



MBA Interviews

Course Textbook

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MBA Interviews

INTRODUCTION

Organization of the Manual

“Section One” focuses on the message you want to give in the interview; the main strategy is to understand your past and form goals about the future. “Section Two” deals with the delivery and tone of your message. “Section Three” discusses interview questions and content. “Section Four” covers the logistical issues of preparing for a successful interview. Finally, “Appendix A” and “Appendix B” are useful for applicants who want to review basic speech patterns used in interviews. Even advanced level English speakers may want to quickly review “Appendix A” and “Appendix B.” “Appendix C” is beneficial for applicants to get a better idea of the types of questions you could be asked in an interview. While “Appendix D” is a guide to show the verbal and non-verbal strengths and weaknesses the interviewer will be looking for during the interview.

Role of the Interview

The role of the interview is to convince the admissions committee that you have the personality and English communication skills to succeed in an MBA program and in the career you pursue after receiving your MBA.

In school you will be participating in classes, seminars, and team projects, all of which require you to be confident in your English-speaking skills. Since English ability cannot be gauged by GMAT and TOEFL scores alone, schools often rely on interviews to assess this critical skill.

Schools want to know that you have the personality of a leader and that you are likely to succeed in your future career. During the interview, interviewers will be evaluating your self-confidence, your ability to remain calm under pressure, and your ability to think on the spot: skills that will help you succeed in the business world.

Although the topics covered in interviews often resemble those in your application essays, the purposes of the essays and interviews are quite different. When reading your essays, the admissions committee will focus on your professional skills, knowledge, experience, and vision; the interviewer, however, will focus on your communication skills and personality.

What can you deliver in the 30, 45 or 60 minutes allotted for the interview? You will most likely talk about your selling points and the reasons you are committed to this particular school. You may also have to discuss your weaknesses, such as why you think you should be accepted with a GMAT score below the school’s average. It is important that you identify *beforehand* the key points you want to make.

You need to think about how you want to come across in the interview. Of course you want to appear confident in your ability to communicate, but this is not enough. You also want to make an impact on the interviewer. For example, if you are the only person who had an exciting conversation with an interviewer about a common interest

in jazz, the interviewer will remember you well. What makes you memorable could be anything, from your personality to your professional background to your hobbies, so look for opportunities to showcase your strengths and your distinctiveness.

Your Essays and Resume in an Interview

The core content of an interview can be similar to what you wrote in your essays. You can and should use your essays to prepare for an interview. Some interviews may ask you to provide information not in your essays, but even if the examples change, your core strengths and the way you present yourself should remain the same. Interview answers should not exactly duplicate the content of your essays, because if an interviewer has read your essays, such responses would be boring and repetitive. Even if you are repeating some content in your interview that you used in your essays, you should avoid using the same phrases and you should try to give different details. Also remember that your interviewer might not have read your essays.

For most interviewers, your resume is their introduction to you. They won't base all their questions on it, but you can assume they will use it a guide. You should be able to fully expand upon any point covered in your resume; also remember to bring a few copies of your resume with you because you never know when an interview might ask for one.

Preparing for an Interview

There is no way to prepare for every possible question, nor should you try to. Interviews are designed to give you a chance to show how well you think and communicate, not how well you can recite memorized answers. People who have overly prepared (for example, by memorizing answers for common questions) come across as stiff and unnatural. It is better to practice answering questions in a variety of ways without relying on memorized phrases. Doing so will make you sound more natural. No matter how tough the interview is, remember to be passionate about what you are telling the interviewer. After all, you are talking about your life—if you aren't enthusiastic about it, your interviewer won't be either.

Eight Steps to a Successful Interview

1. Read the MBA Interviews course text at home
2. Review your essays
3. Pick out key words for your self-marketing strategy (e.g. three strengths and three weaknesses)
4. Practice at home (with an audio or video recorder, if possible)
5. Review your responses and evaluate their effectiveness
6. Revise your strategy and focus your message
7. Set up a practice session with a counselor; follow up with the same or different counselor(s) as needed
8. Keep practicing on your own; you want to sound natural and confident

Section One:

THE MESSAGE

Your Knowledge Pyramid

Business schools value candidates whose careers have a clear trajectory—they are far more likely to accept somebody whose past experiences and business school ambitions point in one direction. If they can't see an overall purpose in your decision to attend business school, they will be unlikely to accept you. For this reason you need to think about your overall “story” carefully. What role does business school play in this story?

To create a coherent story, you should reflect on your past experience and formulate your future goals. Importantly, you also need to imagine how an MBA at the school you are applying is connected to your professional past and future. One way to envision this process is develop a “Knowledge Pyramid”:



First, you need to review your past experiences. This will help you answer questions about significant events in your past that made you who you are today; it will also help you explain how your past has prepared you to pursue your future goals.

Second, you need to develop plans and goals for your professional future. Having a goal is not enough; you need to be able to *articulate* that goal clearly.

Finally, you need to understand how an MBA relates both to your past and your future. How will an MBA help you achieve your career goals, and why is now the best time to get one? Considering answers to these questions will help you decide which business schools best suit your needs. In an interview, be ready to say in detail how that one school complements your plans.

Interview Evaluation Criteria

One of the best ways to understand what interviewers are looking for is to understand their criteria. The following sample interview report shows how an interviewer is instructed to evaluate you:

MBA INTERVIEW REPORT For Fall 2009 Admissions

Applicant's Name: _____

1. Presentation and Communication Skills

(Is the applicant articulate, sufficiently professional, poised, energetic, articulate, perceptive, enthusiastic, and someone who would work well with diverse and International classmates? If the applicant is a non-native English speaker, please comment on English speaking and listening skills.)

Score _____

2. Leadership/Teamwork Skills

(Ask the candidate about their leadership style, examples of taking initiative, effectiveness in a team, and/or demonstrated capabilities in leadership and team roles. Assess the candidate's level of self awareness as a leader and as a contributor to teams. Is the candidate able to articulate key strengths/weaknesses? Does the candidate have clearly defined leadership development goals?)

Score _____

3. Goals

(What are the candidate's short and long-term goals? Are they well conceived and believable? Does the candidate show sufficient motivation and energy to meet their objectives?)

Score _____

4. Strengths/Contributions

(What are the candidate's strengths? What, if any, unique qualities or experiences make this candidate stand out? Some things to consider: unique and relevant expertise, evidence of a strategic perspective, ability to analyze/evaluate business situations, creativity, strong communication skills, international perspective)

Score _____

5. Commitment to Our School

(Does the candidate demonstrate sufficient awareness of OUR SCHOOL's program? What other schools did the applicant apply to? How committed is the applicant to OUR SCHOOL in comparison to other schools?)

Score _____

6. Warning Signs

(Any significant concerns or possible problems? Please give examples.)

7. Overall Evaluation

(Consider intellectual ability, contribution to the program, hire-ability, and commitment to OUR SCHOOL, Potential contribution as an alum, and general fit to our program)

Score _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Date Submitted: _____

As the sample interview form shows, you will be evaluated using fairly specific criteria. While this is not an actual interview form, it is based on our knowledge of the kind of criteria used by MBA programs. To summarize, interviewers are looking for:

1. Presentation and Communication Skills
2. Leadership/Teamwork Skills
3. Goals: Your Future Vision
4. Strengths and Contributions: Professional and Personal Qualities
5. Commitment to and Knowledge about their MBA Program
6. Warning Signs: Do You Have Any Particular Weaknesses?

Keep these criteria in mind as you prepare for interviews. Feel free to ask your counselor for specific feedback on any one of these areas during your practice interview sessions.

Knowing Your Message

While the interviewer will be asking you questions and you must give appropriate answers, you do have both the ability and responsibility to guide the interview in a way that allows you to showcase your strengths and distinctiveness. The way that you can do this is to know, in advance, what your **selling points** are.

