

personal MBA Coach.

Top 15 MBA Application Pitfalls

2023
Personal MBA Coach



Personal MBA Coach has helped clients around the world get into their dream schools since 2008

- #1 ranked on Poets&Quants last year
- Invited to present to admissions directors at annual GMAC conference
- 96% success rate, \$10M+ in scholarships secured last cycle
- Boutique family-operated / 7 days a week
- All clients receive 1:1 support from Scott or a former MBA Admissions Director
- Former clients to network with at every top school
- Proprietary project management system

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Introducing Our Team

Scott Edinburgh, Founder

- MIT B.S., Wharton MBA
- Consulting, financial services and travel & hospitality experience
- AIGAC Board of Directors

MJ Shores, Director

- Former Wharton and UCLA Admissions Director
- Served on GMAC, Forté and MBA Tour boards/committees
- Featured in *Business Week*, *The Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*

Frenk Nebiu, Director

- Former Kellogg Admissions Director
- MBA recruiting lead at Deloitte Consulting
- 8+ years of experience across consulting, higher ed, & nonprofit

Erin Edinburgh Wand, President Operations & Knowledge Management

- Yale SOM MBA
- Former Forté Scholar
- 20+ years of professional exp. including at Bain, Mars Inc., & US Airways

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The Personal MBA Coach Difference

- Boutique family-operated since 2008 / 7 days a week
- All clients receive 1:1 support from industry veteran
- Direct access to Founder
- Support from team of former M7 MBA interviewers
- Our editors have PhD or master's degrees from leading universities including Yale, Columbia & UVA
- Former clients to network with at every top school
- Extensive knowledge base
- Proprietary project management system

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Why Personal MBA Coach?



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Top 15 Application Pitfalls

Having illogical or vague career goals

- Your career goals should make sense!
- If your goals are not natural, explain this
- If you are a career switcher, let adcom know why
- In general, be decisive and specific





Asking your company's CEO to write your LOR

- Unless you really work closely with the CEO, he/she is not a good choice
- Ignore prestige
- Pick the person who will write an amazing letter
- Recommenders should know you well and be able to compare you to your peers
- Non-professional recommenders are ok in certain circumstances



Using job description bullets on your resume

- Highlight your strengths
- Show leadership
- Include specific (ideally measurable) results
- Establish your key skills
- Prove that you did the job better than peers and/or expectations

Not including school specifics



Avoid vague statements that could apply to any school



Don't include compliments



Show research and interest



Schools want to know WHY you want to join THEIR unique campuses



Include the value you will add

Not answering the question

Think about what is being asked and why they are asking it

The best answers will consider both



This sounds OBVIOUS!



Do not write what you think they want to know



While it is ok to include some details for context, if background is not asked, don't spend a lot of time on it



Schools place varying importance on specific criteria



Mentioning a vague reason for wanting an MBA

- Schools are not looking for candidates who want to check the MBA box
- Establish what you want to gain SPECIFICALLY from the MBA
- Level-set with what skills you have and where there are gaps
- Terms such as *Business Knowledge* or *Strong Fundamentals* don't say anything



Using too many buzzwords

Leave consulting talk for the concierge lounge

- Words that are common to you may mean nothing to adcom
- These technical terms are confusing AND unnecessary
- Instead, focus on transferrable skills, results and personal characteristics
- Your MBA resume and cover letters should differ from those used for jobs

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Lacking consistency across the application



ALL OF YOUR
APPLICATION PIECES
SHOULD FIT
TOGETHER,
INCLUDING YOUR
LORS!



SHOW WHAT MAKES
YOU UNIQUE



IF YOU HAVE A
THEME, MAKE SURE
IT APPEARS
THROUGHOUT THE
APPLICATION



AN APPLICATION
THAT IS NOT
CONSISTENT WILL
NOT BE GENUINE

Having too much repetition

Do not waste valuable space telling admissions directors the same thing more than once

- Consistency is NOT repetition
- With few words, use them wisely
- Do not tell the same story twice
- You all have more than one accomplishment. Show them!




Not properly engaging with schools

Admissions directors are real people. Show them you love their schools.

