skills. Personal MBA Coach specializes in providing our candidates with tailored advice, helping them to articulate their unique stories.

6. Consider short-term educational opportunities.

This is particularly important if you are not currently working. It will be crucial to show that you have used time between jobs effectively. Taking additional coursework (particularly quantitative courses or those related to your future field) can be another great way to improve your profile.



How to Think about Your MBA Goals

“What do you want to do after you graduate from business school?”

This seemingly simple question actually can be one of the most difficult to answer eloquently. With a few exceptions, articulating your post-MBA goals is a crucial part of the application process. Most business schools want to know how you will make the world better when you leave their campuses and what your unique mark will be.

As you begin to reflect upon and articulate your goals, consider these six pieces of advice.

1. Be decisive.

While no one will hold you to what you write in your MBA application essays, you should be decisive when discussing your MBA career goals. Pick a set of goals and run with them. Candidates should not expect to “find themselves” in business school, though in reality this often happens.

If you do have multiple ideas in mind, some schools are comfortable with understanding your thought process and decision-making criteria (Personal MBA Coach discusses this with clients on a case-by-case basis). Most schools, however, will want candidates to have clear plans laid out before they arrive on campus.

2. Be consistent.

Your goals should be YOUR goals. This means they should not vary from one MBA application to the next. Candidates can lose credibility by changing their goals to please the audience, and it can be difficult to articulate true passion (see point 6 below) for goals that are not genuine.

3. Develop career goals that are ambitious, yet attainable.

As valuable as an MBA is, you likely will not be running a department on the first day out of business school. Do your research and figure out what positions are realistic for you.

You can start by looking at career postings from companies in your target industry. Pay close attention to required industry experience, particularly if you are considering changing careers. This will give you a good idea of what role you might be qualified for immediately post-MBA and will allow you to specifically note which position you hope to secure after school.



How to Think About Your MBA Goals (cont.)

4. Consider a logical career pathway.

With your attainable role as a launching point, set out an ambitious path and long-term goal for yourself. This long-term goal is your opportunity to dream big and show how you will drive change in your future industry. It should flow logically (though not necessarily obviously) from your short-term goals.

While you do not need to rise through the standard career ranks at your target firm (though it is perfectly fine if this is your goal), your career path should make sense to the reader and allow you to leverage the skills you will develop during your MBA and throughout your early post-MBA career.

5. Share how you will be unique.

Even if you have a common career goal, such as becoming a management consultant or an investment banker, you want to share how you will make your unique mark. Perhaps you intend to develop a specific area of expertise within the consulting industry or focus on a certain sector. You must go beyond simply stating the position you are hoping to achieve. Think deeper and share your vision for improving your chosen field or company.

6. Articulate passion.

A strong career goals essay will communicate passion for your future field. This does not mean that you need a long explanation for why you selected this career path. That said, as you provide the context and discuss your future, it should be clear to the reader that you are excited about this profession. Sharing what drove you to this field and identifying current innovations that particularly intrigue you are ways to show such passion.



What is an MBA Resume?

All MBA applications require you to submit a resume. You may be thinking, “No problem, I already have a resume.” However, it is not quite that simple.

An MBA resume differs considerably from a professional one as each accomplishes a different goal. A professional resume shows potential employers that you have the specific skills and experiences they are looking for. You are selling your ability to do the job and should include industry-specific terminology and jargon.

A resume for an MBA application, on the other hand, should provide evidence that you have been successful and demonstrated leadership. You are selling your future potential.

After years of detailing your specific technical and industry expertise, you may be wondering HOW to begin developing your MBA resume. To guide you, Personal MBA Coach has outlined our four top MBA resume tips, based (frankly) on the mistakes that we frequently encounter:

1. Do not outline your job description

Too often we read resume bullets that list a candidate’s tasks and responsibilities. While this might be great for proving you can do a specific job, it does nothing to differentiate you from other MBA applicants. Anyone in your role could copy and paste these bullets from the job description. Admissions committee members do not need to know each detail of your job.

Instead, focus on your key accomplishments. What initiatives did you lead? What projects did you succeed in? How did you go above and beyond in your role? How did you excel, particularly in relation to your peers?

Focus on the highlights in your MBA essay. It is okay to leave out certain tasks and projects you worked on, especially if they would not impress someone outside of your company or industry.

2. Include results!

Learnings, takeaways, and results are the most important items to include in your business school resume. These items can and should include both personal growth over time and the impact you have had on your organization’s performance. The more specific and measurable your results, the better. Think of items such as “increased performance 30% over previous year” or “drove \$1M in new business by doing x, y, and z.”



What is an MBA Resume? (cont.)