Selling points can be:

- Accomplishments
- Strengths
- Interests
- Goals
- Leadership experiences
- Teamwork experiences
- Your motivation for MBA study
- Unusual/interesting facts about yourself

If you have a set list of things you definitely want to talk about, it will be easier for you to represent yourself as impressively as possible.

Section Two:
DELIVERY

Making a Strong First Impression

You will be leaving the interviewers with an impression of your personality—the key is what that impression will be. First impressions are made in the first 5 to 10 minutes and are difficult to change, especially in a relatively short interview. Studies have repeatedly shown that first impressions have a significant impact on whether someone succeeds or fails in an interview. Therefore, assume that the first few minutes of your interview will have an enormous impact on the interviewer.

Your interviewer will be paying attention to your level of enthusiasm, especially about your future. A high level of energy will give the impression that you will follow through on your plans. If you present yourself with confidence, composure, and passion, your interviewer will gain trust in your ability to succeed in the future.

In addition, you will be displaying your own way of dealing with people. For example, think about what kind of personality you exhibit at work, on teams, when dealing with clients, or in meetings. Do you present your ideas assertively, in an organized manner? Are you warm and supportive of people? Do your interactions usually involve humor? Show the interviewer that you are the kind of person the school wants as a member of its next MBA class.

You will be evaluated based on your ability to keep an *easy, conversational style* with the interviewer, so you should try to *relax* and *smile*. Remember that the interviewer is trying to get a sense of your personality and sociability. Be positive, friendly and make sure you are listening deeply to their questions.

It is important to make a strong first impression—to do so you need a clear, articulate message, and you need to deliver it with poise, energy, and enthusiasm.

Controlling Your Body Language

Body language is highly relevant to English communication. You must not only sound poised, energetic, and enthusiastic, you must look poised, energetic, and enthusiastic! Body language has the power to reinforce words, or detract from them.

Steady *eye contact* is particularly important: do not look down, do not look at the interviewer's notes page, and do not look away from the interviewer too much.

When speaking, it is very important that you *project your voice*. This is especially critical for a telephone or SKYPE interview. Speaking too softly is likely to make it harder for someone to hear you. Additionally it creates the appearance of being weak or shy. Don't yell, but do speak in a clear, strong voice with varied intonation to emphasize key points.

Generally, the interviewer will approach the applicant and offer his or her hand at

some point during the introduction. The applicant should respond with a firm, single-squeeze *handshake*. It is also acceptable for the applicant to offer his or her hand first. You should be aware that a handshake that is too long, too short, too firm or too weak may create a negative first impression, so it is advisable to practice your handshake with a trained interviewer such as your counselor. He or she can give you feedback about the first impression you are giving through your handshake. A confident handshake can create a good first impression and get the interview started in a positive way.

Making Small Talk

Another way that you can make a positive impression is by making effective use of casual conversation, which we call “small talk.” When meeting anyone for the first time, especially in a formal setting, it is common to make small talk. An admissions interview is no different.

Remember that your opening chatting about the weather or your trip or some other common and neutral topic is the interviewer’s first chance to gauge your basic social skills. Even if you are not confident, fake it.

If you have little experience making small talk or are concerned about your skills in this area, please see the appendix of your textbook for examples of possible topics to discuss. Additionally, your interview counselor can help you practice small talk if you are uncomfortable or unsure of your skills in this area.

Stating Your Conclusion First

When you answer a question, begin with your conclusion first and then add details. For many native speakers of Japanese, getting used to this way of presentation is hard. One of the biggest differences between the way information is usually presented in English and Japanese is that in English, stating one’s conclusion first is considered to be most effective, while in Japanese it is generally considered to be more effective to provide sufficient context first.

You should limit your responses to one main idea per answer:

Example I:

Question: “On your resume, you focused on your sales results. What do you think explains your success?”

Answer: “I think the reason I have been so successful as a salesman has to do with my ability to listen to my clients.”

Example II:

Question: “Why did you transfer to the marketing department?”

Answer: “After becoming my company’s top salesman in 2002, I realized that I wanted to develop skills in marketing as well as...”

Example III:

Question: “Why are you being sponsored for an MBA?”

Answer: “My company is sponsoring my MBA because senior management thinks I can play a key role in managing our entire organization.”

Be Brief, but Prepared to Expand

In an English-language interview, you should create the appearance that you’re answers are spontaneous, not scripted, and should provide initial answers that take the form of a statement rather than a speech. Therefore:

- Keep your initial answer short, roughly 30 seconds for a simple question and up to 2 minutes for a difficult, compound question.
- Cut out background information you might have included in your essay on the same topic. Add it only if you are asked to follow-up or give more details.
- Put your main point first.

While giving an answer that is too long is certainly undesirable, you do not want to give answers that are too short, either. Giving “one word answers,” such as a simple “yes” or “no” can give the impression that you are unenthusiastic about the interview, so always explain these answers by providing enough details for the interview to be able to understand the “how’s” and the “why’s” of your story or response. And of course, be prepared to give more detail if asked to do so. It might also be helpful to prepare a list of 1 or 2 follow-up questions and answers to possible questions the interview could ask you about your response.

Managing Your Tone

One mistake that many interviewees make is approaching the interview as a series of speeches they must deliver. This is a very ineffective strategy and can leave an interviewer with the impression that the person being interviewed is unable to speak intelligently without a great deal of preparation. In your interview, give unscripted statements, not memorized speeches.

In terms of the overall tone of your interview, the most important thing is to **BE POSITIVE!** Because your interviewer is deciding whether or not you would be a good addition to their school, you want to come across as a positive, proactive candidate. You should never complain or say anything that could be interpreted as being negative. It is certainly appropriate to talk about failures/weaknesses/dislikes if you are specifically asked by your interviewer to do so, but you should not volunteer this information if not asked.

Adjusting Your Style Based on the Interviewer

It is helpful to know the different personality types of interviewers and the different styles of interviews. While most interviewers are professional and friendly, you should be prepared for unusual interviewers. Three extreme styles are described below. Hints are given for how to deal with each type:

“The Unhelpful Interviewer”

–gives no response/support

Winning Strategy:

–signal when you are done

This type of interviewer reads off a list of questions in a business-like manner and waits while you provide complete answers to each. Such an interviewer is likely to sit quietly, take notes on what you say, and may make no effort to make you comfortable or to encourage you to relax.

Strategy: It is tempting to fill in any periods of silence, but you may end up saying things you didn't intend to say. Instead, when you're finished with an answer to a question, say something to signal that you are done. For example: “So, those are the three main reasons I want to go to Berkeley.” Be patient; the interviewer will eventually move on to the next question.

“The Overly-Casual Interviewer”

– you forget why you are there

Winning Strategy:

–take control of your message

The interviewer doesn't seem to be interviewing you. Instead, you seem to be having a free conversation, friendly and casual. The interviewer may interrupt frequently to follow up on something you said. You may even find the interviewer offering you information about him or herself.

Strategy: It is okay to relax and speak naturally in such a situation, because the interviewer is probably just assessing your personality and communication ability. Perhaps he or she has already decided you are qualified based on your other application materials so is more concerned about getting to know you, rather than gathering more information about your past or future. It is sometimes easy to forget you are still being interviewed, so remember to keep in mind how you want to come across.

“The Aggressive Interviewer”

–seems to be judging you negatively

Winning Strategy:

–think of possible gaps in your logic,
then defend yourself with confidence and certainty

This type of interviewer is aggressive and interrogates you ruthlessly. For every answer you provide, he or she asks you to explain in more detail. The interviewer seems to want to make you uncomfortable.

Strategy: Although this type of interviewer is not common, you should be prepared for the possibility. This behavior may actually be the interviewer’s attempt to see how you handle a difficult situation. The most important thing to do is to stay composed and not betray your nervousness through negative body language. Be ready for surprise questions and think more about delivering your answers with confidence than about saying the “right thing.” Also while preparing for the interview, pay close attention to the areas in which you are weakest, because aggressive interviewers will be looking for how you handle questions related to any perceived weaknesses or unexplained portions of your application.

