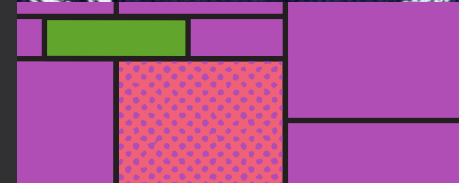
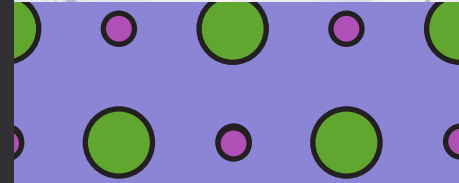
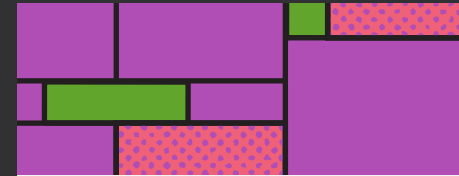
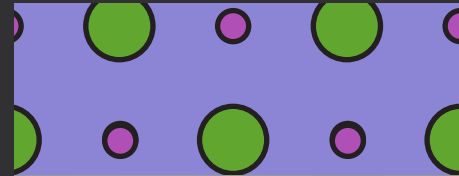


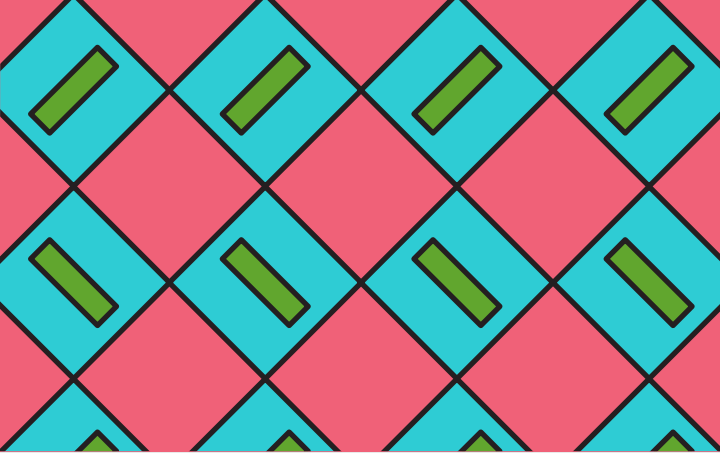
Tell Your Story: Personal Branding for MBA Applications





Contents

Why an MBA?	3
Crafting your MBA story	4
Self-reflection: Expressing who you are	5
Articulating your goals	6
Answering “Why an MBA?” and “Why Now?”	7
Tying it all together	8



Why an MBA?

Thinking of getting an MBA? You're not alone! Every year, thousands of driven young professionals like you make the choice to invest in themselves with an MBA—the proven path to leadership positions across industries, organization types, and continents.

An MBA adds significant value to your life and career in a number of ways.

More on mba.com

[MBA Return on Investment \(ROI\) Calculator](#)

[MBA Jobs: What Can You Do with an MBA?](#)

[How an MBA Can Help You Prepare for an Uncertain Future](#)



Return on investment

An MBA pays off many times over in the long run. A recent survey found that 9 in 10 alumni report a positive ROI, recouping their investment in just a few years following graduation.¹ It's not uncommon for full-time MBA graduates to double their salaries in their first job after business school.²



Career opportunities

Your MBA can accelerate your trajectory on your current career path, give you the chance to pivot into a new role or industry, or launch your own business. The vast majority of alumni agree that their MBA prepared them for their chosen career and has offered them opportunities for quicker advancement.³



In-demand skills

MBA students learn a broad-based management curriculum that has been proven over the decades and is constantly updated to meet the demands of modern business. Nine in 10 global corporate recruiters say they're confident in graduate business schools' ability to prepare students to be successful in their organizations.⁴