3. Focus on leadership and transferable skills

While it may be crucial in your current role that you are an SQL expert, this will be much less interesting to admissions committee members. Instead of detailing the technical skills you have amassed, focus on the transferable skills you have developed. Share how you have emerged as a leader. Leadership comes in multiple forms so even if you have not managed a team or a project, there are many ways to demonstrate your unique leadership. (If you do have management experience, include it!) Teamwork and communication are other important skills to include.

As you select professional strengths to share, prioritize those that are relevant to many industries, for example, analytical skills, strategic thinking abilities, or research experience. Sharing these transferable skills helps to convince readers that you can excel in business school and beyond.

4. Show multiple aspects of your profile

Successful business school students are active outside of work: in their communities, in athletics, within organizations, etc. They have hobbies or specific language skills. They win awards or earn certifications. They are involved on their campuses or at work outside the scope of their jobs. These details are important—they show readers another aspect of your candidacy beyond your work experience.

However, keep in mind quality over quantity! A laundry list of activities or an organization you volunteered with once will not help (and including such in your MBA resume might even hurt your credibility).



Guide to MBA Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are an essential component of the business school application. Admissions Committee members rely on recommenders to vouch for you: to corroborate—and, in fact, bolster—all that you will tell them is worthy and commendable about you, and to speak objectively about your candidacy. As you narrow your school lists, study for the GRE/ GMAT (soon to be GMAT Focus) and draft your essays, LORs should also be top of mind. Not only must you select the ideal recommenders, but you also must prepare them adequately!

It can be tempting to select the person with the most prestigious resume or the person easiest to discuss your business school plans with. Personal MBA Coach encourages you not to take this approach and instead to carefully weigh your options.

How Do You Select the Ideal Person to Write Your Letter of Recommendation?

1. Do not just look for impressive titles.

This is not to say that impressive titles are a bad thing, but their title does not matter as much as their knowledge of and esteem for you. Admissions Committee members will see right through a strategy to have the CEO of your company, with whom you sat in on one meeting, write a letter for you. Not only will they not be able to explain the most important aspects of your candidacy, but it may not be a very credible letter if it is clear you do not have a strong relationship with the recommender.

2. Choose recommenders who will take the time to write thoughtful, detailed letters.

Select someone who will go the extra mile to delineate your worth and merits. Generalizations or unsubstantiated flattery will not help you. Choose recommenders who understand the application and selection processes and, within them, the importance of letters of recommendation. You want LORs that add a special, memorable detail about you and that make your candidacy sparkle. Not everyone is great at writing and, similarly, not everyone realistically has time to draft a carefully thought-out letter. The quality of the writing is important in demonstrating your candidacy. That said, do not worry about English proficiency. Letters are not evaluated based on grammar.

3. Identify recommenders who know you well.

This is one of the most important pieces of advice we can provide. The best letters show



Guide to MBA Letters of Recommendation (cont.)

intimate understanding of the candidate. Your recommender should be familiar with your character, your strengths, your weaknesses and your career aspirations. It is best if your recommender(s) immediately supervised you and took notice of your growth, increased responsibility, and sense of leadership. The use of specific examples will be important and the better the recommender knows you, the clearer and more genuine these will be.

4. Select someone who can compare you to other candidates (if possible).

A good letter will compare you to other candidates, putting your accomplishments in perspective (more on this below). For that reason, an ideal recommender will have the experience and exposure to compare your strengths and weaknesses to those of your peers. While this may not always be possible (and that alone is not a reason to eliminate a recommender), if you are comparing two similar candidates, this is an important factor to keep in mind.

5. Ask non-professional references if you have strong extracurriculars and/or weak recommendation options at work.

While the general advice is to select professional supervisors to write your letters of recommendation, there are some exceptions to this rule. Some applications may be well served selecting at least one recommender from other walks of life: an extracurricular activity, for example, or a nonprofit you have volunteered for. If you have taken a major role in an activity outside of work, your supervisors there—and even colleagues—might be able to speak in a more informed manner about a trait that you really want highlighted in your application because it is central to you and the achievement of your goals. Further, they will be able to provide a different perspective on your candidacy.

Similarly, if you do not have a suitable professional reference option, perhaps because you absolutely cannot tell your supervisor you are applying to business school or because your company is structured such that you do not work closely with one particular person, you may be best suited selecting a nonprofessional reference.

6. Use additional influential / alumni letters in some cases.

While we said title should not be a factor in selecting your recommenders, some candidates might be lucky enough to have a close relationship (even a personal one) with someone



Guide to MBA Letters of Recommendation (cont.)

who has strong ties to the school of their dreams. In this case (and you never know what connections you might have until you inquire), it is worth taking the time to consider them as an additional recommender. Again, this is on a case-by-case basis, and Personal MBA Coach is happy to advise clients on this specific situation.

Remember, regardless of whom you select to write your letters of recommendation, early notice is key. Do not wait too long to make these requests

How Should You Take an Active Role in Preparing Your Recommenders?