Generally speaking, you will probably have an interviewer who is friendly, yet poses tough questions. Regardless of the interviewer, try to maintain your confidence and demonstrate that you are ready for even the most challenging English-speaking environment.

Interview Language and Etiquette

Just as there are social customs for *mensetsu* in Japan, there are customs for interviews that are widely shared among English-speaking countries.

If you have an alumni interview, you won’t know in advance which social customs your interviewer will follow, so you need to be flexible. A Japanese alumnus may follow *mensetsu* protocol, English-language interview etiquette, or mix the two. In general, try to follow the cues given. For example, if the interviewer offers to shake

your hand, you should be ready to offer your hand in return. Conversely, if he or she offers you a business card following Japanese custom, you should follow the appropriate custom in return.

Using the right language and etiquette is an important part of presenting yourself effectively. We have created **Appendix A and Appendix B** for those who need basic models for communicating effectively in interviews. These have been specifically designed for low to intermediate-level English speakers. However, we suggest everyone reading this manual review these appendices at least once.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Common mistakes, even very simple ones, can give the interviewer an overall negative of yourself, so they should be avoided. The following are some of the most common mistakes made in interviews:

Apologizing for Your English

Don't apologize or go back to fix a grammatical mistake. Although English is important in interviews, it is not your accuracy that is being judged, but rather your ability to convey ideas. After all, even native speakers make grammatical mistakes when speaking.

If you are not a native speaker of English, you are not expected to speak like one. However, to communicate well in school, you need to be able to get your ideas across and this is what you should demonstrate in your interview. As long as the interviewer shows signs that he or she understands you, keep going.

Your goal should be communication. This means both understanding your interviewer and having your interviewer understand you. Don't be worried if your interviewer asks you to repeat something. And don't worry if you have to ask your interviewer to repeat something, especially the question itself. This is a normal part of the communication process. If you are in doubt about the meaning of a question, either repeat the question to be sure you understood it correctly, or politely ask the interviewer to repeat it. This avoids the embarrassment of answering the wrong question!

Giving Memorized Responses

If you memorize your essays or an interview script, it will be obvious to your interviewer that you are not thinking, and just speaking. It is also possible that you will give the impression that you are a poor listener, because you may not adjust your message to what is being asked. Additionally, those who memorize their answers often do not know when to stop. Or worse, when the interviewer asks a question while you are still giving your answer, you could lose your "place" or get distracted, forget what you want to say and lose an opportunity to present yourself as a confident and capable

applicant.

While memorization can, at times, be necessary for low level speakers of English, we strongly encourage even low-level speakers to move away from their script as soon as possible. However, if needed, it can be effective for you, while practicing your responses, to write down or memorize key points you would like to convey during the interview.

An interview should be treated more like a conversation than an oral examination. In conversations, no one wants to listen to long memorized speeches. If you give a long, dull response, your interviewer will probably feel bored and stop listening. Your main point will be lost and the interviewer may doubt your communication skills. Remember that there are few if any “set expressions” in English interviews and native speakers of English value spontaneity.

Being Negative

One of the worst things you can do in an interview is to give the impression that you have a negative attitude. Being thoughtful, even critical, is important, but if you come across as someone who complains, who is ultimately more of a critic than a creator, who finds fault with others, or who otherwise dwells on the negative aspects of an experience, you could be seriously undermining your interview. Successful businesspeople are, for the most part, optimists. The entrepreneurial mentality, which is often at the core of the MBA experience, is about finding opportunity and is thus inherently optimistic. You should come across as someone who has made the best of life’s opportunities, is forward thinking, and does not dwell on the negative.

Avoiding Eye Contact

Do your best to look at your interviewer(s) as you speak as much as possible. A lack of eye contact can often have unintended consequences: you may appear to be less-confident, you may appear unsure of what you are saying, or worse, you may appear untruthful!

Being Confused/Uncertain

An MBA program is a huge time and financial commitment. Such life decisions should not be made without sufficient thought. If you come across as uncertain about your academic and/or professional goals, your interviewer is highly likely to question your suitability for a MBA program. Making a clear and well thought out argument for your goals is absolutely critical.

Not Focusing on Overall Impact

Keep in mind that the overall impression and total impact of your statements matter most.

Since the judgment of the interviewer is based on overall impression, don't lose confidence if you have made a mistake or can't think of a word. If this happens, just move on. For example, if you cannot think of a word, it is important to keep the conversation moving forward; don't freeze and spend too much time trying to find the "perfect" word. If you don't know the answer to a question, it is better to say simply "I don't know" and steer the interview back to strong ground than to fake an unconvincing answer.

Not Asking Enough Questions

In most interviews, simply passively answering questions is not the best strategy to take. You need to be fully engaged in the conversation and therefore should ask questions when appropriate. Don't just limit yourself to questions at the end of the interview.

For example, it is better for you to clarify an unclear question than to answer it without knowing if you properly understood it.

Also, do not say "yes" as an unconscious response before answering questions: in English this sounds like you are anticipating the question, agreeing with the question, or saying that you understand it—all three of these interpretations are distractions. Instead of saying "yes", use keywords from the question in response.

Finally, from a school's perspective, the interview is the best predictor of an applicant's classroom behavior. Someone who asks questions in an interview is more likely to do so in the classroom and is therefore more likely to add real value to the class. We recommend preparing a list of 5 questions that show your interest in the program and research you have done about the opportunities available. In general, asking obvious questions available on the school's website, like about average TOEFL or GMAT scores of successful applicants is not effective.

Section Three:
CONTENT

Self-Introduction

After a short period of small talk an interviewer will often begin the interview by saying something like: “*Tell me about yourself.*” This is your opportunity to make your *first strong impression* and showcase your personal presentation and communication skills.

When asked to tell an interviewer about yourself, take every opportunity to show that you are achievement-oriented and constantly strive to develop both personally and professionally. At the same time, show yourself to be a well-balanced and sensible person with varied interests and an active life outside of work and MBA preparation.

“Tell me about yourself” is a very broad question, and there is a great deal of information that could be appropriate; however, you do not have to give your entire life story, only a very brief summary. Two sentences are usually adequate to answer this question. A useful way to approach this question is by using the following template:

“Professionally, I have...”

First, give a one-sentence work history summary, perhaps highlighting an impressive accomplishment.

“Personally, I have/am...”

Then, give a sentence highlighting what you do outside of work, such as a hobby or interesting fact about yourself.

Transition into Your Message

Every interview is different, and it is likely that you will be asked different questions in a different order by every different interviewer you encounter.

After your self-introduction, some interviewers will ask follow up questions related to what you revealed about yourself in your self introduction. Others may ask questions related to your past experiences, such as “Describe how your past schooling will help you in achieving your career goals.”

Be prepared to answer questions about anything that you have included in your resume. You may also need to be prepared to answer questions about your essays, particularly if your interviewer is an admissions committee member.

Question Categories

Interview questions typically fall into five basic categories: past, future/goals, personal, critical thinking/knowledge, and hypothetical. Additionally, one specialized type of Interview, called the “behavioral interview”, asks questions based on past experiences. The majority of interviews, however, ask questions from several of these categories. Each category gives you a chance to highlight your communication ability and winning personality from a different perspective. For each category, sample questions are given along with general advice for answering each type of question.

Past Experience Questions

It is relatively easy to talk about your past since it is familiar to you, but to do it well you need not to only provide facts about the past, but also to interpret the past to show your strengths. When answering questions about your past, look for opportunities to highlight your understanding of yourself and what you’ve experienced.

Past Questions help the interviewer find out about strengths you have shown in the past and determine how much you have learned from past experiences. During the interview, remember to interpret past events and demonstrate enthusiasm about what you have learned, even if you are discussing a failure.