- Convince adcom you ACTUALLY want to go
- Talk to students
- Attend virtual events
- Join MBA fairs
- Ask smart questions

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Giving up too early on testing

- While test scores are not the be all-end all, be sure you have taken all steps to maximize your score
- Try GMAT, GRE and EA if you are struggling
- Change preparation style (if a class isn't working – try a tutor)
- Take the test multiple times
- The “average” score is not enough for everyone
- You can still submit an updated score AFTER you have applied

G⁴ I² V¹ E¹ U² P¹


Overusing optional “essays”

- Most applicants will NOT answer optional questions
- If it is not asked, there is usually a reason
- Focus only on truly extenuating circumstances
- Keep any optional answers simple and to the point
- Do not consider optional questions (with a few exceptions) to be essays





Forgetting to be humble

- 
- One can be proud of their accomplishments while maintaining humility
 - Business schools are looking for accomplished professionals who will ALSO make thoughtful peers and colleagues
 - Consider the consulting airport test

Volunteering a weakness that was not asked about

- Unless asked, you do not need to volunteer flaws
- Your essays provide a very limited opportunity to sell yourself so focus on your strengths and your specific accomplishments
- Discussing growth opportunities does not require highlighting failures



Waiting until the last minute to start your essays

Essay writing is a multi-step process

A good essay goes through multiple iterations

This should not be tackled in a matter of days



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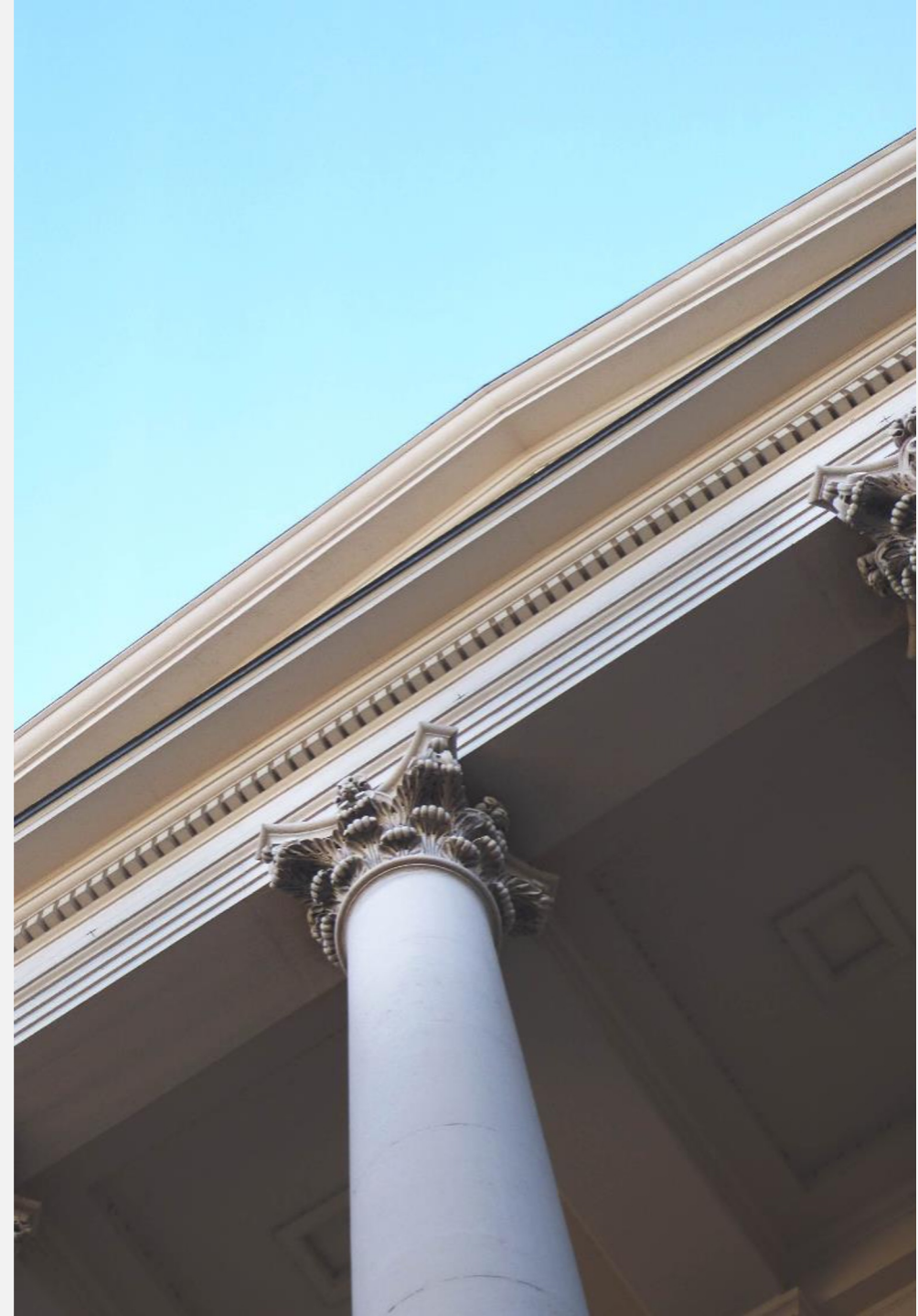


Personal MBA Coach clients received \$10M+ last cycle

Below is a sample of the schools clients got into



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How Can Personal MBA Coach Help?



