

**personal  
MBA  
Coach.**

# **Personal MBA Coach's Essay Writing Guide**

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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.



## How to Articulate 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.

For those planning to apply to business school in September 2024, it is never too early to start thinking through your post-MBA goals. In fact, developing a strong MBA goals statement is a key aspect of Personal MBA Coach's comprehensive package.

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.



## How to Articulate Your MBA Goals (cont.)

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.

### 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.



# Identify your topic

To create a stunning presentation, it's best to simplify your thoughts. Start with an outline of topics and identify highlights, which can be applied to whatever subject you plan on discussing.

## Articulating Your Personal Story

Personal MBA Coach started with the premise that everyone has a personal story and that the most successful candidates craft unique and compelling stories. This continues to be a cornerstone of our support and the area where we find our clients need the most guidance. We advise candidates to start thinking about their stories months, if not years, in advance! The good news? Everyone has a personal story; you may just need help figuring out how to make it shine.

**Keep in Mind:** This is not the time to tell the admissions committee what you think they want to hear. As an Association of International Graduate Admissions Consultants (AIGAC) Board Member and Committee Chair, Personal MBA Coach is fortunate to attend an annual conference with Admissions Directors from 25+ top MBA programs including HBS, Stanford, Booth, Kellogg, Wharton, Ross, Sloan, Yale, Darden, Fuqua and many others. Authenticity is often a key point of discussion.

The most successful candidates do not always write essays about overcoming a horrible tragedy or solving world hunger. Sure, if you have done something impressive or triumphed over a difficult situation, include it—if it fits with your story. But you also can write compelling essays without this.

**So, what should you include in your personal story?** This answer will differ for every candidate but across the board, I can tell you, NOT EVERYTHING! No one wants to read a long explanation detailing a chronological flow of your life. Instead, you must be **focused, logical and unique**.

When Personal MBA Coach meets with a new candidate, we start by asking a lot of questions. We talk about everything the applicant has done, often starting from childhood. You should start with a similar process.

*1. 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.*

*2. Think about your future goals. What do you want to do after you earn your MBA and, again, why?*

*3. Next, look for a theme! What single idea connects items from #1 and #2? This is the hard part, so give it time.*

## Articulating Your Personal Story (cont.)

Here is an example:

One candidate's passion for education began as a result of a family tragedy. Instead of centering his essay on his misfortunes, however, he barely mentioned the tragedy in his essay as, frankly, it did not say anything about him.

He focused instead on what he did in the face of this situation. He shared his penchant for education starting at a young age. His extracurricular activities, past career choices, and future aspirations laddered up to this. Sharing these highlights led to a compelling statement. His application strength did not come from his career successes but from how his essays were **focused**, his personal and professional moves were **logical**, and his career path was **unique**.

This candidate was accepted to an M7 school.

Business schools want to know how you will make the business world (and the world more broadly) better when you leave their campuses. They also want to know how you will leave a unique mark.

Past behavior is the best predictor of the future, and we all have left a mark in one way or another. No candidate is ever perfect; instead, we chart the best course we can with the hand we are dealt. The best personal statements show this.

As you can see from this discussion, crafting a personal statement is not easy—but Personal MBA Coach is here to help!





## 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, 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.





## Short Answer Questions, Optional Essays and MBA Videos

While the MBA essays may get the bulk of your attention, other crucial application components require significant effort, including short answer questions, optional essays and MBA videos.

This means it is time to kick your efforts into high gear—especially since Personal MBA Coach never advises waiting until the last minute to hit submit.

Below, get Personal MBA Coach’s advice on how to tackle each.

- **Take your time filling out the short answer application questions**

Do not underestimate the importance of short answer MBA application questions. Applicants should set aside adequate time to perfect these answers, particularly since many schools, including Harvard Business School, have lengthy short answer sections that will require significant time.

These questions serve a few important purposes. First, they allow you to share additional aspects of your candidacy. Naturally, you cannot cover all of your accomplishments and traits in your application essays; the short answer section is your chance to share these important successes.