Interviewers will generally ask questions about your past experience in one of two ways: conceptual or experience-based

In conceptual questions, interviewers will ask you about concepts (such as leadership or teamwork) and will expect you to give relatively general answers. You will not necessarily have to give a specific example, but you should be prepared to do so if asked.

Experience-based questions often begin with phrases like “Tell me about a time when ...” or “Give me an example of ...” These questions require you to give specific examples of events that happened in your past and details about your actions in the situation. They are best approached as an exercise in storytelling. When answering questions about your past, always look for opportunities to highlight your selling points, your understanding of yourself and what you’ve learned from your experiences.

We have broken down all the questions you might hear about your past experience into the following categories:

Academic Experience

1. Why did you choose your undergraduate school?

2. What did you do most earnestly during university?

Past academic experience is certainly one good indicator of future performance, so it is not surprising that interviewers frequently ask about academic experience. If your academic record is not strong or if you studied a field drastically different from the one in which you currently work, you need to develop an effective way of handling questions about this, because there is a good chance you will be asked.

Professional Experience

1. Why did you choose your current job/career?
2. Describe your career to date.
3. Describe a typical work day.
4. What do you like/dislike about your current job?

You must be able to clearly discuss your work. Given that much of your contribution to a class will derive from your professional experience, interviewers want to know if you have the ability to effectively discuss your work and have something interesting to say about it. Additionally, interviewers use questions about your professional experience to measure your actual level of responsibility and/or competence. Be positive when talking about your boss or your firm. If you have changed jobs, you will need to talk about the situation in such a way that shows you were motivated by a desire for more challenges, responsibilities and opportunities to grow.

Accomplishments

1. Tell me about an accomplishment.
2. What is your greatest professional accomplishment? Why?
3. What are your greatest non-professional achievements?

It is always critical that you be able to clearly discuss your accomplishments to demonstrate how your past experience shows your potential for future professional and personal growth.

Leadership

1. Are you a good leader?
2. What is your definition of leadership?
3. Describe your most valuable leadership experience.
4. Have you ever exercised leadership when you were not in an official position of leadership?

This is an important category for any MBA interview. It is critical that you be able to talk about your leadership style and your biggest influences.

The questions above use different phrases and require you to tailor your answer to best fit the question, but they are basically all seeking to learn more about your leadership

abilities. The interviewer wants to hear clear examples in which you took initiative and obtained results. Be enthusiastic about your job experience and portray yourself as one who tries to exceed expectations.

Teamwork

1. Describe your most valuable teamwork experience.
2. What has been your most difficult interaction at work?
3. Tell me about a time when you were part of a high performing team.

Your interviewer will want to hear about how you work in teams, what you contribute, and what challenges you have faced and overcome in team situations. Choose experiences that show you are the kind of team member who can make positive contributions and work well with a diverse group.

Creativity

1. What has been your most creative solution in a business setting?
2. Give an example when your thinking was different than others.
3. Have you ever had to overcome resistance to a new idea that you had proposed?

Creativity is an important characteristic in business settings. In particular, entrepreneurs, marketers, and anyone else who wants to make a career out of being innovative must be able to demonstrate their creative talent. Many business schools look for applicants who can display creativity as problem solvers. Sometimes this is referred to as “thinking outside the box.” When you think about yourself and your professional and personal experiences, we encourage you to look for any instances when you had a novel idea or approach to an old problem.

Failures

1. Tell me about a failure.
2. Have you ever failed? How did you recover from this experience and what did you learn?

Don't be afraid to talk about failure if you are asked to. If you are asked to discuss a failure, put stress on what you learnt from the experience. A key aspect of case study analysis is the ability to analyze failure. If you can't analyze your own failures, why should an interviewer think you have the ability to analyze bigger and more complex failures in your MBA classes and case studies? Failure questions are a great way to measure the richness of someone's experience, their ability to learn from past mistakes, and the depth of their thinking.

Ethical Dilemmas

1. Describe an ethical dilemma you have faced.

2. Discuss an ethical dilemma you faced at work.
3. Describe a situation where your values, ethics, or morals were challenged. How did you handle the situation?

Ethical dilemma questions, like failure questions, require you to analyze a specific past action. They are a test of your problem solving ability, a way to understand your values, and a way to obtain insight about your ability to make decisions. Given that interviewers frequently ask ethical dilemma questions, you must be prepared for this type of question.

Behavioral Patterns

(Note: After each question below, the key characteristic that is being measured is indicated)

1. Tell me about a time when you had to lead a group but faced opposition or some other challenge within the group. What did you do? What was the outcome? [*leadership*]
2. Tell me about a time when a colleague was not pulling his or her weight. What did you do? [*teamwork*]
3. Describe the most difficult experience you have had in your career. How did you proceed? [*perseverance*]
4. What is the best idea you have come up with and how did you apply it? [*creativity and initiative*]
5. Describe a time when you had to work or interact with someone who was very different from you. What was that like? [*interpersonal ability*]
6. Describe a time when you disagreed with a colleague or supervisor. What did you do? [*communication*]
7. Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a difficult situation. How did you come up with the solution? [*problem-solving ability*]

Some schools, most notably MIT, have started to utilize interview techniques used by employers by conducting “behavioral interviews” that focus on specific, past actions as a way of determining patterns of behavior, thinking, and relating to others. These interviews focus on finding out what you have actually done in the past, as opposed to what you would do in a particular situation. For example, instead of asking, “Describe your work style with your supervisors,” they may ask, “What did you do the last time your ideas conflicted with those of your supervisor?” Schools identify a list of *core competencies* that they would like to see in their students and then base their questions on those competencies. The belief is that past behavior is an indicator of future behavioral patterns.

Preparing for behavioral interviews is not so different from preparing for standard interviews. What is tricky about behavioral interviews is that you need to be especially aware of the kinds of patterns you are revealing to your interviewer.

A question such as “Describe your work style with your supervisors” encourages you to prepare a positive response, and you are given a chance to select some positive

example to show the interviewer. In other words, you know how you are “supposed” to answer. However, if the interviewer asks you to describe specific actions that you took in the past, you will have less control over creating an “ideal” response. Thus, when practicing your interview answers on your own and with your counselor, be very conscious of the overall impression you are creating.

Goals/Future Plans Questions

Talking about goals can be easy because you can create your own ideal image of the future. The difficulty, however, is that you need to convince the interviewer that your plans and goals are feasible. You may be asked about your career future, your future as a student, or your future as a member of your society. In all cases, be enthusiastic and show passion for the path you are on.

Remember, these questions may look a lot like your essay questions, but don't be tempted to provide memorized responses. Even if your interviewer has not read your essays, he or she will be able to tell that you are repeating memorized information rather than answering the question spontaneously and sincerely.

Your Goals

1. Tell me about your future career goals.
2. Why do you need an MBA?
3. Why is this the best time for you to pursue your MBA?
4. What are your career goals?
5. What is your ideal job after MBA?
6. Where do you see yourself in ten years?
7. What are your short and long term goals?
8. What would you do if there were no MBA program?
9. What do you plan to do immediately following graduation?
10. Why are/aren't you going back to your company after graduation?
11. What would you do if not accepted anywhere?

Your goals should be consistent with your experience and your reasons for pursuing further education. Be practical about where you see yourself in five years. Refrain from making a statement like “I will be the CEO of my bank” unless that is your actual goal and you have a detailed plan to achieve that goal.

Also, be prepared to explain in detail how advanced training and education will help you achieve your goals. Highlight some of the strengths of the program you are applying to in order to further justify your choice. Make sure that all your answers connect and reflect the planning you have done for your future.

Obviously you are not committing to any plan you mention during the interview; you are simply demonstrating that you have the ability to make clear and realistic plans. While you are describing your plans, you should show that you are a person with the

energy and drive to follow through on them.

