



FIVE FATAL FLAWS TO AVOID IN YOUR MBA APPLICATION ESSAYS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3** About Accepted
- 4** Introduction
- 5** Fatal Flaw #1: Lack of Substance
- 7** Fatal Flaw #2: Failure to Answer the Question
- 8** Fatal Flaw #3: Cliched Writing
- 9** Fatal Flaw #4: Superficiality
- 11** Fatal Flaw #5: Lack of Focus
- 13** Why Avoiding These Fatal Flaws Matters So Much
- 14** What's Next?



Download your bonus guide!

**Why MBA? The Winning
Ingredients of a Dynamic MBA
Goals Essay**

ABOUT ACCEPTED

Accepted is THE premiere professional admissions consulting firm, helping applicants get accepted to colleges, graduate schools, business schools, law schools, and medical schools, as well as other healthcare programs, for the past 30 years. We have guided thousands of candidates through the entire application process to gain acceptance at the world's top programs.

When you choose Accepted, you'll have a passionate and invested admissions consultant dedicated to helping you specifically, in addition to the support of an entire team of uncommonly talented professionals, including former admissions directors, published authors, PhDs, journalists, professors, and career coaches. With collectively hundreds of years of direct admissions committee experience, our team has more insider knowledge than any other firm. We KNOW the application process inside and out and can guide you every step of the way with a personalized application strategy that leverages our peer review process so you gain critical feedback from multiple sources.

We invite you to [meet our team](#) and [read what our past clients have to say about us](#).

When you are ready to take the next step in your application process, sign up for a free consultation. We look forward to speaking with you about your goals and helping you achieve them!

SPEAK WITH AN ADMISSIONS EXPERT!

INTRODUCTION

Your MBA application essays are your chance to show the admissions committee (adcom) who you are beyond your stats, and an engaging, well-written essay will get the job done. We know it's easy to make mistakes in writing these essays. After all, you probably aren't used to writing about yourself in this way. We've seen an endless number of essays that include some potentially detrimental – yet totally avoidable – flaws.

In this guide, you will learn how to avoid the five most common application essay killers and submit successful, acceptance-worthy essays for business school. Sound good? Let's get started.

FATAL FLAW #1: LACK OF SUBSTANCE

An essay without substance will bore your readers. And if you bore your readers – even though they’re obligated to slog through (I mean read) your essay, you’ll lose their meaningful attention and with it, any serious consideration of you as a candidate. It’s that simple.

Kindle your readers’ interest in you and hold on to it with an essay full of the following:

1. Substantive self-reflection

How well do you know yourself? No Google search is necessary to find the real “you,” but you need to create an environment of quiet space in which to seriously think about your goals, experiences, and dreams. What are the most formative experiences that have made you who you are? Search your head and your heart. This is where you will find the solid substance that the schools want to know about.

2. Vivid and lively anecdotes, examples, and specifics

Now that you have collected your thoughts and gotten better acquainted with yourself (aren’t you glad you did?), you need to show the adcom that your dreams are grounded in experience. Write about real-life situations with colorful specifics, short scenes with dialogue (if appropriate and space permits), and the context of the situation you’re describing. Examples liven up your essays and keep the reader interested.

Here’s one before-and-after to illustrate what we mean:

Before: “I volunteered at a local women’s shelter last summer so I could give back to my community.”

After: “I had wanted to volunteer at a local women’s shelter to give back to my community, but I had no idea how tiring it would be to stand behind the buffet table, ladling out mac and cheese to mothers and children in 90+ degree weather.”

3. Revelations of your thought processes and feelings

While lively examples and anecdotes tell the “what” of your life, they don’t convey the “why.” The adcoms want to learn about how your experiences have informed and changed you. How have your thinking, values, and motivations evolved over time as a result of the experiences you’ve had and the lessons you’ve learned? Reflecting on your growth will help you better understand yourself, your strengths, and your career vision.

Let’s return to the women’s shelter example we just introduced. You could mention that you “built relationships by talking to some of the women.” But that’s a bland fact. Alternatively, you could describe a specific conversation you had with a 25-year-old mother of two who was trying to earn her

cosmetology license, and then elaborate on how that conversation affected, motivated, or changed you. It's a no-brainer to choose the path that includes detail, context, and reflections.

How to avoid Fatal Flaw #1

When you construct your essays on a foundation of self-reflection and astute examples balanced by analysis, you will keep your readers' sustained interest. Not sure how to do that? [Working one-on-one with an expert advisor](#) will help you organize your thoughts and ideas into a cohesive, compelling essay that will get you ACCEPTED!