Network support

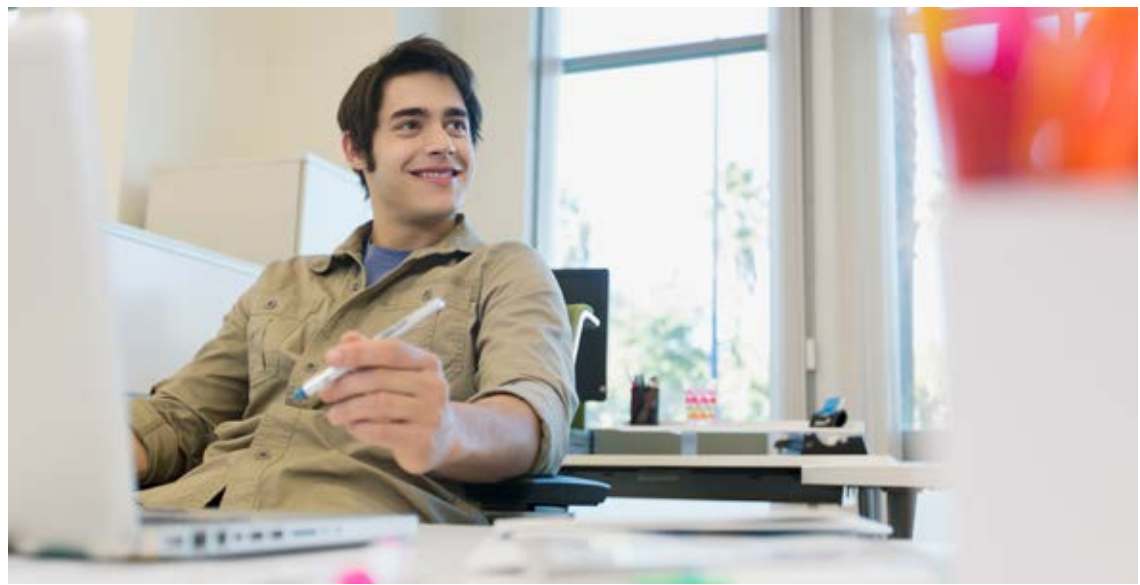
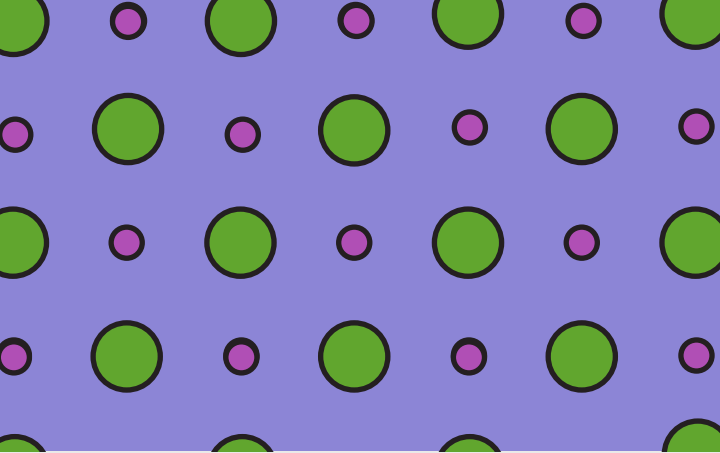
You can't underestimate the importance of relationships to career opportunities and being a part of an extensive MBA alumni network can get you in the door at leading organizations. A recent survey found that 95 percent of full-time MBA alumni say they would recruit an alumnus from their program for a job at their company.⁵



Global mindset and mobility


MBA courses teach the skills that next generation executives will need in the globally interconnected and dynamic economy of the future. For many, earning an MBA abroad creates opportunities to establish a career and life in a new country, including in locations like the United States, Western Europe, and Canada.

1. Graduate Management Admission Council. (2020). mba.com Longitudinal Survey.
2. The Financial Times. (2020). Global MBA Ranking 2020.
3. Graduate Management Admission Council. (2020). mba.com Longitudinal Survey.
4. Graduate Management Admission Council (2020). Corporate Recruiters Survey.
5. Graduate Management Admission Council. (2018). Alumni Perspective Survey.



Crafting Your MBA Story

Congratulations on choosing to pursue your MBA! The question is: what's the best way to get started?