Potential Contributions to the School

1. How would you contribute to our school?
2. What could you contribute to case studies/discussions at our school?
3. How can you contribute to your classmates at our program?
4. What will your classmates learn from you? What legacy will you leave behind?

Contribution questions make you identify your key selling points; in other words, they ask what value you will add to your classmates and the school. These contributions should be based on your knowledge, unique experience, strengths, and personality.

Why Their School?

1. Why do you wish to attend this school?
2. How would this particular program help you in achieving your goals?
3. Name some other schools you have applied to.
4. What would you do if (another, higher ranked school) accepts you?
5. Why should we accept you at our school?
6. Is our school your first choice?
7. Do you have any worries about joining this school?

Can you convince an interviewer how the unique features and characteristics of the program best prepare you to reach your goals? Other ways to demonstrate “fit” for the program: classes, curriculum, size, professors, extracurricular programs, exchange programs, location, ratio of international students/students from a particular region, research opportunities and network related to your field. In addition to answering why one school is your first choice, you can also show passion for a program by asking your interviewer specific and well-informed questions at the end of the interview.

This is where you demonstrate your knowledge of and interest in an MBA program. Your interviewer will be actively checking your level of commitment to the school, and may ask you where else you applied. An interviewer may even ask why you would attend their school instead of a particular other school. You need to be prepared to answer these kinds of questions.

Some schools may even ask you what you perceive to be the biggest differences between their school and another top school, even if you did not apply to that other top school. What is worse, some interviewers, especially alumni interviewers, will ask you whether their school is your first choice.

We can practice this kind of question with you. Frequently our students tell us that our practice interviews are more difficult than the actual interview. This is our goal, but it is your responsibility to let us know what your biggest fears are and what questions you are particularly afraid to be asked. These are the questions you need to practice the most.

Personal Questions

You may be asked direct questions about your personality. You will be expected to demonstrate that you have already taken the time to assess yourself. You should know your strengths and weaknesses and how others perceive you. You should also be able to discuss your activities outside of work.

Self-Awareness

1. Tell me about yourself. (Be prepared - this is often the first question interviewers ask.)
2. Name 3 words/phrases to describe yourself to others. (Make sure you have a story that demonstrate these words or phrase, in case your interview asks you to elaborate.)
3. Are there any aspects of your personality that may surprise your friends, family, or colleagues?

The main goal of asking such questions is to assess your self-awareness. Be candid when answering personal questions and show that you have thought deeply about who you are. If you give superficial or false answers, you will sound dishonest and this will reflect badly on your personality and your judgment; on the other hand, only tell the interviewers what you want them to know—you don't have to confess everything.

Strengths and Weaknesses

1. What are your strengths?
2. What are your weaknesses?
3. Why do you think you were chosen as a corporate-sponsored MBA candidate?
4. Why should we admit you? (This is a contribution to the program/school question)

These questions are extremely important because they require you to state your key selling points. You should be able to tell the interviewer what you are good at and where you need to improve. Focus on professional skills, core competencies, and your personality.

Hobbies/Interests/Personal Activities

1. What do you do outside of work?
2. What is an activity you are involved in? Why is it important to you?
3. What would you do if you never had to work again?

These questions are a way for the interviewer to learn more about you as a person. Admissions committees want people who will contribute to their community and society, not just to the classroom, so it is important that you don't come across as someone who only works and has no life outside the office.

Critical Thinking/Knowledge Questions

You may be asked to talk about current developments in the world, your industry, or your country. This is a chance to demonstrate your analytical ability or knowledge of a specific subject. During the interview, you will not be expected to recite the facts of the events; you are more likely to be asked to analyze them in some way or to relate them to your own past or future situation.

1. Briefly state your opinion about the domestic and international policies of the Japanese government.
2. What are the differences in the marketing (or other) strategy of your firm and that of your competitors?
3. What is the strategy of your firm for the Chinese (or other) market?
4. What business event in the news concerns you most right now?
5. What do you think is the most important economic change that has occurred in the last year?
6. How has information technology affected your industry/company?

Critical Thinking/Knowledge Questions give you a chance to hold an intelligent conversation on a variety of subjects. You should talk in some detail about things you know well, and talk briefly about things you don't know well. In either case, try to talk with confidence.

To prepare for this kind of question, can keep abreast of the news in your field and in your region. It is advisable to read both domestic and international publications so you are able to cite specific events or situations in your field. Pay attention to key individuals, companies or regions involved, rather than trying to memorize minor details. The goal is to remain composed and confident, no matter what question you get.

Hypothetical Questions

Hypothetical questions ask you what you would do in certain situations. They may be situations close to you ("What would you do if a fellow team member did not do his or her share of the work?"), or they may be quite far-fetched ("What would you do if you were Prime Minister of Japan?"). The interviewer wants to see your creative thinking skills in action, as well as your performance under pressure.

When you practice answering one of these unpredictable questions, focus on keeping your voice strong and showing confidence, even if your answer is not very exciting. In the appendix, there is a sample list of questions of this type. You will see that many of these questions are geared toward bringing out your personal or professional values. The more you understand your own values, the easier these questions will be.

A Specific Situation or Scenario

1. Suppose an overseas firm is planning a new (specific business) in Japan. What questions would you ask the client to get the basic information for the planning?
2. What would you do if your company were about to go bankrupt?
3. What would you do if you were Prime Minister of Japan?

Some hypothetical questions focus on specific business or government situations. The interviewer will be looking for answers that show both knowledge and business values. Don't worry about giving the "right" answer, because there isn't one! Instead think about presenting your opinion or your current thinking on the matter in a clear way. If you try to think of the "right" answer, you may end up giving a hesitant answer and you will have lost an opportunity to demonstrate your confidence under pressure.

Personal Values

1. What would you do if a team member weren't pulling his or her own weight?
2. If I were to meet a former MBA classmate of yours 5 years from now, how would he or she describe you?

Some hypothetical questions are designed to elicit your personal values. There are no right answers to these questions either, but the way you answer them will tell the interviewer a lot about you. How do you deal with other people? What kind of a person do you hope to become? What do you think is the best way for people to spend their time?

Questions for You to Ask Them

1. Do you have any questions for me?
2. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

You should always prepare at least five specific questions to ask in case there is time at the end of the interview and the interviewer asks if *you* have any questions.

An interviewer might also ask "Is there anything else?" To prepare for this possibility, during the interview be conscious of a unique or impressive fact or experience that you have not yet shared with the interviewer and be prepared to add this at the end if asked. If you have nothing else to add, take this as an opportunity to restate your strong desire to attend their program.

The worst thing you can do in either of the above situations is say: "No, I do not have anything else to tell you" or "I do not have any questions for you." This is almost the same as saying that you really do not care if you get into the school or not. If you are interested and committed to a school, you will have questions prepared ahead of time.

There are two general types of questions you can ask. The first type is a “closed” question. These are fact-based questions which best demonstrate that you know about the school and want more details about a particular aspect of their program that directly relates to your mission and future goals. It is important that you do not ask about something that could be easily discovered on the school’s website or other promotional materials.

The second type of question is an “open” question, which is designed to get your interviewer to talk. This type is especially effective with alumni. For example, you can ask them about their experience and for advice about how to make the most of the opportunities their school provides.

Do not ask anything basic that you can learn on the school’s website. Try to ask specific questions that reveal what you want to do at the school. It pays to do your homework and read everything you can find about a particular program. This is also where your own network can come into play. Go to all the events you can and build your own trusted network of alumni and/or current students who really know you and know why you are a good fit for that school.

After the Interview

You should send a thank you note via e-mail or regular mail directly to the person with whom you interviewed. Below is the body of a typical thank-you note. You should adapt it and add details to fit your situation.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. It was a pleasure to be able to tell you about (strengths as an applicant). It was also enlightening for me to see the school (or talk with you about your program), which reinforces my interest in your program. I was impressed most by. . .