The format of the short answer section also allows admissions committee members to easily compare you to your peers. Ensure you take the time to stand out by carefully selecting the accomplishments discussed. Wherever possible, these answers should be complementary and not repetitive, but there will be some natural overlap between your short answers and your resume.

Finally, short answer MBA application questions are a test of consistency and cohesion. The voice used here should match that shared throughout your essays and should paint a credible and concrete image of who you are as a candidate.

- **Consider whether you should complete any optional essays**

Most schools offer candidates the chance to complete an optional essay. However, DO NOT feel compelled to answer it. In most instances, Personal MBA Coach advises only candidates with extenuating circumstances to provide additional information here.

Such extenuating circumstances include low GPAs, gaps in employment and an unusual choice of recommenders (i.e., not asking a direct supervisor).



## Short Answer Questions, Optional Essays and MBA Videos (cont.)

Keep in mind that you should be brief and to the point with these essays. Do not offer long-winded excuses or any more information than is needed.

- **Allow adequate time to prepare for MBA videos where applicable**

Increasingly, top programs use the MBA video essay to assess applicants. After all, you will have limited career success if you are unable to nail an interview, so this is the admissions committee's way of evaluating your physical presence and delivery.

For some schools, such as MIT Sloan, the video question is provided in advance and applicants submit a pre-recorded video with their applications. For other schools, the applicants receive some or all of the questions in advance but record the video on the spot. Finally, schools including Yale SOM and Kellogg do not share the video question in advance, requiring applicants to record videos on the spot within two days to one week after submitting their applications.

For these statements, be yourself. An MBA video essay gives admissions committee members the chance to learn more about you on a personal level. Potential topics include goals, passions, values and hobbies, among other more challenging questions.

While you do not want to sound overly rehearsed, it is important to practice for these MBA videos. If you have the question beforehand, write out bullets in advance of filming. If you do not, practice sample questions.

As you practice, consider factors such as audio quality, demeanor, and fluency in addition to the content itself. Looking for additional help? Personal MBA Coach has proprietary software and a list of prior questions asked to help candidates prepare for these videos. We also include an analysis of sample videos in our comprehensive packages.

- **Do not forget to proofread**

Of course, applicants should also set aside sufficient time to proofread their MBA applications. Personal MBA Coach encourages candidates to get someone who is unfamiliar with their applications to do a thorough review for grammatical mistakes and glaring issues. However, beware of making too many last-minute changes. The purpose of this review should be to catch typos, not to second-guess yourself or your hard work.

For those working with us, our expert proofreaders review clients' applications at the final stage to ensure they are fully ready to submit.

## TESTIMONIALS

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Scott and his team did a fantastic job helping with my essay writing. I am a very poor writer as an engineer and this team was able to polish my weak essays into something fantastic essays that got me into two M7 schools and waitlisted at another.

— CHICAGO BOOTH & KELLOGG

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110% recommend! I've had a fantastic experience working with Scott and his team. Scott has a ridiculous amount of knowledge about the MBA world, and for every school I applied to, I felt like I had an edge because of the specific insights I was given about that particular school and what they're looking for - information I could have never gotten otherwise.

The support is truly comprehensive (including rec letter edits, mock interviews, infinite essay edits until they're perfect, etc), and makes a stressful, complex admissions process far easier to deal with. I truly could not have gotten the outcome I did without working with Personal MBA Coach!

— WHARTON

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I 100% recommend Scott to anyone who is looking for an early start to their MBA application prep. I took the early planning and comprehensive packages, and that gave me an edge in my applications. Scott has a clear idea of what is and isn't required for each school and his advice and essay edits are very unique for each school, considering exactly what they look for.

He is confident, straightforward, and knows when to say no. As an applicant from a family business background, I received advice on how to best position my background and goals, and that helped me secure an admit to a top M7 school.

— COLUMBIA BUSINESS SCHOOL

## LET PERSONAL MBA COACH HELP

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

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