 **More on mba.com**
[Developing a Successful MBA Story](#)

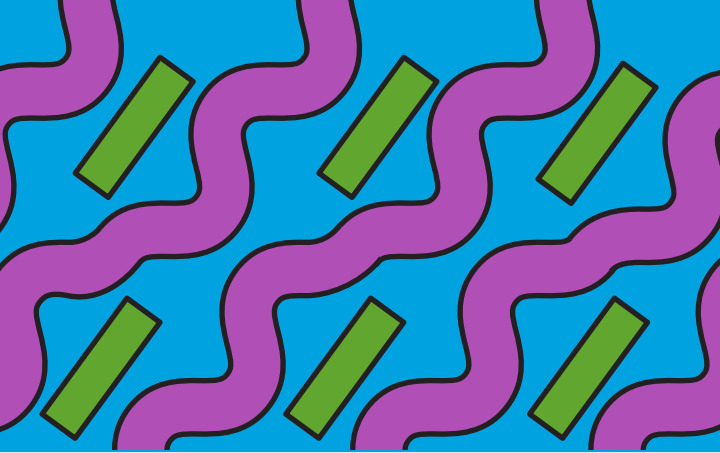
A critical, but often overlooked first step to conquering the MBA admissions process is taking the time to think through the story you want to tell with your applications. Giving yourself the space to step back and be introspective about who you are, where you want to take your career, and how an MBA can help you get there can be helpful not only for your applications, but can also help you understand for yourself why you're making this investment at this moment in your life's journey.

Being thoughtful about how you present yourself and frame your personal brand is essential to putting together applications that:

- **Tell an authentic and compelling narrative**
- **Differentiate you from other qualified applicants**
- **Stick in the minds of the admissions committees**

Investing your time at this step early in the process will push you to develop a clear and concise personal brand statement and help you stay on message as you craft the various parts of your applications, including your essays, short answers, and even in selecting who will write your letters of recommendation.

Read on in this guide for advice on expressing who you are, articulating your goals, and conveying why an MBA is the right move for you right now.



Self-Reflection: Expressing Who You Are

Your MBA applications are so much more than the sum of your undergraduate GPA, GMAT™ exam score, and years of experience. Successful applicants weave their MBA story into the various parts of their application and articulate why accepting them into the program will add value to the class and enrich their classmates' MBA experiences. Conveying who you are, your background, and your accomplishments are key to this.

More on mba.com

Telling an Authentic MBA Story:
[From an Underrepresented
Minority Perspective](#)

As a first step, take some time to reflect on these questions related to who you are, where you come from, and what you've already accomplished in your life and career. This list is not comprehensive—consider this a jumping off point for your self-exploration.

Your personality traits

- How would you describe yourself to someone you just met?
- What interpersonal qualities do you believe define your personality?
- What motivates you?
- Do you have any personal stories that reveal a key character trait?
- What are your weaknesses?

Your background

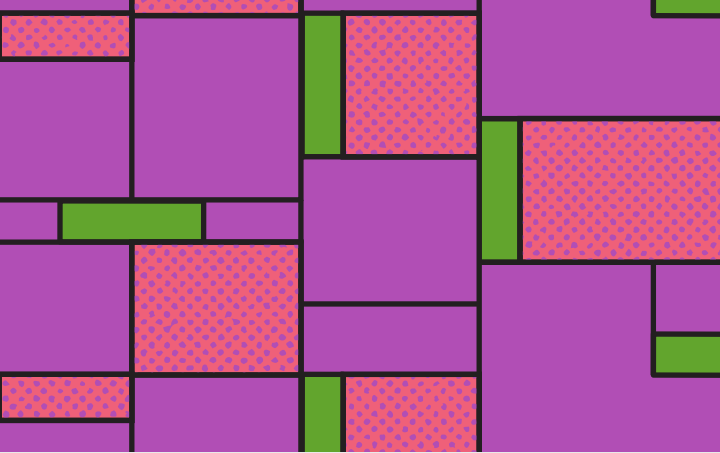
- What is your professional experience to date?
- Where did you grow up? What kind of environment were you raised in?
- Have you had to overcome any personal or professional hardships?
- Where have you traveled, and how has that travel affected you?
- Who has had the biggest influence on your life so far?

Your accomplishments

- Have you earned any awards or honors in college or at work?
- Was there ever a time you experienced a failure, and came away from it stronger?
- Have you done volunteer work for a cause that you're passionate about?
- What work projects have you completed that you're especially proud of?
- Have you ever supervised anyone in a professional or non-professional setting?