Thank you again, and I look forward to hearing from you in March.

By reminding the interviewers of your strengths, you help them remember the interview. You could also mention something interesting you talked about to remind them about who you are. For example, if you talked about the latest snowboarding technology because you are both avid snowboarders, you could mention it in the letter.

Section Four:
LOGISTICS

Frequently Asked Questions

Once you are confident that you have understood this manual, it is time to begin preparing for your interviews and meeting with your counselor. In this section, we will provide you with frequently asked questions and our answers on how to schedule interviews and how to get the most out of your counseling sessions.

The following are responses to the most frequently asked questions:

“How do I get an interview?”

MBA programs offer one of two ways to get an interview: open sign-up or invitation. Many schools welcome applicants to sign up for interviews without prior screening. This can be done via the school’s website, which we encourage you to check regularly throughout the application process for updates. Other schools offer interviews by “invitation only,” meaning they will assess your completed application first before deciding whether or not to grant you an interview. An invitation to interview is a good sign from the admissions committee, whereas an open interview does not tell you anything about your chances for admission.

“When and how should I schedule my interviews?”

For open sign-up interviews, you should register as early in the season as possible (summer to fall), because spaces are usually very limited. If you wait too long, you may lose your opportunity to interview. At some programs, it is not necessary to submit a completed application before scheduling an interview.

If it is difficult for you to conduct an on-campus interview, you may have a chance to time your interview with the school’s travel plans. Each year many business schools travel to Tokyo as part of the MBA Tour, the QS World MBA Tour, or their own recruitment travels, and some schools set aside an extra day or two to conduct interviews. You can find this information on the school’s webpage (see next paragraph). Another option is to schedule an interview with a local alumnus or a telephone interview with an admissions staff member.

As soon as you know which schools you want to apply to, go to the “interview” section of each school’s admissions homepage. There you will find detailed information and instructions on how to sign up for an interview. Each school has different procedures and policies, so be sure to follow the instructions carefully. Many schools begin accepting interview reservations as early as the summer before deadlines.

And of course, if your intended schools offer interviews by invitation only, then you will need to wait to hear from them after you have submitted your applications.

Note: While it is a good idea to sign up as early as possible in order to ensure yourself a space, you should also schedule your interview far enough in the future to have time

to prepare adequately for it. August may be too early if you have not yet begun thinking deeply about your motivations for an MBA and/or if you have not used any English since you were in high school!

“Where and with whom should I schedule my interviews?”

You have a number of options for how you want to conduct your interviews. You will have to consider many factors, including your personal schedule, finances, and readiness. If you have any questions about these options, you should discuss them with one of our counselors to make sure you are making the best strategy for your individual case.

ON CAMPUS: If you can afford the time and expense of going to the school, you will most likely be interviewed by a member of the admissions committee. This can work in your favor if the same person reads your application, as it can help you be a “real person” instead of just a piece of paper. Another advantage of having an on-campus interview is that you will demonstrate your initiative and commitment to the school.

ADMISSIONS OFFICERS IN JAPAN: Another interview option is meeting with admissions officers when they come to Japan. This will give you the advantage of making personal contact with a decision-making member of the committee, but will not demonstrate as much initiative and commitment to the school as a campus visit.

ALUMNI IN JAPAN: Many schools also offer alumni interviews. These are available in Japan and are often easier to schedule. The disadvantage is that alumni will not read your application nor will they have any decision-making power. In addition, alumni interviews are not always held in English, which means you will have limited or no opportunity to demonstrate your English skills.

PHONE/SKYPE: Finally, some schools offer phone or SKYPE interviews. These are typically the toughest interviews, because listening comprehension is more difficult on the phone. You will see no body language to tell you whether your idea is being well received, whether you should keep talking, or whether it is best to be quiet. For these reasons, it is advisable to schedule an in-person interview if at all possible.

“What about telephone interviews?”

Applicants are occasionally interviewed by telephone, usually because the applicant is unable to schedule a face-to-face interview. On rare occasions, an admissions staff member may call an applicant without warning in order to clarify some last minute questions (e.g., confirmation of communication ability).

Telephone interviews are generally no different from face-to-face interviews in content. However, it is generally much more difficult to express yourself in a telephone interview. Although you may be sitting in the comfort of your home during this “meeting,” you may find it a challenge to communicate well when you and your interviewer cannot see one another. On the telephone, you must rely on the verbal cues of your speaker, as you are unable to see his or her facial expressions or physical gestures. Likewise, you must depend entirely on your English speaking skills because you cannot use gestures to convey your thoughts. Pauses and silences may feel awkward. (Please see Appendix B for a detailed English language guide to telephone interviews.)

“What about SKYPE / SKYPE video interviews?”

SKYPE or other online telephone conferencing software is essentially the same as a telephone interview. Online video interviews may be offered, and while they are somewhat better than telephone interviews (at least you can see each other) it is still particularly difficult to get a feel for your interviewer and their reactions because they are not physically present in the same room as you. Often, you can only see a small headshot of your interviewer, and depending on the speed of the connection, the video itself may be choppy or delayed.

If you do a SKYPE video or other video interview, be sure to test the software prior to the real thing, preferably with someone in the same country as your interviewer. This will allow you to gauge the strength of the connection. In addition, be wary of your background. As the interviewer will be given a small window into your life, via your room or office, make sure it is neat and doesn't take away from the positive impression you are trying to convey.

“What about combination test-interviews?”

Some business schools in Europe conduct lengthier interviews that combine a presentation, English test, or all-day on-campus event. If you are applying to one of these schools, you may be asked to give a short presentation in addition to your interview, or you may be asked to engage in a discussion with a group of other interviewees. In these types of evaluations, the schools are probing more deeply to look for specific skills and qualities to help determine your likelihood of success in their program. Specifically, they are often looking at communication ability. Because these interviews are varied and quite specific in nature, we recommend that you schedule private sessions with your counselor to discuss your strategy and to practice.

“How much time will it take to prepare for my interviews?”

Because MBA application interviews are very different from job interviews, you should practice for your MBA interview even if you have a lot of experience interviewing in other situations. You can practice in front of a mirror, on videotape, or with friends, co-workers, or family members, but ultimately you should practice with a trained interviewer, such as your counselor. Interviewing with an unfamiliar person in unfamiliar surroundings is the best way to generate the nervousness you may feel as you face the real thing. You can then learn from your mistakes and be ready to go into the real interview with confidence and poise.

We offer various options depending on your ability level and learning curve:

Near-native Speakers

- Prepare your overall strategy
- Confirm that you are presenting yourself and your message effectively
- We suggest: 1-2 interview sessions; you can always purchase more if needed

Intermediate Speakers

- Give an assessment and then prepare your overall strategy
- Check your message
- Develop your answers
- Practice your delivery
- We suggest: 5 interview practice sessions

Low-level Speakers

- Give an assessment and then prepare your overall strategy
- Check your message
- Develop your answers
- Practice delivery
- We suggest: 5 or more interview practice sessions

REMINDER: Low to intermediate level speakers of English should pay close attention to the contents of the basic dialogues found in the appendices to this manual.

“Do you have any suggestions for maximizing the value of counseling sessions?”

- In the majority of cases, we suggest that you work with a new counselor, not the same one you consulted for essays. In addition, in order to fully utilize our 5 session Interview Package, you should not use the same counselor for all five sessions.
- Send your counselor your latest resume by 4pm the day before the interview. Inform your counselor of your status (upcoming interview dates and details,

such as whether your interviewer is alumni or admissions staff, the location of the interview, and its format, such as phone or face-to-face).

- Whenever possible, indicate your goals for the session when you send your resume to your Interview Counselor and/or at the beginning of each Interview Practice Session.
- We encourage you to use audio or video to your counseling session for later review.

