



PREPARING TO ACE YOUR MBA INTERVIEW



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Paying For Your MBA

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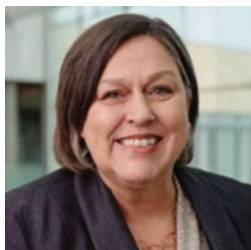
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When you are ready to take the next step in your application process, sign up for a free consultation. We look forward to speaking with you about your goals and helping you achieve them!

SPEAK WITH AN ADMISSIONS EXPERT!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - KELLY WILSON



In her past roles as executive director of admissions at CMU Tepper and assistant dean of admissions at Georgetown McDonough and Pittsburgh Katz, Kelly oversaw admissions for 23 years for the MBA and master's programs in management of information systems, computational finance, business analytics, and product management. Having approved more than 38,000 admissions decisions, she has a deep understanding of what top MBA programs value. Her working style is warm, supportive, straightforward, and organized. Kelly is also a member of AIGAC.

[Click here to learn more about Kelly Wilson.](#)

INTRODUCTION

You've scored an MBA interview invitation – what great news! We know you want to make the most of this opportunity, so we created this guide to help you prepare for success.

Doing well on your MBA interview is the last hurdle you need to clear before a program decides whether or not to accept you. You do not want to just wing it, and the more prep you do before the big day, the smoother, more confident, and more seamless your answers will be.

This guide has two parts. Part 1 is about what we call “MBA interview must-knows.” In it, we explain what you need to understand before heading into your interview, including what your specific goals should be, why you should develop detailed knowledge of the program, and how to feel prepared for either of the two types of interviews you might experience.

In Part 2, we review interview approaches and share the most common questions you can expect to be asked, as well as the subtext for these questions so you understand what the schools really want to learn from your answers.

PART 1: THE MBA INTERVIEW MUST-KNOWS

Must-Know #1: Your Top Three Interview Goals

Goal #1. Show fit.

Your interviewer is assessing your fit for your target program. To ensure that you are ready for this assessment, take the time to consider how your professional and educational background and your goals match the school's pedagogy, strengths, and career opportunities. The interview is not just about you as a professional. It's also about you as an individual, so plan to highlight how you will make an impact within the program's community.

Goal #2. Inform the school of any recent accomplishments or achievements.

Did you retake the GMAT? Earn an A in calculus? Get a promotion? Take on a leadership role on a new project? Tell your interviewer of any successes that have occurred since you submitted your application. This strengthens your overall profile as a growing, dynamic individual. This is particularly important if you are interviewing at schools such as Harvard and Wharton, which in the past have discouraged or not accepted new information from candidates after the application submission date, even if the information is highly relevant and/or the applicant has been on the waitlist for months.

Goal #3. Demonstrate your communications and interpersonal skills.

These skills are important for everyone but absolutely critical if English is your second language and/or your transcript and test scores might lead one to question your abilities in these areas. Also, the interview is a conversation in which you want to be actively engaged while still allowing the interviewer to guide the discussion.

Must-Know #2: You

How well do you know yourself? Once you know yourself well, you'll be able to effectively explain how well you fit the program. And while the interview is not meant to be a brag session, you want to have four or five impressive stories about yourself in mind that you can share to reveal you have the qualities the school values, qualities that show you belong there. Being able to authentically convey your enthusiasm and relevant skills, experiences, talents, and accomplishments without appearing boastful requires finesse and tact. It helps to remember that you're having a conversation with a stranger, not writing an epic memoir.

Must-Know #3: The School

What does the school value and emphasize? Innovation? Leadership? Teamwork? Diversity, equity, and inclusion? Yes, all schools appreciate these qualities, but some place more weight on certain values than on others. Before your interview, make sure you understand what your target school values most, how the school defines those qualities, and how you can show that you possess them.

Additionally, make sure you know how the program works from a technical standpoint. Does the school have cohorts? Learning teams? Projects, lectures, cases? This is information that you can easily gather from the program's website and information sessions, as well as from conversations with the admissions team, students, and alumni.

