

Personal Essay

IMPORTANCE

The personal essay is the portion of your business school application that aims to show admissions offices a picture of who you are as a real person. They want to get information about you outside of the typical academic and professional environment. After standardized test prep, your essays are likely the most time consuming and important portion of your whole application. Personal essay prompts will vary depending on the business school, but good essays always answer the call of the question.

GETTING STARTED

As you begin to think about your personal essay think about personal attributes, characteristics, and experiences that make you stand out and set you apart from other applicants. Do not regurgitate your application or summarize your life. Instead, remember that you are trying to reveal yourself in a light that your GMAT score or your resume does not expose. Spend time brainstorming on your own, and with other people that know you well. This will help you come up with experiences or qualities that can best help you answer the essay prompts.

STYLE AND FORMAT

Generally speaking each school has 3-5 essays questions and response requirements range from 200 to 750 words per question. Applicants typically are required to answer a few mandatory questions and then pick from a few options for the remaining essays. Be sure that you follow the directions exactly for each application (font, spacing, word count, etc.).

Keep in mind that this is not a resume. Don't summarize or jump around between experiences. Pick a specific experience or attribute that helps you directly answer the question. Make sure that your writing is succinct, easy to follow, and engaging. All the stories or experiences you share should be applicable to the questions. Your entire essays portion should flow together to create a unique impression of you as a person. Remember that you have very few words to respond to the prompt so every sentence should carry a lot of weight. Make your words count.

Be sure to write many drafts. Your final draft will need to be perfectly polished and this may require more than 2 or 3 drafts. Proofread your essays and have others look over them. The Pre-Professional Advisement Center has an editor who can also help you hone and edit your essays. The editor's services are available to you even after you have graduated. Utilize all the resources you have to produce a typo-free essay that shows the admission committees who you really are.

EXAMPLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

- What matters most to you, and why? Write from the heart, and illustrate how a person, situation, or event has influenced you.
- Enlighten us on how earning your MBA at [specific business school] will enable you to realize your ambitions.
- Explain your decision to pursue graduate education in management.
- Explain the distinctive opportunities you will pursue at [specific business school].
- Tell us about a recent success you had: How did you accomplish this? Who else was involved? What hurdles did you encounter? What type of impact did this have?
- The mission of the [specific MBA program] is to develop principled, innovative leaders who improve the world and to generate ideas that advance management practice. Please share with us something about your past that aligns with this mission.
- What are you most proud of and why? How does it shape who you are today?
- What is your desired career path and why?
- Why pursue an MBA (or dual degree) at this point in your life?
- What actions have you taken to determine that [specific business school] is the best fit for your MBA experience?
- What do you see yourself doing professionally upon graduation?
- Through your resume and recommendations, we have a clear sense of your professional path to date. What are your career goals going forward, and how will the [specific MBA program] help you achieve them? If you are not currently employed full-time, use this essay to provide information about your current activities. Please provide any information you would like to add to your application that you have not otherwise included.
- Re-Applicant Essay: How have you strengthened your candidacy since your last application? We are particularly interested in hearing about how you have grown professionally and personally.
- It's the first day of class at [specific business school]. You are in a classroom meeting your "section." This is the group of 90 classmates who will become your close companions in the first-year MBA classroom. Introduce yourself.
- Please share with the admissions committee an interesting or surprising fact about you. Please respond to One of the following short essay prompts: a. My greatest memory is... b. I'm most afraid of... c. My greatest challenge has been... d. I'm most proud of...
- Tell us about a recent success you had: How did you accomplish this? Who else was involved? What hurdles did you encounter? What type of impact did this have?
- If you could choose one song that expresses who you are, what is it and why?
- Describe an experience that has fundamentally changed the way you see the world and how it transformed you.
- Describe a difficult decision you have made and why it was challenging.
- Why are you seeking an MBA from [specific business school] and what unique knowledge and experiences do you hope to contribute to the program?
- Please describe your short and long term goals post-MBA. Explain how your professional experience has shaped these goals, why this career option appeals to you, and how you arrived at the decision that now is the time and the MBA is the appropriate degree.
- Describe the most courageous professional decision you have made or most courageous action you have taken at work. What did you learn from that experience?