

INTRODUCTION: The Stacy Blackman Consulting Essay Guides

MBA program applications require you to respond to a series of essay questions on a variety of topics including your career progress, career goals, accomplishments and setbacks, and potential contributions to the program's student community.

Before putting fingers to keyboard, it's a good practice to first consider who your reader will be, what the subject matter is, and your objective for the writing assignment. The answers to these three questions are fairly straightforward:

WHO IS MY READER?

The Admissions Committee

WHAT IS THE SUBJECT MATTER?

My attributes, strengths, achievements, and goals, which combine to form a complete picture of me

WHAT IS MY OBJECTIVE IN WRITING THESE ESSAY?

To earn an acceptance letter

The next question isn't so easy to answer:

WHAT SHOULD I WRITE ABOUT?

The subject matter of the essay - your attributes, strengths, achievements, and goals—is decidedly broad. At this point, most applicants feel a bit stumped. As they consider possible directions for their essay, one question crops up again and again:

WHAT IS PROGRAM X LOOKING FOR?

If they only knew what the admissions officers were looking for, then they'd have a much easier time selecting essay topics and stories that will feature those relevant attributes and talents.

It would be helpful if each school's admissions committee told you exactly what they were looking for. Representatives of the program from admissions officer to current students certainly offer plenty of clues, but there is no definitive source of reference.

The Dean of Admissions for one of the top programs responded as follows when asked what his program was looking for:

"We look for people who will contribute in a meaningful way to our community...We don't just look at one thing - we look at the whole picture and think about the fit."

When reviewing your application, the admissions committee is trying to determine if who you are, what you've accomplished, and what you hope to achieve in the future is a good fit for their institution. With this in mind, we can refine our answer to the question above about your objective for this essay writing "assignment." Your end goal is, of course, to earn an acceptance letter, but the way you do so is to persuade the admissions committee that you fit. You must look at your strengths and achievements through the lens of the admissions officers. The essay are your opportunity to communicate those strengths and provide multiple reasons to believe that you will fit in next year's class.

You may be saying to yourself:**“OKAY, GREAT! BUT WHAT SHOULD I WRITE ABOUT?!”**

This essay guide will help you answer that question in three key ways:

- 1) Based on over a decade of experience with the admissions offices of the most competitive MBA programs, we will offer some insight into what constitutes “fit” for the program being discussed. By listening carefully to the admissions officers over the years and by paying close attention to the profiles of successful applicants, we have assembled a list of the fundamental qualities and attributes that each program values. As you might expect, there is some degree of overlap between programs, but we have tailored the discussion in each guide to the specific program being evaluated.
- 2) Keeping this list of qualities top of mind, we will offer analysis and advice on the typical essay questions asked by this program. We will share the most important lessons we’ve learned over the years while working with our clients on these essays. These practical lessons should significantly enhance your ability to choose the right subjects and stories for your essay and will help you to avoid the pitfalls that trip up many applicants, thereby saving you time and improving the quality of your output.
- 3) Many of the lessons and the do’s and don’ts will be illustrated with essay excerpts and, in some cases, complete drafts. Not only will we show you essays that worked and analyze why they worked, we also will show you essays that didn’t hit the mark and demonstrate how a different strategy or story was better suited. In other cases, we will discuss how to improve the execution to make a particular essay more effective. By applying these case study lessons to your own work, you will greatly improve your execution on the stories you decide to share with the admissions committee, enabling you to assemble a set of essays that represents the best of who you are.