

# How to Prepare & Apply for an MBA

## Undergraduate Education

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- Secure good grades during your undergraduate education.
- Graduate with a four-year degree from an accredited university. If you graduated from a university located outside of the United States, send your transcripts to an approved credentialing agency; IERF and WES are two such agencies.

## MBA Programs

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- Start researching MBA programs and selected schools based on individual criteria.
- Determine what type of MBA program is the best fit for you (full-time, executive, part-time, or online).
- Register your interest in the programs you are considering so that you are on their mailing list. This will help make you aware of their recruiting events or other useful resources.
- When possible, take part in campus visit programs, recruiting events, chats with students and administrators, and find out what type of internet resources are available (online information sessions, chats, blogs, podcasts, videos).
- Select a few schools and find out more about their admissions criteria, admissions process, and deadlines.

## Test Preparation

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- The GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test) is the most popular business school admissions test. However, more and more schools are recognizing and accepting the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) as an acceptable alternative. See our handout “*GRE v GMAT*” to see how many students are actually accepted who took the GRE over the GMAT.
- Start studying for the GMAT/GRE your junior or senior year of college. If you are adequately prepared, try to take the test before you graduate. Students who choose to take the test before or right after graduating tend to do better than those who wait a few years. GMAT/GRE scores are good for five years.
- Take the GMAT/GRE when you feel adequately prepared. Taking the test and submitting your score early just to meet a deadline is not effective. Take your test when you see consistent practice test scores that are within the range a school recommends. If you are not able to test within that range, contact someone at the school to ask for advice.
- If you are an international student or permanent resident and did not graduate from an institution located in a country where English is the first language, most programs will require you to take and pass all sections of the TOEFL. Check international admission criteria to find out the minimum TOEFL scores.

## Work Experience

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- Obtain quality management and leadership experience. Start thinking about what you would like to do after you obtain your MBA, and make sure you are acquiring the right kind of work experience to meet your goals. Most programs require **at least two years of work experience** and recommend three to five years prior to application to the program.
- Mission experiences, while certainly formative, do not necessarily constitute work experience. Most schools prefer work experience to be traditional. Accepting mission experience as work experience is not standard practice. See our handout “*Admissions Information for the Top 50 MBA Schools*” to see how the average age of incoming students reflects their work experience.

## Application Process

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- Check to see if a program's application is online or if it is on paper. All application materials need to be turned in for you to have a complete application.
- Apply early so that a file can be created for you. Without a submitted application, your hard copy materials cannot be accepted. You can send your GMAT/GRE score either before or after you submit your application. Schools will not review your file without your score, but having a file already created can expedite the process.
- After submitting your online application, send all of your official transcripts to schools where you are applying. You will need transcripts from all schools you attended during your undergraduate education.
- After applying, check your online status to make sure you have turned in all of the required documents.
- Once admitted to a program, pay your admissions deposit if you plan to attend that program. If classes are filling and you are not certain which program you will attend, you may need to pay a deposit at multiple schools. Just being admitted to a program does not guarantee you a post in that program. You must pay your deposit to secure a seat.
- Check with each school to find out if there are additional requirements you need to fill before starting school.

## Essays

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- After GMAT or GRE 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**.
- 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. Avoid rehashing your resume or summarizing your life.

## Letters of Recommendation

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- Letters of recommendation should be written by someone who knows you well and is qualified to give a pointed and specific recommendation.
- Providing your letter writers with your resume and/or essay can help your writers to give more streamlined, pertinent recommendations.

## Financial Preparation

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- Save funds to help pay for your education. Generally, you will not want to work your first year of business school, and some programs will not allow you to work.
- Check with the schools of your choice to see what types of loans and scholarships are available to students.
- If you are a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, apply for federal aid after completing your taxes during the year you plan to start school. It is best to apply for aid as close to January, of the year you plan on starting business school, as possible. You do not have to be admitted to a school to start the federal application process. To expedite the federal aid application process, apply for a pin now. This will give you an ID number to use when you apply for aid at any time in the future. Follow up with the schools' financial aid office to find out if there is additional paperwork for you to fill out.