FATAL FLAW #2: FAILURE TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

MBA applicants often ask, “What does the adcom want?” It’s really simple: **they want you to answer their questions**. Too frequently, applicants don’t comply with this straightforward request.

In particular, you might feel queasy at the thought of discussing a failure, a time when you really blew it. You might think that if you admit to a failure, it will somehow make YOU a failure in the eyes of the adcom. This is exactly backward.

Learning from failures is a stress test that (ideally) leads to maturity and growth. That’s why the schools ask this kind of question. They want to see that you took lemons and made lemonade, so to speak. Don’t fear the question; ride the wave! Answer the question directly, without apologies. Then share what lessons you learned, and – this is key – prove that you learned them by showing the difference in how you handled a similar situation later. Voila! Your “failure” has become a success.

If you are asked why you want to attend a given business school, [provide specifics about how the program complements your interests and goals](#). Mention particular courses, specialty tracks, internship or research opportunities, and anything else that is school specific and relevant to your aspirations. If you’ve connected with alumni and students, make note of what you learned in these conversations that resonated with you. If your answer is so generic that it could apply to most MBA programs, you’ll probably get dinged. Don’t tell them why you are more qualified than anyone else to attend their program. [Be confident, but with some appropriate humility](#).

What if you encounter an open-ended question with general instructions? Simple – enjoy the luxury of writing about what interests you and presents your personality and qualifications with authenticity and enthusiasm.

How to avoid Fatal Flaw #2

Don’t assume that the adcom “really” wants to hear what you want to write about, rather than what is asked in the essay prompt. The MBA application is designed to elicit specific information about you and your potential to excel in business school and your future career. Answering the programs’ questions directly is the most effective way to give them what they want. [Be sure to review our school-specific MBA application essay tips here!](#)

FATAL FLAW #3: CLICHED WRITING

There's a great cartoon that shows a man standing at his boss's desk, holding a sheet of paper, as his boss, seated at his desk, reviews a sheaf of papers we assume were presented by the man standing. The boss says, "This is gobbledeygook. I asked for mumbo jumbo."

It's easy to make fun of the meaningless verbiage and abused cliches that often completely disguise what otherwise might have been clear, simple language, understandable by most people. But jargon and colloquialisms choke so many types of documents that we have almost become immune to not only their utter foolishness but also their popularity.

Take a look at this harvest of incoherent buzzwords masquerading as part of a personal statement:

"As a new donor-centric nonprofit working for collective impact, we work to attain buy-in through our community-driven action models and the donor pipeline. We are drilling down so we can gain organic, scalable, capacity-building growth, allowing our underserved clientele to feel empowered for change. As an aspiring thought leader, I think outside the box, but my role also requires that I take a deep dive, and sometimes even take it offline, when I have maxed out my bandwidth."

Okay, we clearly exaggerated here, but you'd be surprised how widespread this epidemic of incoherence is! Do yourself a favor: use simple, clear, jargon-free language. Write directly and clearly so people can understand you.

Now let's translate what this applicant was trying to say:

"As a new nonprofit raising private-sector funds for low-income housing, we are basing our models on similar programs that have built multifamily housing units where tenants commit to assuming responsibility for many aspects of the property management. Our research on the most successful models will allow us to start small and grow slowly as we learn what will work best in our particular community. We will look to early successes to help low-income tenants feel both safer and more optimistic about their housing opportunities. As an aspiring community leader, I often need to consult with individuals outside my organization for their input on this plan, especially when I begin to feel overwhelmed."

Notice that the translation required many more words, but those words and phrases are all real, familiar, and concrete. They effectively turn a jargon jambalaya into plain speech. For more on what real writers

(and readers) think of the latest in vapid jargon, check out our post ['Twas the Night before Deadlines: A Cautionary Tale of Cliches](#).

How to avoid Fatal Flaw #3

Write in straightforward, unvarnished language. Filling your essay with cliches, jargon, and meaningless verbiage will raise a big red flag indicating that you cannot communicate in clear, simple, precise language.

[Work one-on-one with a pro](#) who will help you make your ideas shine to create an essay that will get you

ACCEPTED.

FATAL FLAW #4: SUPERFICIALITY

This fatal flaw is a close cousin to lack of substance and clichéd writing. Superficial writing is so generic that the essay blends into the great mass of submissions by applicants who – on a surface level, at least – are very much like you. They have similar goals, similar educations, and similar industry backgrounds. They have done generally the same type of prep you’ve done to gain acceptance.