You'll score extra points by answering interview questions in a way that conveys your knowledge of the program. That knowledge should position you to be ready to ask your interviewer detailed questions about the program, such as about how it meets your educational needs and will help you achieve your professional goals. You might also ask about opportunities to contribute to the class or to further your extracurricular interests through clubs and other activities. Be sure to go beyond elementary questions for which the answers are easy to find.

Must-Know #4: The Interview Type

There are two main types of interviews: blind interviews and informed interviews.

Blind Interviews

Most schools use blind interviews. In this kind, your interviewer will know only the information that is on your resume and what you tell them directly.

The advantage of a blind interview is that the interviewer hasn't seen any of your application materials other than your resume, so you can mine your entire storehouse of impressive stories and experiences. Each one will be new and engaging for your interviewer to hear about. However, don't limit yourself to just material that you included in your application, especially if you have had experiences since you submitted your application that are worth sharing. The interview conversation might also segue naturally to allow you to share other stories that didn't make it into your application. Be flexible.

Informed Interviews

As the name implies, an informed interview is one in which your interviewer has gone through your file thoroughly. Harvard Business School, MIT Sloan, and UNC Kenan-Flagler rely on this interview method. In this scenario, it can be tricky to find new material to present that will enhance the interviewer's understanding of who you are. To manage this challenge, explore how you might go deeper into the stories you have told and share additional anecdotes that can shed light on another, or a deeper, aspect of an experience and what you learned from it.

Be ready to address weaknesses and gaps in your application. An interviewer who has reviewed your entire application might be more likely to hit harder and probe deeper with their questions than someone leading a blind interview would.

Must-Know #5: The Interview Approach

There are a few different approaches to the MBA interview: traditional interview, behavioral interview, team-based discussion, and prerecorded interview. Most schools use a combination of the traditional and behavioral interview approaches.

Traditional Interview

Traditional interview questions are those that interviewers ask to learn more about you, including delving into your background, motivation, and self-awareness, and to gain insights into your professional presence. In Part 2 of this guide, we take a deep dive into the most common traditional interview questions.

Behavioral Interview

Behavioral interviewing focuses on exploring specific real-life situations you have experienced rather than asking how you would handle a hypothetical situation. The premise of this approach is that past performance predicts future behavior. The questions seek to elicit information about how you did something, why you made the decisions you made, and what the outcome was. A recommended technique for responding to behavioral questions is to use the STAR method, in which you frame your answer by explaining the situation, task, action, and result.

Team-Based Discussion

Some schools, such as Wharton and (pre-pandemic) Michigan Ross, offer team-based discussions. Wharton provides a mini case, typically one about a school initiative, and asks you and other candidates to work together as a team to solve it in a short period of time (35 minutes). The interviewers in this situation are looking for evidence of your ability to work effectively in a group and want to see whether you can help the team come to a solution that is better than the one it started with. Consultants often do very well in these sessions because they are regularly asked to do this type of exercise with their clients. Michigan Ross uses more of a game-like, storytelling scenario. In both situations, you need to think on your feet and demonstrate that you are a team player.

Prerecorded interviews

We're increasingly seeing schools using prerecorded interview bank platforms such as Kira Talent to screen applicants. Initially, having a discussion with a computer screen instead of a person is awkward, but with practice, it will become similar to a blind interview. Schools that use this approach will typically give you a practice session in which you can become familiar with the technology, but once you begin the official video session, you don't have any "do-overs." Additionally, you are often given a little time (typically, 20 to 60 seconds) to think about the question and then an allotted a little more time to answer the question (30 seconds to 2 minutes). Some schools, such as Kellogg, call this a video essay and provide some of the questions ahead of time. Schools like this technology because it enables everyone on the committee to review the interview or video essay prior to making an admissions decision. Although Kellogg still offers blind interviews to most of its candidates, other schools use this approach in place of an in-person interview.

Nice-To-Know: Your Interviewer

If you have your interviewer's name before your interview, see what you can learn about them via Google, LinkedIn, or a company website or blog. If you are able to glean some information, it can be helpful in connecting with them on a personal level. For example, perhaps you both went to the same college or have ties to the same professional organization. Knowing where your interviewer has worked or that you like the same band or share an interest in hiking could provide common ground for a few minutes of social interaction.

If you don't know your interviewer's name or can't find out anything, don't sweat it. Most of what you need to know about the interviewer can be learned in the moment. Read the room, as they say. If you are greeted with a wide smile and your interviewer appears to have a sense of humor, they might be receptive to an occasional joke or lighthearted observation. A firm handshake and a more serious demeanor will alert you to stick to the facts and steer away from any light bantering. You should be able to gauge which approach to take within the first moment or two of meeting your interviewer and can act accordingly.

PART 2: THE MBA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

[You'll be asked lots of questions](#) during your interview on topics ranging from your background to your skills to your goals. The following are the most common MBA interview questions, and although you might not encounter these exact questions, they are likely to come up in one way or another during your interview.

Question #1: Walk me through your resume.

What are they really asking?

This question (or some version of it) is very often the first one asked in an MBA interview. It should be fairly easy to answer and typically provides a foundation on which the rest of the interview can be built. As you answer, your interviewer will be observing whether you remain focused while speaking, whether you seem particularly nervous, and how well you can summarize your work accomplishments succinctly while at the same time providing a narrative about your career progression. All this information helps the interviewer manage the interview.

Your interviewer will have already looked at your resume, but this is your chance to explain the “why” behind the information it presents. It’s your responsibility now to highlight some of your career accomplishments. But remember that your primary goal is to explain the reasoning and motivation behind your most significant career moves and achievements.

How to prepare your answer

Your response to this prompt should be approximately two minutes long, so once you have chosen the information you would like to highlight, [practice delivering your answer](#), repeating it out loud several times to make sure it fits into that time frame. Believe it or not, you can say quite a lot in two minutes, provided you are making every sentence count and are not speaking generically or repeating yourself. Do not summarize everything you have done at every job. Instead, briefly discuss your accomplishments and the circumstances surrounding your move from one role to another.

The logical starting point for your response is your graduation from college. Explain why you chose to pursue the degree you earned and how it made sense to embark on the career you did, based on your education. From there, look closely at your jobs. In one or two sentences, how would you discuss your time in each role? What motivated you to move from one position to the next? For your current job, outline your primary responsibilities. While you might feel tempted to continue on and discuss why you now want an MBA, wait until your interviewer specifically asks you that question.

How to highlight particular circumstances

Situation 1: Worked two years at a consulting firm, then switched to work in marketing at a pharmaceutical company.

“While at ABC Consulting, I had an extended engagement with a major pharma company. Working there made me realize the growth and potential of the industry, and I no longer wanted to be an outsider looking in. I wanted to accomplish specific goals of XYZ.”

Situation 2: Worked in operations at a manufacturer, then switched to finance.

“During my time in operations, I worked closely with the finance group in preparing our supply chain forecast. Through that experience, I came to realize that I really love numbers and that finance more closely fits with where I see my career going. I made the case to senior management, and after recognizing my capabilities in the area, they found a spot for me.”

Situation 3: Moved up in the organization from analyst to senior analyst to associate.

“I was fortunate to be involved in projects that gave me a lot of responsibility early on, and I had supportive mentors along the way. This allowed me to be recognized for my contributions and move up in the organization.” *[In this type of situation, mentioning a few details of the projects would be appropriate.]*

Key points to remember

- The focus in these answers is on the “why” more than the “what” in [your career thus far](#).
- Don’t offer details that the interviewer doesn’t need or hasn’t asked for. Highlight the most important things and move on. If the interviewer says, “Tell me about yourself,” it is appropriate to give the details about your work experience while also sharing some relevant personal background. These details might include where you grew up, interesting information about your childhood or schooling, why you chose the university you did, and why you elected to study what you did.

Question #2: Why this MBA program?

What are they really asking?

This question is intended to gauge the sincerity of a candidate's interest in the school and to reveal how they view their fit and how/where they might make an impact.

How to prepare your answer

Your job is to show that [your reasons for applying to the program](#) go well beyond the obvious elements of reputation, network, and/or location. You need to display genuine enthusiasm and passion – but not gushing, over-the-top cheerleading. Be as specific as possible with your reasons, which could include the following:

1. Distinctive curriculum necessary to reach your goals
2. Faculty members you are excited to learn from (and why)
3. School clubs or organizations you are looking forward to joining and how you will make an impact
4. Value-added components of the program that intrigue you, such as study abroad opportunities, internships, and entrepreneurship projects

If you were able to visit the school, mention aspects of that visit that have added to your excitement about being a part of the community, such as the classroom environment; conversations you had with students, admissions officers, or other applicants; and the overall feeling you had while on campus.

Key points to remember

- Make sure that your answer is specific enough to the program that it could not also refer to other schools you are looking at. Ideally, this will be an easy question for you because you are legitimately enthusiastic about the prospect of attending. Even if the school is not your top choice, and possibly even a safety school, you still need to convince your interviewer that it makes sense to offer you admission, and that if admitted, there is a decent chance you would attend. By sharing why you are excited and how you will make an impact, you are helping the interviewer see you as a contributing member of the community.

Question #3: What is your weakness?

What are they really asking?

Nobody is perfect. Your interviewer wants to measure how self-aware you are and whether you possess a healthy degree of humility.

How to prepare your answer

Spend some time reflecting on how you are striving to be your best self. In a work context, what areas do you need to develop? Where do you find yourself stuck? Is there a consistent theme or issue that comes up in your performance reviews? Sometimes we don't want to acknowledge our weaknesses to others, but doing so is the precursor to growth. If you have taken steps to mitigate a known weakness, it should be on your list of possible responses.

Once you have identified a few areas for improvement, you can plan to [portray those weaknesses](#) as the flip sides of strengths. For example, being too detail oriented might bog you down with additional work, but it also ensures that you are thorough, leaving no stone unturned. You might admit that you are working to consistently find a balance between the two. In this particular example, you might create extra work for yourself, but you also have a strong work ethic.

Key points to remember

- When discussing your weaknesses, focus primarily on how you are working to improve them and how they also double as strengths.
- If you have identified an area where you could improve and have taken steps to address the issue, share both it and the plans you have to mitigate the weakness.
- Try to have at least two weaknesses to discuss that are not situational, such as "My professional network is weak because I am surrounded primarily by IT people."

Question #4: Why do you need an MBA?

What are they really asking?

The schools want to know whether your reasons for earning an MBA match what the MBA degree will provide you in terms of both the academic content and your intended career path.

How to prepare your answer

Regardless of the function or industry you're coming from, the likely answer to the "Why MBA?" question is that you have a significant amount of depth in your particular field. And to break free of being labeled as simply a subject matter expert, you need to develop more breadth.

Most people pursue an MBA to move into a management role or to change fields. To succeed in management, you need to have an understanding of all functional areas of business, from finance to operations to technology. An MBA degree provides the toolbox you need to succeed in management in the shortest amount of time.

For career switchers, including those coming from a nontraditional background, a full-time MBA program is a great way to make that transition. It gives you access to critical coursework, training in "soft skills" and leadership, the all-important summer internship, and other key resources and opportunities.

Key points to remember

- This is not meant to be a "gotcha" question. The interviewer simply wants to ensure that your expectations for the MBA are in line with what the program delivers.
- Be specific about how the school and its resources support your professional development and post-MBA career goals. If you need to develop specific skills to successfully achieve your short-term goal, be sure to share this information with your interviewer.
- There is no doubt that adding an MBA degree to your resume will bolster credibility and prestige. Still, you don't want to come across as someone interested in an MBA degree only because of the pedigree. That is a big turnoff.

Question #5: How will you contribute to the program?

What are they really asking?

The admissions committee is looking to put together [a diverse group of people](#), not just in terms of work experience and ethnic background but also in terms of life experience. They want to know that you can already visualize how you will add to the overall MBA experience of your class.

How to prepare your answer

In thinking about how to respond to this question, you should consider the following:

- What makes you truly individual, uncommon in your thinking, background, talents, and energy?
- In what classes might your work experience be particularly useful to the learning environment?
- How do your ethnicity, culture, experiences, and/or places you have lived inform your view of the world?
- What personal interests or hobbies do you have that might provide you with a unique perspective on an activity at or aspect of the school?
- What would you like to initiate at the school?
- Overall, how will the experience of others be richer because you are in the class?
- Key points to remember
- Imagine that the admissions committee must choose between you and someone else with a similar demographic profile and work experience. What will make them choose you?

Question #6: What questions do you have?

What are they really asking?

The interviewer wants to confirm that you have thoroughly researched the program and have pertinent, thoughtful questions that will allow you to round out your knowledge about it.

How to prepare your answer

This is probably the only question you can be certain will be asked in the interview, [so take sufficient time to consider what you want to ask](#). Write down your questions so you don't have to stress about remembering them during the interview.

Avoid procedural questions such as "When will I find out about your decision?" You can ask these types of questions after your interview if the topics weren't covered. Thoughtful questions could focus on "big picture" topics, such as school strategy or trends, or relate to various features of the program, such as particular coursework, and how those features are relevant to your goals.

Consider sharing a fact you learned while doing your research on the school, and ask a question related to that fact. For example, you might say, "I read about the school's Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Strategic Plan on your website. What have been some early successes that have benefitted the students in the program?"

The best questions will prompt the interviewer to dig deep into their knowledge of the school. They might even need to do a bit of research and get back to you with the answer, which would give you an additional opportunity to connect with someone critical to your admissions decision.

Key points to remember

- Even if you have memorized all the content on the school's website, visited the campus, and already asked (and had answered) all the questions you think you could possibly ever have, come up with two or three nonprocedural questions for when you are asked. A blank stare or "I have no other questions" just looks bad.
- This will most likely be your last opportunity to ask questions about the program before you find out the admissions committee's decision, so make sure your questions count.

Additional MBA interview questions

Some of our clients have shared a variety of questions they were asked during their MBA interviews. Many of the following were expected questions and match or are very similar to the ones we have discussed in this guide. Others might take you by surprise.

- Discuss your career progression.
- Give examples of how you have demonstrated leadership inside and outside the work environment.*
- What are your short-term and long-term goals with regard to business function, industry, and location?
- Why are you pursuing an MBA? Why now?
- Describe an ethical dilemma you faced at work. How did you handle it?*
- Describe your career aspirations.
- What would you do if not accepted?
- Why does this school appeal to you?
- Tell me about a time when you were in a leadership role and faced a challenge. How did you approach it, and what was the resolution?*
- What is an activity you are involved in? Why is it important to you?
- Can you share some of the experiences you have had at work?
- [Why are you interested in a general MBA program?](#)
- Why did you choose your undergraduate major?
- Describe yourself.
- What contributions would you make to a group?
- What are three words or phrases you would use to describe yourself to others?

- What do you find most frustrating at work?
- How would your coworkers describe you?
- Describe a typical workday.
- Have you worked in a team environment? What were your contributions to the effort?
- Discuss any [experience you have had abroad](#).
- How did you choose your job after college?
- What do you do to relieve stress?
- It's two years after graduation – what three words would your team members use to describe you?
- Describe a situation where you brought an idea forward and it failed.*
- How do you define success?
- What would you do if a team member wasn't pulling their weight?

*Use the STAR method to respond to these behavioral questions, sharing the situation, task, action, and result. Spend the majority of your time focusing on the action(s) you took and the outcomes.




WHAT'S NEXT?

We hope you feel much better prepared now for your MBA interview! Our goal for this guide was to help you nail your upcoming interview, though it's always a good idea to bolster your preparation by working one-on-one with an expert advisor at Accepted. Check out our [Mock Interview Packages](#), and get the guidance you need to GET ACCEPTED!

Want to speak with an Accepted MBA admissions expert first? Sign up for a free consultation!

GET STARTED!

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