→ Pro tip


It can also be helpful to involve people close to you. How would a colleague or close friend describe you? What they say may differ from your own self-assessment and reveal something interesting. You may have taken a personality assessment like the Birkman Method or StrengthsFinder as a part of your job. Now's a good time to revisit your results and understand what they say about you.



Articulating Your Goals

MBA admissions committees want to understand not only who you are and where you come from, but also where you want to go and what you want to do.

First things first: it's okay if you're unsure! That by no means disqualifies you. The admissions committees understand that your plans may change but articulating clear career goals highlights that you have done the work of envisioning your ideal professional future and underscores your commitment to the journey of your career.

 **More on mba.com**
[Tell the Story of You in Your Business School Application](#)

Here are tips for articulating your career goals in a way that is clear, compelling, logical, and achievable.



Be honest about what you want

Remember, this is *your* career! Your goals should reflect what you want for yourself, and definitely not your best guess of what the admissions committees want to hear. Narrow things down by what industries interest you, what functions are a good fit, where you want to be geographically, and other parameters that can focus your exploration.



Research

You'll want to demonstrate that you've done your homework and understand in a realistic sense what it will take to get where you want to go. Research your target industries and roles and get a sense of the trends that may shape their future. Networking and informational interviews with people in the roles you see yourself in will help you find clarity.



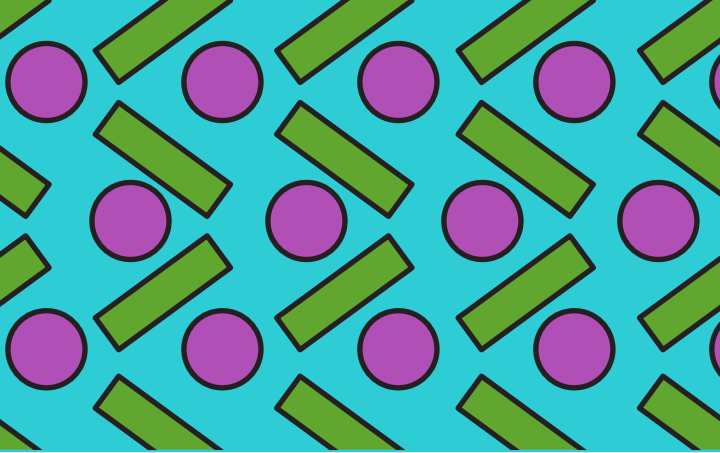
Gap analysis

Identify the new skills you'll need to acquire to get where you want to go, as well as the skills you already have that you can build on. Connecting the dots between where you've been and where you're headed will make for a compelling, logical narrative. If you're planning for a significant career change, it's especially important that you demonstrate your reasoning and research.



Short-term goals leading to a long-term vision

Consider not just your end goal—where you want to be in 10+ years—but also the short-term steps that will lead there. This is where you want to be the most specific and should include details around your MBA internship plans and the years after graduation. They should be researched and realistic and focused on expanding your skills and building toward your long-term vision.



Answering “Why an MBA?” and “Why Now?”

It's important that your MBA story include a compelling, personal, and specific answer to the questions “why an MBA?” and “why now?”. In evaluating candidates, MBA admissions committees want to understand how their program's experience and resources will contribute to your professional goals and why now is the right time for you to take this step, so it's critical that you be able to spell it out clearly and persuasively.

Here are some tips for framing the importance of an MBA to you achieving your goals.

Be specific

There are a lot of reasons for someone to pursue an MBA. You could simply rattle off a few of them and be done with it, but that wouldn't reveal anything about its specific value to you and your career goals. Try to be as specific and thoughtful as possible. If you want to develop your skills, which skills, and why? If you want to make a career change, be specific about how you plan to use your internship and coursework to enable your transition. You need to make clear that you've given the question of “why an MBA?” significant thought.

Relate your timing to your career goals

Timing is everything, and the admissions committee needs to know that you have carefully considered the timing of your MBA. With your current experience, how will an MBA facilitate the next step toward your career goals? If your goal is a career change, what's driving the timing of your pivot? If you want to launch a start-up, why is now the right time? Be prepared to provide a specific answer.