Once you have chosen your recommenders, your involvement in the process has just begun! We often hear of candidates who ask someone to write the letter of recommendation, ensure it gets submitted, and call it a day. This can be a big mistake! Your role in the MBA letter of recommendation process should be much more involved. You should take an active role to ensure that your recommenders understand what the business school wants, its values and culture. You do not want a recommender to write pages of fluffy praise: You want substance and detail, both about your accomplishments and your promise, that show a good fit between you and your school of choice. We recommend you do the following:

1. Open communication!

Talk with your recommenders about the schools you are applying to and the LOR.

2. Share your goals with your recommenders.

The more your recommenders know about your short-term and long-term aspirations, the better equipped they will be to select pertinent stories about you and to emphasize accomplishments or traits that demonstrate your potential to reach your goals.

3. Remind your recommenders of your accomplishments and successes.

Make sure you and your recommenders are on the same page about your biggest accomplishments at work, your challenges, and the value you brought to the firm, company or nonprofit organization. Your recommenders are busy, and it is easy for them to forget details. Take the time to think of the top stories you would like them to recount and remind them of your role in certain projects or assignments. Not only will this make their lives easier, it also will ensure they share the best stories.

Guide to MBA Letters of Recommendation (cont.)

4. Discuss your essays with your recommenders.

It is important for recommenders to be fully in touch with your application as a whole. Specifically, it is helpful for them to know what you are writing about in your essays so there is no contradiction or dissonance between the essays and the LOR. Beyond your goals, let them know the traits you are highlighting and the success stories you are telling. The idea is for the letter to complement the rest of your application. This means you do not want them to repeat exactly what you are already saying; at the same time, you want to make sure there is no conflicting information. If your recommenders have a sense of your stories, they will be better equipped to share examples of accomplishments that demonstrate a complementary skill set or touch on an area you were not able to cover in your essays. The more they know about what you are writing in your essays, the more successful this will be.

5. Make sure you are embodying the skills you want substantiated in your LORs.

If there are skills or leadership traits you want evidenced, make sure you have demonstrated them to your recommenders. If you are not sure that you have, use the application time to take on an extra responsibility at work, or take charge of an activity that would give you the chance to show off that skill or leadership trait. Whatever you can do to show your strengths (particularly if you are starting early!) will help ensure your recommenders have enough examples to write a glowing LOR. Keep this in mind when you are at the office or client site at 8 PM and debating whether to leave or burn the midnight oil.

6. If possible, ask your recommenders to distinguish you from others.

Just as we advise that your resume and essays go beyond listing tasks, your recommendations should go beyond recounting what you have done. Successful MBA students are leaders who have differentiated themselves from their peers, going above and beyond what would be expected in the role. One of the best ways to show this is to compare you to your peers and others who have had the job previously. The best way for your recommenders to discuss your accomplishments and successes is by highlighting how you excelled compared to others who held your same job or role. Did you outshine others in your position by doing something especially well? Or did you go above and beyond expectations? Ask your recommenders to discuss that in their letters.



I cannot recommend the Personal MBA Coach team enough! After talking with other companies, I chose Scott's team; he was honest and genuine in sharing his thoughts about my profile and collaborated with me to design a plan. Scott assisted me throughout the process, worked with me to brainstorm essay ideas, and helped me re-gain confidence when I ran into some bumps during the application process. Huge shoutout to the entire team overall for the great mock interview experiences and fantastic essay edit suggestions! I'd highly recommend working with Personal MBA Coach.

— HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL



Scott and the rest of the team are fantastic. I felt thoroughly supported throughout the whole process and he always made sure to guide me (without ever generating material on my behalf or in any way distorting the application material I was writing). I couldn't be happier that now, this fall, I'll be headed to Stanford GSB (a school I never would have dreamed of going to). Thanks, Scott!

— STANFORD GSB



"I am truly happy to recommend Scott and the Personal MBA Coach team! Getting in touch with Scott at the beginning of the application process was the best choice I could possibly make. The incredible result of getting an admit offer from two M7 schools and LBS (and a waitlist offer to a third M7 school) would have not been possible without the structured support of Scott and the team, let alone the fact that I submitted 4 applications for Round 1 starting the applications two months prior to the deadline. The service level is absolutely top-notch. From brainstorming to finalizing the pool of target schools for application, to editing the resume and essays, I was always amazed by the honest, high-quality, effective, and timely feedback and inputs I received from Scott and the team. I totally recommend Scott and the Personal MBA Coach team to anyone looking to make their dream of getting into a top business school real!"

— COLUMBIA BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Helping clients since 2008, our boutique one-on-one approach has led to a 96% success rate!

Call or email for a consultation with founder, Scott Edinburgh

SCOTT EDINBURGH

Founder, Personal MBA Coach

+1 617 645 2424

scott@personalmbacoach.com

www.personalmbacoach.com

Facebook: @PersonalMBACoach

Twitter: @PMBACoach