Call: +1 617 645 2424

Email: scott@personalmbacoach.com

Web: www.personalmbacoach.com

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Questions



resume

The MBA Resume

Professional vs. MBA Resume

A professional resume sells your ability to do a specific job

- Shows potential employers that you have the specific skills and experiences they are looking for

A business school resume sells your future potential

- Provides evidence that you have been successful and demonstrated leadership
- Proves that you did the job better than peers and/or expectations

Key aspects of a strong MBA resume



Highlight

Highlight your strengths



Show

Show leadership



Include

Include specific (ideally measurable) results



Establish

Establish your key skills



Prove

Prove that you did the job better than peers and/or expectations



Letters of Recommendation

LOR Strategy

- Ask someone who will write an amazing letter
- Ignore title / prestige
- Ensure s/he has worked with you for a while
- Start doing things you want written about
- Ask non-professional references if you have strong extracurriculars
- Ask your references early
- Use additional influential / alumni informal notes in some cases



What makes a good letter of recommendation?

Specificity

- Your recommender compares you to others
- Allows the reader to clearly see your teamwork
- Have you grown in the past? If so, how? Ensure examples are provided

Recency

- Make sure your current abilities are reflected
- Letters should not come from “old” connections

Honesty

- Quality should be very high, but you are human!
- Make sure the feedback is actually feedback
- A believable letter carries more weight than a “better than god” letter

Detail

- Ensure recommender answers the questions!
- Pay attention to question differences across schools
- Ensure the letter is the right length (or at least close)

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My Goals

1.

2.

3.

Articulating Your Post-MBA Goals

Strategy for Approaching Goals

- Goals should be specific, ambitious and attainable
- Include target titles and companies
- Select ONE short-term and ONE long-term goal
- If returning to consulting, think about what area you might specialize in
- Be specific in terms of what you will accomplish



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cial and moral traits are predetermined
is not just labeled to one hate between races like white
defined as
among themselves
have racism within itself. Racism can also be just blind hatred between
two different
unprovoked
n also be due to skin color, background, sex, language, birth places, or even
ism can influence many things like slavery or the formation of countries and
f of inferiority was not this automatic creation. Not all skin types or colorings
? ?

Essays

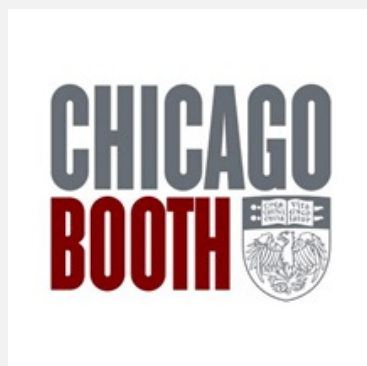
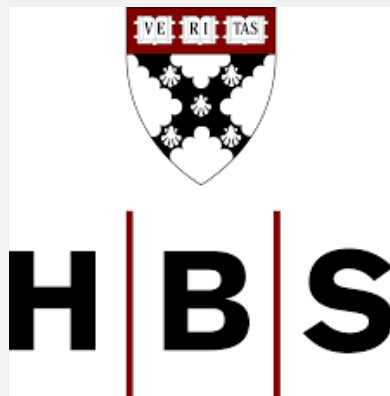
onsidered inferior. Many years ago the Portuguese discovered how much mo
can than themselves. An important feature of race is that how on
Source?
Specifics?

Essays: General Guiding Principles

- Answer the question ASKED
- But consider the WHY
- Write authentically
- Ensure each essay fits with your “personal story”
- Do not repeat yourself
- Be succinct
- Keep your language approachable



Now, let's get into the specifics!



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Harvard Business School Essay

As we review your application, what more would you like us to know as we consider your candidacy for the Harvard Business School MBA program?

HBS Essay Tips

How can you approach this essay?

- One key story
- Thematically

What are some potential topics?