But you are not those people. There is only one of you, and you cannot afford to blend in.

Distinguish yourself by avoiding the general and aiming for the specific

Use real-life anecdotes that will reveal you to be a distinctive and memorable individual. These are stories that only you can tell. You also want to avoid umbrella words such as “leadership” without more precisely explaining what you mean. “Leadership” has a broad definition that can cover any number of qualities that are desirable in the admissions process, so while you want to demonstrate leadership, you won’t get the job done by babbling about your “leadership abilities” in a vague, generic way. Instead, provide an example of a time when you were in a leadership role and demonstrated very specific aspects of leadership that were key to your success.

Here is a partial list of leadership components that you can focus on:

1. Listening
2. Initiating
3. Mentoring
4. Teaching
5. Persuading
6. Organizing
7. Establishing a goal or vision
8. Motivating
9. Managing
10. Empowering

What other leadership elements can you think of that have played a part in your personal experiences and abilities? Not all leaders can claim these qualities, and at most, only a handful can write about the specific example you will provide.

How to avoid Fatal Flaw #4

Be real. Avoid vague umbrella words and use precise language instead to help banish superficiality from your application essays. Check out our [blog posts about writing strong MBA application essays](#) for more help.

FATAL FLAW #5: LACK OF FOCUS

Let's assess where we are now. You've dedicated time to thinking about yourself and your goals, and as a result, you've succeeded in more effectively answering the schools' essay questions directly and specifically. You've paid attention to answering any questions-within-the-question and have de-jargoned your essays, writing with lively details. Yet somehow, your essay still isn't working. It seems... unfocused. Perhaps you tried to make too many points in a short space or didn't elaborate enough on a main point.

Even if you have a clear goal or sense of direction, you need to structure your essay so that your reader can easily follow your thought process. Here are a few tips to create this logical structure and coherent presentation.

- 1. Have a core idea or theme.**

Every essay you write should have a single, principal message you are trying to convey. Just as a salesperson has a concise "elevator pitch" they make to prospective buyers, you should be able to succinctly state your theme in one sentence – or at most, two. Everything in your essay should support that theme.

- 2. Follow a chronological or thematic structure.**

You might have two or three examples in your essay and/or a few subtopics within your main point. That's fine, but your examples and subtopics need to be smoothly organized, either chronologically or thematically. Whichever approach you choose, there needs to be an architecture to your essay, and you need to stick to it.

- 3. Use smooth transitions.**

Transitions help your reader move from one example or subtopic to the next with logical, flowing connections or contrasts among them. Transitions are like signposts that guide your reader along the path of your essay.

Before you start writing your essays, think about what you want to say, clearly and critically. As we discovered in Fatal Flaw #1, Lack of Substance, you need to give yourself the gift of time to examine your motivations and goals, based on your experiences and values. During that important exercise in self-reflection, and when you are writing the key points you want to raise in your essay, consider the relationship between and among the experiences, insights, and subtopics you plan to write about. Making these connections will provide your reader with a much more gratifying reading experience – and help boost your candidacy.

How to avoid Fatal Flaw #5

Sketch out your core ideas and the examples you'll use to underscore your theme, choose either a thematic or chronological structure, and help your reader easily follow your narrative by using flowing transitions. The result will be a coherent, substantive essay that is a pleasure to read. Be sure to [read our sample essays](#) for ideas on different structures that work well.

WHY AVOIDING THESE FATAL FLAWS MATTERS SO MUCH

You only have one chance to make a first impression, as the saying goes. Your essays just might be how you make that first impression to the business school adcoms. If they are, they could be the difference between earning a coveted interview or acceptance – or receiving the dreaded rejection letter. We hope the guidance we've provided here helps you feel better prepared to start your thinking, planning, and writing process. We know you'll be able to avoid these killer mistakes now! Still, nothing beats working one-on-one with an expert on your application.

[Our consultants](#) will not only ensure that you avoid mistakes but also guide you in writing an outstanding, shining application that will get you accepted to business school!

WHAT'S NEXT?

Thank you for reading Five Fatal Flaws to Avoid in Your MBA Application Essays.

Now it's time to move from general tips to personalized advice tailored just for you.

Sign up for a free consultation with one of our MBA admissions experts today!

GET STARTED!

Contact Us

-  **+1-310-815-9553**
-  **support@accepted.com**
-  **www.accepted.com**