In closing, we thank you for taking this class and reading our manual. We sincerely hope that it has helped you feel ready to begin the challenging, but ultimately highly rewarding process of working your way through your applications and interview preparation. We look forward to coaching you through a successful admissions process.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: BASIC DIALOGUES

The Beginning: Introducing Yourself

A typical interview begins when you are invited into an interview room or office. You will need to introduce yourself, but there is no established order for who goes first. The best approach is to listen to what your interviewer says and then provide the appropriate information in response. And no matter what happens, be ready to smile at the first opportunity. Compare Examples I and II below:

Example I

Interviewer: Hello, Ms. Kimura. My name is Geraldine Brooks.
Please sit down.

Applicant: Thank you, Ms. Brooks, how do you do? (sits down)

Example II

Interviewer: Hello. Come in. My name is Gianni Di Marco.

Applicant: Thank you, Mr. Di Marco. My name is Junichiro Suzuki. Nice to meet you.

Interviewer: Please have a seat.

Applicant: Thank you. (*sits down*)

Notice that in Example I, the interviewer used the applicant's name so the applicant did not have to introduce herself. In Example II, the interviewer only introduced himself, which left the applicant to do the same.

It is less common for the applicant to introduce himself first, although it could happen as in Example III:

Example III

(Applicant knocks and enters the room. Applicant pauses, then speaks.)

Applicant: Hello, my name is Makoto Matsuki.

Interviewer: Hello, Mr. Matsuki, come in. I'm Dean Lyons.

Applicant: Nice to meet you, Dean Lyons.

Interviewer: Why don't you have a seat?

Applicant: Thank you. (*sits down*)

It is wise to wait two or three seconds before you speak, as there is a good chance that your interviewer will begin the introductions. If not, go ahead and introduce yourself. If you both speak at the same time, smile and let the interviewer continue.

Example IV

Applicant/Interviewer: Hello, my name is.../ Hello I'm...
Applicant/Interviewer: Taro Tanaka/Ethan Bluestone
Applicant: I'm sorry. Go ahead
Interviewer: Come on in, I'm Ethan Bluestone.
Applicant: Hello, I'm Taro Tanaka. Nice to meet you.

Small Talk

After the introduction, there is usually a period of small talk before the actual interview questions begin. The subject of small talk is not important (it usually focuses on travel, the weather, or the location you are interviewing in), but it is important to be able to keep a conversation going for a few minutes. The easiest way to do this is to use the answer-and-ask technique. That is, each time you answer a question, ask another one back. Remember to keep small talk positive and harmless (no strong opinions).

Interviewer: Have a seat.
Applicant: Thank you.
Interviewer: So, how have you liked Hanover so far?
Applicant: It's beautiful! Is this typical weather for April?
Interviewer: Actually it's much drier than usual. We often have rain.

If your interviewer doesn't offer any small talk, you can begin by commenting on or asking the interviewer's opinion on any of the above subjects:

Interviewer: Please have a seat.
Applicant: Thank you. You have a great view from your window...

Transition to Core Interview

The interviewer will generally signal when small talk is over, but some interviewers maintain a fairly casual approach throughout the interview. Whether the transition is obvious or subtle, you will eventually begin getting questioned about yourself. To be effective in this part of the interview, you will need to understand common question-answer techniques.

Interviews typically begin with questions about general information, then move to

more specific issues. In a typical pattern, the interviewer asks a “Primary Question”, then asks one or more “Follow-up Questions”.

Primary Questions

Primary Questions should usually be answered with short (10-30 second) responses. Your goal is to provide a clear answer to the question, giving just your main points.

Example I

Question: What do you plan to do after earning your MBA?
Answer: I plan to return to my company as a manager in the International Relations department, but I eventually plan to become the CEO and work towards directing my company’s global strategy.

Example II

Question: Tell me about an accomplishment at work that you are proud of.
Answer: Well, last year I was put in charge of the branch outreach project. In my first six months, I was able to revolutionize the way the branches communicated with both the main office and each other. This ended up saving my company millions of dollars.

In the above examples, the answers are not very detailed, but that is okay because in each case, the interviewer is highly likely to ask a follow-up question.

Follow-up Questions

In Follow-up Questions, you are usually asked to provide more detail (numbers, examples, facts, stories, reasons) about your answer to the Primary Question. Details take longer to explain, so you can give longer answers (around 1 minute is comfortable). Don’t go on too long or your interviewer might lose focus.

Example I

Question: What do you plan to do after earning your MBA?
Answer: I plan to return to my company as a manager in the International Relations department, but eventually plan to become the CEO and work towards redirecting my company’s global strategy.

Question: How do you plan to redirect the company's global strategy?

Answer: My plan is to start by... (*gives details*)

Question: Oh really? What will your position be at that point?

Example II

Question: Tell me about an accomplishment at work that you are proud of.

Answer: Well, last year I was put in charge of the branch outreach project. In my first 6 months I was able to revolutionize the way the branches communicated with both the main office and each other. This ended up saving my company millions of dollars.

Question: What was the toughest thing about the project?

Answer: Well, before I started, the situation was... (*give details*)

Combined Questions

Sometimes a primary question is combined with a follow-up question. For example, "If you could be any animal, what would it be and why?" The "why?" is the built-in follow-up question. If you are asked a combined or two-part question, try to answer the main question first in 10-30 seconds. Then restate or introduce the follow-up question and give a longer answer.

Example:

Question: Tell me about a failure in your life and why you think it was a failure

Answer: When I was first made lead consultant about 3 years ago, I had a conflict with a client that resulted in my company losing the client's business. (*short pause*) I think that was a failure because I let the client see my anger, when I should have been more professional. I hadn't been in the position long, so I didn't understand the protocol about leading a group of consultants. As a result I tried to manage everything by myself, I got frustrated, and I took it on the client representative. When I realized what had happened I talked to a lead consultant in another department about it and reflected on what I had done wrong. No I am much more...

Although it is a good idea to keep your answers brief, feel free to talk in more detail on subjects you are comfortable with or you feel strongly about. This will allow you

to control the impression you give the interviewer. He/she is more likely to remember the things you talked about in some detail, than those things you addressed fairly quickly. Practice will make this technique easier and more natural for you.

Structuring Your Answers

Since spoken answers to interview questions are fairly short (in comparison to essays that may go on for several pages about a single question), it is important to give structured answers and put the most important information first. You might get interrupted and never get to the end of what you were going to say, so don't save the best ideas for last. Even if you don't get interrupted, the interviewer may only pay attention to the beginning of the answer, then begin to think about the next question.

For some questions, you can divide up your answer by saying things like:

“There were basically three steps I took to accomplish...”

“There were two main factors behind my decision to...”

“I think the two most important aspects of...”

These types of introductions tell the listener what to expect. If you say there were three things, be sure you clearly state all three things. (*“First The second skill I used was... The last skill was...”*). In most cases, a list longer than three is too long for an interview. Although counting off the items in your response makes it clearer, if you do this for every question, it may seem a bit unnatural, so practice other patterns as in the examples below:

“The main skill I used to accomplish (ABC) was.... I also used (XYZ) skills to... Finally, I used my ability to...”

“The most important factor was (XYZ), but I also feel that (ABC) and (DEF) contributed to the outcome.”

You may also introduce your answer by giving an overview of the entire answer, then going back to explain in detail.

“I believe there were two very different factors that contributed to the failure of (big company). First, they failed to (do something important) and second, the conditions they were facing were (very bad). The first factor, their failure to (do the important thing), started when they...”

“The thing I like most about my job is (XYZ). This gives me the opportunity to do (x), (y) and (z). I especially enjoy being able to do (x) because...”

Final Questions

Interviews often end with the interviewer asking you “Is there anything else you want to tell me?” Since you don’t want to say something uninteresting that sounds like everyone else, you should prepare well for this question. If you prepare three or four possible ideas before you go into the interview, you probably will still have something to talk about if you are asked this question.