- An experience that shaped you
- Interest or passion
- Value that shapes you
- Issue you have overcome
- Lifelong hobby turned into career



Keep In Mind

- Choose a theme that allows you to share what makes you special
- Your essay should be interesting to read
- Do not try to throw everything in here
- You can (and most likely will) discuss professional experiences but do not recount your resume
- Including goals or why HBS is not necessary



Stanford GSB Essay A

What matters most to you, and why?
(650 words suggested)

- Truly assess your “personal story”
- Do not be afraid to take a risk
- Focus. A narrow theme is best



A strong answer will...

- Include a balance of WHY and WHAT
- Not feel forced or overly boastful
- Truly speak from the heart



Stanford GSB Essay B

Why Stanford? (400 words suggested)

- Open with brief professional context
- Discuss your specific short-term and long-term goals
- Establish how Stanford will help fill these skill gaps (classes, clubs, programs, etc.)
- Articulate what attracts you to Stanford's culture





Wharton Essay 1

Essay 1: How do you plan to use the Wharton MBA program to help you achieve your future professional goals? You might consider your past experience, short- and long-term goals, and resources available at Wharton. (500 words)

- Briefly establish career context
- Include both short-term and long-term goals
- Goals should be specific and achievable
- Discuss Wharton in detail
- Include classes, clubs, trips, etc. and how each will help you

Wharton Essay 2

Essay 2: Taking into consideration your background – personal, professional, and/or academic – how do you plan to make specific, meaningful contributions to the Wharton community? (400 words)

- Cover two aspects of your candidacy
- Include both past experiences and future contributions
- Be specific in terms of how you will add value on campus





Chicago Booth Essay 1

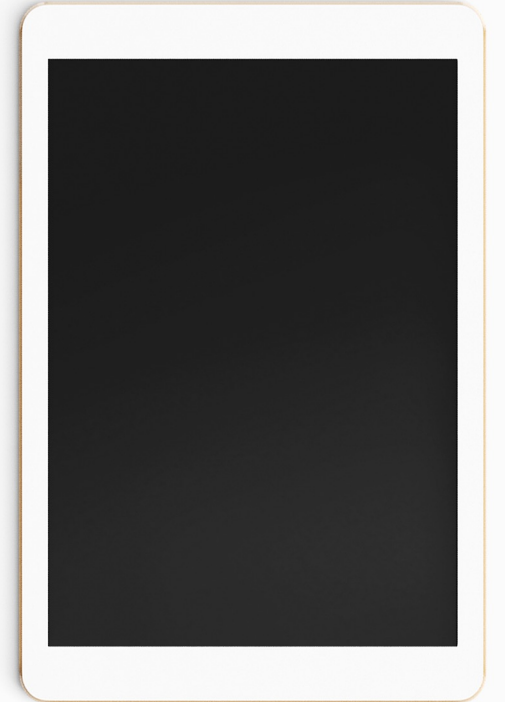
How will the Booth MBA help you achieve your immediate and long-term post-MBA career goals? (250-word minimum)

- Discuss your short-term and long-term goals
- Establish your key skills
- Cover how Booth will help close your skill gaps (name classes, clubs, programs, etc.)
- Show an understanding of Booth's culture

Chicago Booth Essay 2

An MBA is as much about personal growth as it is about professional development. In addition to sharing your experience and goals in terms of career, we'd like to learn more about you outside of the office. Use this opportunity to tell us something about who you are. (250-word minimum)

- Think about how you are unique
- Potential topics include:
 - Passions
 - Values
 - Hobbies
 - Extracurricular activities
- Be focused and succinct



Columbia Business School Essay 1

Through your resume and recommendations, we have a clear sense of your professional path to date. What are your career goals over the next 3 - 5 years and what is your long-term dream job? (500 words)

- Include short-term and long-term goal
- Be specific and share how you will leave your mark
- Dream big but stay logical
- Include past experience for context only
- Mention how CBS will help





Columbia Business School Essay 3

Why do you feel Columbia Business School is a good fit for you academically, culturally, and professionally? (250 words)

- Do your research
- Name 3-4 specific offerings
- Include a mix of classes, clubs, seminars etc.
- Mention at least one NYC-specific offering
- Where relevant, include cultural fit

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MIT Sloan Cover Letter

Taking the above into consideration, please submit a cover letter seeking a place in the MIT Sloan MBA program. Your letter should conform to a standard business correspondence, include one or more professional examples that illustrate why you meet the desired criteria above, and be addressed to the Admissions Committee (300 words or fewer, excluding address and salutation).





MIT Sloan Cover Letter

- Ask for a place in the MIT Sloan class
- Reflect on your most significant accomplishments
- Do not simply list what is in your resume
- Highlight what you will contribute to Sloan
- Keep Sloan's values in mind