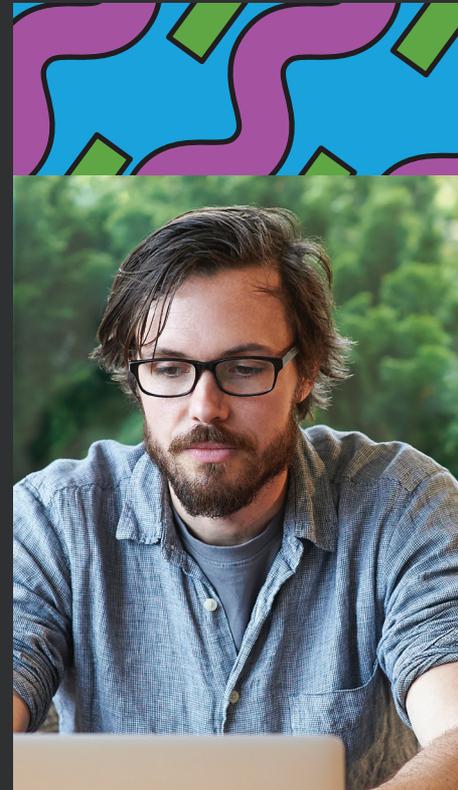
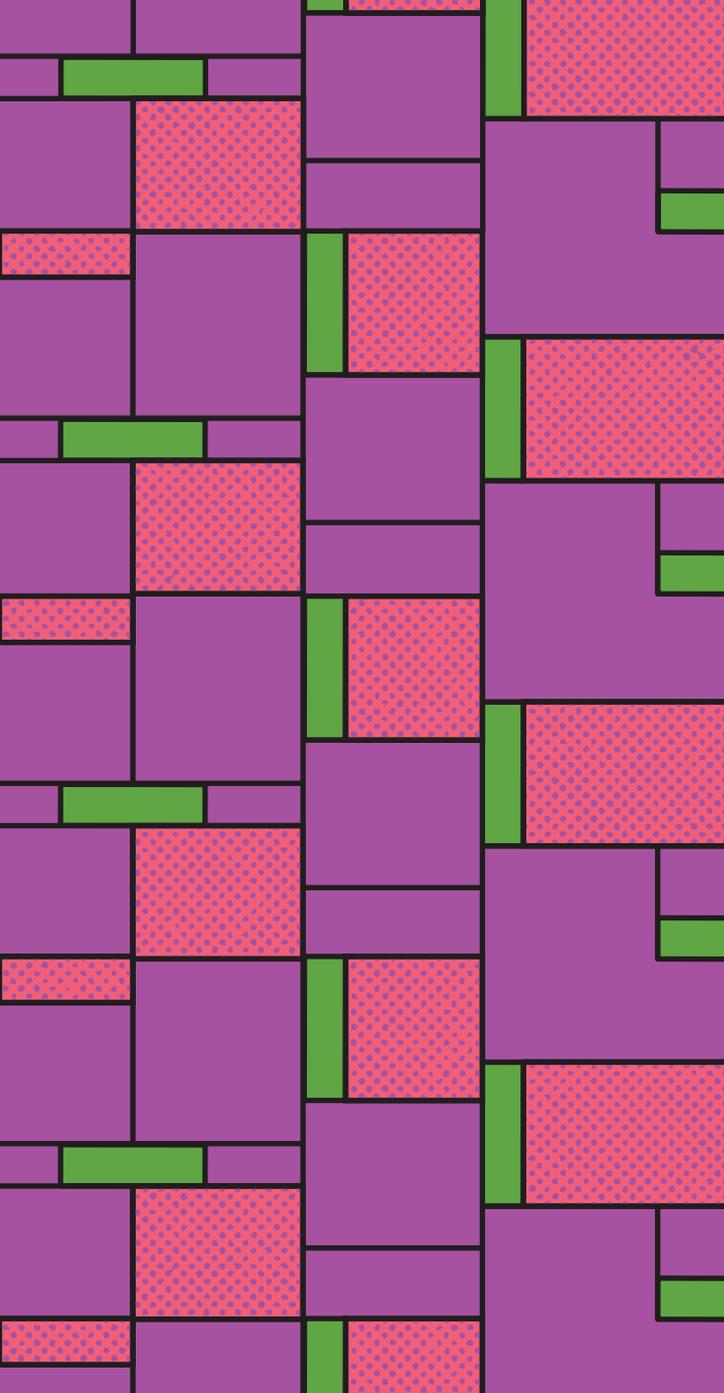