→ Pro tip

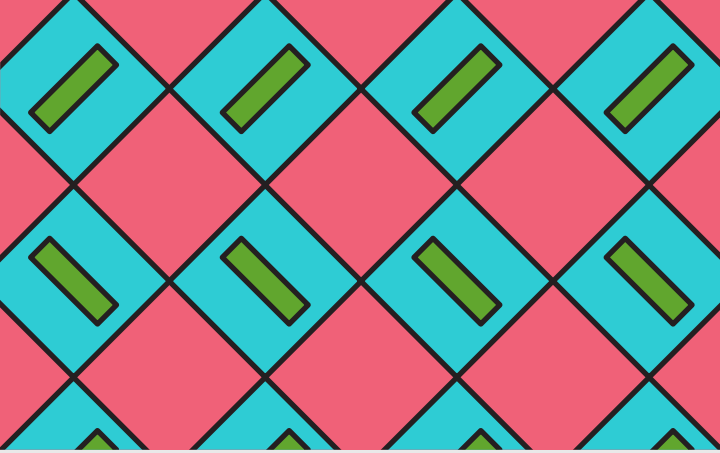
Once you've identified your best fit programs that you plan to apply to, you'll need to adapt your answer to “why an MBA?” to address the more specific question of “why this program?”. First consider this in a more general sense from your own personal perspective before tailoring your response to a specific program to that ensure your authenticity shines through.

It's okay to get personal

If personal or family circumstances are driving the timing of your application decision, it's okay to be upfront about that. However, this shouldn't be your only rationale. Work your personal circumstances into your career narrative and relate the value of an MBA to making your circumstances work for your life. For instance, if you're moving to a new city for your spouse's career, part of your “why an MBA?” and “why now?” could be that you need to establish a new network in a new city to enable your career pivot.

What you bring to the table

MBA admissions committees are particularly interested in applicants who they believe will add to your classmates' experience. Your applications and interviews are your chance to make your case for why your perspectives, interpersonal skills, enthusiasm, and more, will enhance others' learning and growth.



Tying It All Together

Now it's time to pull the different elements of your story together into a personal brand statement that will serve as your lodestar throughout the admissions process. This will help ensure that you stay on message and use the different pieces of your applications to communicate a clear and consistent MBA story that is uniquely yours and makes you stand out.

There's no one tried-and-true formula for doing this but consider starting with one of the frameworks below and then adjusting it to make it work for you. Of course, all the details you developed earlier in this guide won't necessarily be reflected here but keep those points in mind for later phases in the application process. You'll be glad you have them later.

I'm a personality trait leader with a background in background, pursuing an MBA to "why an MBA?" to help me achieve my long-term goal of career goal.


I'm a background professional who is passionate about background/accomplishment and I plan to "why an MBA?" with my MBA so I can career goal.

I'm pursuing my MBA now to "why an MBA?" so I can career goal as a part of my passion for background/accomplishment.

Remember, the most important thing is that you be authentic. If you learn nothing else from this guide, it should be that your secret weapon in the admissions process is **you and what makes you unique**. Being thoughtful about how you tell your story will differentiate you from the pool of other qualified candidates and increase your likelihood of earning a spot in one of your top choice programs.

→ Pro tip

Consider your personal brand statement a kind of "elevator pitch" as you network and meet new people—not only as a part of the admissions process, but also once you start your program and get acquainted with your classmates. Repeat it and rework it until you feel natural and confident saying it conversationally, and you'll get to the point where it's second nature to consistently work the key parts into your introductions.



You're on your way to your MBA!

With the tips provided in this guide, you have what you need to begin your journey to business school with your best foot forward. As you begin to identify your best fit programs and pull together the key pieces of your applications, you'll be glad you put the time and thought into these first steps.



Next steps

mba.com is your go-to source for information and insights as you begin to narrow your choices and identify your best fit programs. Here's a collection of expert advice and resources for you to consult:

- **[The mba.com User's Guide to MBA Rankings.](#)**
Everything you need to know about the major MBA rankings, all in one place.
- **[How to Find Your Best Fit Full-Time MBA Program.](#)**
Expert tips and guidance to narrow your options and identify the programs that make the most sense for your goals.
- **[Business School Application Checklist.](#)**
A useful summary of the key steps between you and getting admitted.