- If you haven’t yet had a chance to talk about what makes you interesting or unusual, this would be a good time.
- Bring up a special interest and tell how you will pursue it during your MBA studies. Choose something that makes you stand out.
- Discuss your past educational interests and specialties and tell how they affected you (contributed to your goals or your career choice, etc.).
- Discuss weaknesses you know the admissions committee will notice anyway. Take control of the situation by telling them how you have or will overcome them.

Interviews can also end with the question, “Is there anything you want to ask me?” You should be prepared to ask two or three good, intelligent questions about the school or the program. Possible question topics include:

- Special interests and how the school can help you pursue them
- Faculty research or interests in areas that concern you
- Further information about the school’s philosophy, direction or approach.
- School facilities that are relevant to your library, computer equipment, campus life, facilities for spouse or family
- Your weakness as an applicant (such as a low GPA) and what you can do to overcome it (such as sending an extra recommendation from someone who knows your academic abilities well)

Don’t ask questions with answers that you could have found easily in the program’s brochure, and try not to ask questions that require such detailed knowledge that the interviewer is not likely to be able to answer them.

Leaving the Interview

Just as there are customs for beginning an interview, there are some general customs for leaving an interview situation.

Your interviewer will decide when the interview is over and will signal by making a closing remark.

“Well, that’s all the time we have for today. It was nice meeting you. Have a safe trip home.”

“Looks like we’re out of time. Thank you for coming today; it was a pleasure getting to know you.”

You should respond by thanking the interviewer for his or her time, indicating your positive feeling about the school, the opportunity to interview, the town or some other relevant topic:

“Thank you so much for your time. It was great for me to be able to tell you about my ideas in person. ”

“Thank you for giving me the chance to have an on-campus interview. This was a great opportunity to see the school in person. It seems like a very challenging atmosphere, which is exactly what I am looking for.”

“Thank you for your time. Wharton is my top choice school, and talking to you has helped me understand even more about the program.”

You will be leaving your interviewer with a final impression of you, so maintain your confidence, composure and passion all the way to the end. No matter how difficult the interview felt to you, remember to smile, make eye contact and give a firm handshake on your way out.

Appendix B: TELEPHONE/SKYPE INTERVIEWS

How to Prepare for a Telephone/SKYPE Interview

The best way to prepare for telephone interviews is to get as much simulated practice as possible. When practicing with a partner, do it while facing away from each other or, better yet, practice over the phone. You will get used to having a conversation without the help of visual cues, while developing your listening skills in the process.

Content

When practicing for content, use the same techniques you would for a regular face-to-face interview. Do not, however, write out entire answers or “scripts” to potential questions. It is tempting to create “cheat sheets” when you are safe from the eyes of your interviewer, but reading your answers to your interviewer is even worse than memorizing them! Practice your responses just as you would for a regular face-to-face interview, and rely on natural delivery—not cheats sheets—throughout the interview.

Telephone Etiquette

The “rules” of a telephone interview differ from those of a face-to-face interview. Of course, over the phone, you will not need to worry about gestures like handshakes and eye contact. Instead, you will need to understand the manners needed for effective telephone communication. Please note the following examples of an interview opening and closing:

Opening: (*interviewer calls.*)

Applicant: *Moshi moshi?*

Interviewer: Hello, may I speak to Masayo Fuji? This is Carol Lee from California Business School.

Applicant: Yes, hello, Ms. Lee. This is Masayo Fuji. How are you?

Interviewer: I'm very well, thank you. And you? I realize it must be quite late there in Tokyo.

Applicant: Oh, not at all. I'm just enjoying a quiet evening after work, so the timing is perfect.

Interviewer: Great. Well, I don't want to keep you up too late so why don't we get started?

Note that conventional introductions and small talk are still used.

Closing:

Example I

Interviewer: Well, Masayo, we're just about finished. Do you have any questions for me

Applicant: Yes, actually. I'm very interested in the collaboration that you said goes on between faculty and students. Could you tell me a little more about that?

Interviewer: Certainly. Well, our student body is pretty small, compared to many of the other top business schools so our faculty and students get to know each other pretty well

Applicant: Mm hm...

Interviewer: The school puts a strong emphasis on teaching in addition to research. And faculty members have been known to bring students on to their outside consulting projects, or have asked students to help with research. And of course outside of the classroom it's not uncommon for faculty and students to eat together, to go to happy hours together...

Applicant: That's great!

Interviewer: Our students and faculty are all on a first-name basis actually. Applicant: That's quite amazing; it sounds very different from the atmosphere at Japanese schools...

Example II

Interviewer: Well, if you don't have any more questions, then we're all done. We're still looking at another three or so weeks of interviews, so you should be getting a final decision on March 15th, by e-mail.

Applicant: Thank you, Ms. Lee. I'm very glad I had this opportunity to talk with you and learn even more about this program. I'll look forward to you hearing from you in March.

Interviewer: Thank you, Masayo. It was a pleasure talking to you. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact our office on the main line.

Applicant: Thank you, Ms. Lee. I'll definitely do that.

Interviewer: Take care.

Applicant: Goodbye. (*hangs up*)

Notice that the applicant, in these dialogues, has to interject occasionally with signals that he is listening. Responses like “Mm hm,” “I see,” and other short phrases are necessary in any conversation, but particularly when the speakers cannot see each other.

Occasionally we hear of applicants who get woken up in the middle of the night by an unexpected telephone call from the admissions office. A committee member may have a few questions about some aspect of your application. Very often, they are calling to confirm your speaking skills and/or interest in attending their program. You cannot really prepare for these unexpected “interviews,” of course, so just be aware that they can happen. When you get the call, sound interested and enthusiastic. They would not call you if they did not have some interest in your candidacy.

APPENDIX C: TOPIC SUMMARY

1. SELF INTRODUCTION

- Tell me about yourself:
 - Professionally, I... (1 sentence work history summary, perhaps one impressive accomplishment)
 - Personally, I... (1 sentence highlighting what you do outside of work / hobby or interesting fact)
- Discuss your career progression.
- Take me through your resume. / Walk me through your resume.
- What do you do in your free time?
- What do you do outside of work?
- What do you do for fun?

2. STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

- What do you consider your top 3 strengths/weaknesses?
- How will an MBA help you to overcome your weaknesses?
- What three adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
- How would co-workers describe you?
- What is the greatest weakness in your application?

3. WORK LIFE

- What is most frustrating at work?
- What is hardest about your job?
- Describe a typical workday.

4. TEAMWORK

- Are you a good team member?
- Describe your most valuable teamwork experience (where you were not the leader).
- Tell me about a difficult interaction at work.
- What would you do if a colleague were not pulling his or her weight?
- Please give an example of when you part of a high or low performing team.

5. EDUCATION / CAREER CHOICES

- Do your university grades reflect your academic ability? Why or why not?
- How did you choose your job after college? (*This is especially important if you studied something very different from your professional field.*)
- Why did you choose your job at your previous company?
- Why did you leave your previous position?
- Why did you choose your current position?

6. LEADERSHIP

- Are you a good leader?
- What is your definition of leadership?

- Describe your most valuable leadership experience.
- Who is your hero or leadership role-model?
- What is your leadership style?

7. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- What are your three greatest accomplishments?
- What is your single greatest accomplishment?
- What was your particular role in this accomplishment?

8. CREATIVITY

- What has been your most creative solution in a business setting?
- Give an example when your thinking was different than others.
- Have you ever had to overcome resistance to a new idea that you had proposed?

9. FAILURE

- Have you ever failed?
- How did you recover from this experience & what did you learn?

10. ETHICS / MATURITY

- Discuss an ethical dilemma you faced at work.
- Describe a situation where your values, ethics, or morals were challenged.
- How did you handle the situation?

11. GOALS

- Why do you need an MBA?
- Why is this the best time for you to pursue your MBA?
- What are your career goals?
- What is your ideal job after MBA?
- