A QUICK GUIDE TO MBA APPLICATIONS

From the mentor of end-to-end boutique MBA Admissions Consulting

Gauri Gharpure

Founder, Scholar Edits

Columbia University | Fulbright Fellow

Foreword

I have mentored close to 1000 applications since establishing Scholar Edits in 2022. Now, I find great joy in democratising some of the knowledge that I share with the handful of MBA aspirants, and candidates to other top global programs, every year.

In this book, you will find meaningful and straightforward guidance on many aspects of the MBA Admissions process. I have covered essay writing advice, interview prep tips, and nuances of application strategy into three sections. Most topics have been dealt with crisply, keeping in view your precious time amid busy professions and other callings.

This guide was designed to bring clarity, not overwhelm. If you are ready for structured, one-on-one guidance—grounded in reflection, strategy, and honest feedback, I would be glad to help you navigate the journey. If this guide raises more questions than it answered, that's a good sign. It shows you followed through and identified areas for improvement through your curiosity and sincerity to know more. Please feel free to reach out to me should you want to discuss any topic in greater detail or would like to consider enrolling for our end-to-end mentoring package.

Here's sincerely hoping that this free e-book provides some degree of clarity to the otherwise daunting process of MBA applications.

All the best!

Gauri Gharpure
9 January

Table of Content
(Clickable)

Essays

Anchoring the narrative

01 Key themes in MBA essays

02 Narratives using STAR and CAR formats

03 Fun facts in MBA essays

04 Embrace your wins

05 From vague to vivid

06 How to approach failure essays

07 How to write optional essays

08 How to write the challenge essay

09 McCombs essays' analysis

10 ISB essays' analysis

MBA Interviews

Reiterating your story

01 Practical tips for a confident MBA interview presence

02 Balancing being spontaneous and being prepared

Application Strategy

Perks of the right mindset

01 Chasing deadlines

02 Weak Profiles

03 Who is not suited for LORs

04 Guidance on school shortlisting

05 Virtues of competitive MBA candidates

ESSAYS: *Key themes in MBA essays*

Navigating Change

Pick stories that best highlight how you handled transitions and adapted to new environments. Talk about how you led through uncertainty by focusing on the characteristics that helped you the most to navigate change.

Intentions Behind Actions

Writing a leadership story? Ensure sharing insight into the motivations that drove your decisions. Explaining “why” you made certain choices is just as important as the “how” you enabled the project’s success.

Decision-Making in Difficult Times

Essays on this theme explore how you respond to high-pressure or morally complex situations, showcasing your ability to think critically and maintain integrity. Word of caution: Refrain from calling out others in a bad light to put a positive twist to your side of the story.

Overcoming Challenges

This theme focuses on resilience and problem-solving. Schools want to see how you approach obstacles, whether personal or professional, and what you learned from those experiences.

Leadership in Team Environments

MBA programs are collaborative, so essays may ask you to demonstrate how you’ve led or contributed to teams, highlighting interpersonal skills, empathy, and collaboration.

DEI – Awareness and Practice

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential values in today’s business world. Essays in this area explore your understanding of DEI and how you actively contribute to fostering inclusive environments.

★★★★★

When I started my business school applications, I knew essays would be a game-changer, but I wasn’t sure how to make mine stand out. That’s when I found Scholar Edits, and honestly, from the first call with Gauri, I felt like I was in good hands.

Swathi N
(NUS, Warwick, Manchester, Bath)

Narratives using STAR and CAR formats

Are you too caught up in the "context" to shine the spotlight on yourself? A note on essay structures using STAR and CAR formats.

The STAR and CAR methods of structuring essays or interviews are quite common.

STAR stands for Situation > Task > Action > Result and CAR stands for Context > Action > Result.These frameworks are powerful because they help candidates highlight impact and leadership.

Though fairly common, these formats are often used less optimally.

I have noticed that many candidates get carried away with the situation - or context - and have a tough time fitting their contributions to the story.

Many candidates spend 60 - 70% of their word count or speaking time setting up the situation/context. This makes the essay sound like a case study rather than a personal achievement.

Context should not take more than 20–25% of the essay/interview answer. The bulk should highlight Action and Result - your initiative, decision-making, and impact.

“Shift the spotlight” from the setting to self, because Adcoms and interviewers want to know you, not just the backdrop.

Remember, Adcoms and interviewers already understand business challenges. What they don’t know is how you navigated them. Keep the context brief and dedicate the bulk to your actions and results.

In short: less case study, more you. That’s how you turn a neat structure into a powerful personal story.

When every word counts, structure and intent matter more than polish.

DOWNLOAD FULL GUIDE