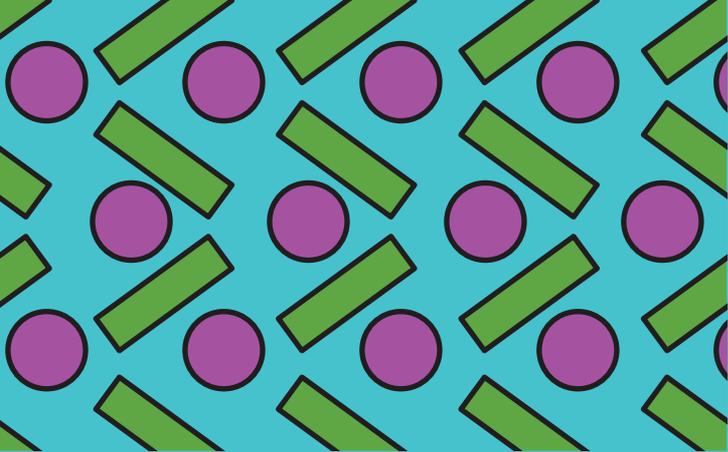
# Finding Your Best Fit Program: A Guide for Working Professionals





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Here are some questions to help guide your self-reflection as it relates to finding your best preference-to-fit alignment between you and MBA programs.

### Format + Scheduling

- Are you interested in fully online programs, fully in-person programs, or programs with elements of both? Do you have the self-discipline to do an online program?
- Are you able to or prefer to take night classes during the week or on the weekend?
- How far are you willing to commute to take your classes?

### Academics

- As you envision yourself at business school, what classes, extracurriculars, and learning opportunities excite you most?
- What kind of learning environment do you excel in?
- Do the program's strongest areas of study and reputation align with your aspirations?

## Your Ideal Fit

Finding your best fit MBA program as a working professional starts with self-reflection. While factors like rankings or a business school's brand recognition can play a role, fit ultimately comes down to your unique needs and wants.

If you haven't already done so, check out the **first guide** in our experienced professionals' MBA admissions process guide series for guidance on self-reflection as it relates to your goals, your background, and the story you want to tell with your applications.

### More on mba.com

[Quiz: What's the Best Business School Program for Your Personality?](#)

[How to Find Your Best-Fit Business School Program](#)

### Finances

- How do you plan to pay for tuition? Are you comfortable with student loan debt?
- What scholarship or funding opportunities do you qualify for? Are you eligible for in-state (or otherwise reduced) tuition rates at the program? Does your work offer tuition reimbursement?
- What is the average salary of recent graduates of the program? How soon could you expect to see a positive return on investment?

### Career outcomes

- What new skills do you need to acquire to meet your short- and long-term career goals? How would you acquire them through this program?
- What career outcome data can you find about the program and how does it compare to your career goals?
- What employers recruit from the program?



Here's some of our best advice for exploring what's out there and arriving at a list of target programs.

## Program Finder

**Program Finder**—mba.com's program directory—is the best place to start your search. Explore more than 3,000 MBA programs and use the filters to narrow your search by a range of criteria, including location, preferred class style (on-campus, online/distance, and blended/hybrid), and curricular focus areas. To get the most accurate results, [create an mba.com account](#) to match programs to your background and aspirations.

## Which program type is right for you?

It's important to recognize that there can be considerable variation among programs at different schools that call themselves "part-time MBA" or "executive MBA" programs. To find your best fit, do a deep dive on program websites and talk to admissions staff, current students, and alumni to get a sense of what program type at a particular school is right for you.

## Landing on a program list

If it's your goal to guarantee acceptance during this admissions cycle, plan to apply to at least five different programs. This is the best way to ensure you'll have the option to start a program on the timeline you want. Your school list should include a mix of programs that fall into the following categories:

- **Realistic programs** – Your GPA and EA/GMAT score are within the 25th to 75th percentile of the last admitted class. You can typically find this information in programs' published class profiles.
- **Reach programs** – Your GPA and EA/GMAT score are below the 25th percentile of the last admitted class.
- **Safety programs** – Your GPA and EA/GMAT score are above the 75th percentile of the last admitted class.

## → Pro tip

Only put programs on your list that you would be happy to attend. There's no point in applying to a safety program just because you're confident you can get in. If you can't see yourself meeting your career and personal goals with a degree from a program, it shouldn't be on your list.

# Narrowing Your Search

Graduate business schools have never had as many options for working professionals than they do today. Between executive MBA, part-time MBA, and online MBA programs, there are thousands of options for you to explore, each with its unique value proposition and spin on the MBA experience.

The question is:  
how do you begin to narrow your options?

## More on mba.com

[How Do I Know Which Business School is the Best Fit for Me?](#)

[Quiz: Is Now the Right Time to Go Back to School?](#)



# Connecting with Schools

At the same time you're researching programs and narrowing down your choices, you should also be thinking about making your initial connections with the schools you're interested in. It's one thing to read about a program on their website, it's another altogether to engage with their admissions team and be able to ask substantive questions.

Here's our best guidance for starting the dialogue with the programs you're targeting.

## More on mba.com

[You Can Still Make an Impression at a Virtual MBA Event](#)

[Use the GMASS Service to Help Business Schools Find You](#)

[7 Questions to Ask Admissions Reps at Events](#)

## Opt-In to GMASS

Of course, you're not the only one trying to connect—schools want to connect with you, too! One easy thing you can do to help schools discover you is to opt-in to **GMASS** (for free) through your [mba.com account](#). GMASS allows business schools to review your background and career aspirations and to connect with you directly. Many candidates learn of scholarship opportunities this way.

## The MBA Tours

MBA Tour events provide potential MBA students with opportunities to meet with top business schools from around the world—all in one place. Participating schools host panel sessions and alumni seminars and are available to engage in discussion with candidates. Check out the [schedule of upcoming events](#) from The MBA Tour and plan to attend at least one event during your school search

## Attend an admissions event or campus visit

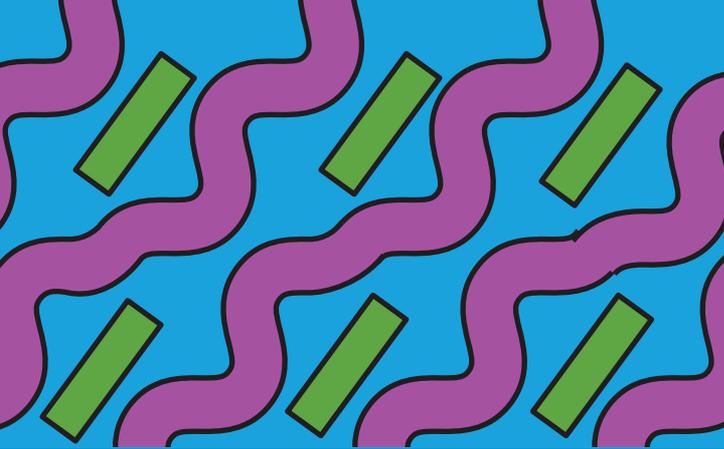
Schools regularly host virtual and in-person admissions events for prospective students. For the schools you're targeting, make it a part of your plan to attend at least one of their events, and make a campus visit if possible. Schools take engagement like this into account when evaluating your application and assessing your level of interest in them.

## Ask good questions

The key to asking good questions is understanding your context. At an event, be sure to ask questions that apply to other attendees. One-on-one is when you can get to questions that are specific to you. In both contexts, don't ask questions that are answered on schools' websites or with a simple Google search, and try to ask open-ended vs. yes or no questions. Always practice active listening to be sure your question wasn't already answered.

## → Pro tip

It can be tempting to dress casually for virtual school event, but don't make that mistake! Dressing the part signals to the schools that you're taking the event seriously and value their time. Looking your best will also boost your confidence and help you get in the right mindset to have professional interactions



# Answering “Why This Program?”

In the **first guide** in our experienced professionals’ MBA admissions process guide series, we discuss how to best answer the important questions of “why an MBA?” and “why now?” Now that you’ve narrowed your options and are ready to connect with schools, you need to think through your more specific, tailored response to the question “why this program?”

Here’s our best advice for answering this question for each of your target programs.

## Do your homework

The most common mistake is simply not to put the time into thinking about your answer. It’s important that you telegraph to the admissions team that you’ve done your homework and have given the question significant thought. Your first source is the school’s website, of course, but you need to also attend an admissions event or do a campus visit to get a sense of how they describe the program themselves. Go deeper by connecting with alumni or current students.

## Be authentic and specific

Admissions professionals do this all day, and they can see through candidates who don’t mean what they’re saying. Put in the work to offer not only authentic answers, but answers with enough specificity to really paint a picture for them that you’re the real deal. Make it clear that you know what you’re talking about.

## → Pro tip

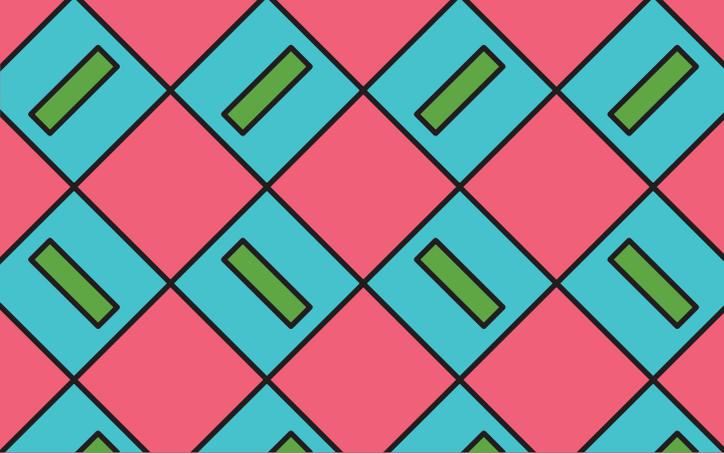
Avoid shallow rationales like citing the program’s ranking or platitudes like “everyone knows it’s the best.” The admissions team asks this question to judge whether you’re actually a good fit and also to assess your emotional intelligence and maturity. Demonstrate that you’re a deep thinker who’s in touch with yourself and the world around you.

## Be multi-dimensional

Another common mistake is to focus too narrowly on any one given aspect of the school. Remember, the business school experience is a rich one that touches all aspects of your life. Think of at least five specific reasons this program is right for you and be able to summarize them in a tidy two-minute response.

## Keep it positive

While you may have worked to construct pro/con lists for your target programs, do not put down other programs in your interactions with admissions staff. This will reflect poorly on you and make them wonder what you’re saying about their school to the other schools you’re applying to.



## Next Steps

With the insights and resources shared in this guide, you have what you need to think critically about what you're looking for in an MBA program, decide on a target school list, and begin to engage with them on why you're a good fit.

Now comes the fun part: the application process. In the next guide of our series, the **MBA Application Guide for Working Professionals**, we get right to the heart of the question you're asking yourself: "How do I get into one of my top choice programs?"



### More on mba.com

[Why the Executive Assessment Is a Great Option for Experienced Professionals](#)

[Top 5 Tips for Writing Compelling MBA Admissions Essays](#)

[Strategies for Acing the Most Common MBA Interview Questions](#)



### The Executive Assessment

Did you know there's an admissions assessment for MBA programs tailored for experienced professionals like you? The best part: it evaluates the data-driven skills you use everyday and requires minimal prep. Learn more about the Executive Assessment in the guide.



### Application timing

It's key that you understand how the MBA application process works if you want to maximize your odds of getting into one of your top choice programs. Our guide explains application rounds, the best strategies, and how to get off a waitlist.



### Essays and short answers

MBA application essays and short answers are your opportunity get beyond your stats and reveal something deeper about yourself to the admissions committees. We've got insider advice on essay do's and don'ts that can make all the difference.



### Letters of recommendation

Being smart about who you ask, giving them some light coaching, and managing the process are all important to ensure that your letters add to the strength of your overall application. Check out our top tips in the application guide.



### Interviews

Does the thought of an admissions interview give you anxiety? It doesn't have to! We've compiled the best advice from experts on how to prepare and get into the right mindset for success

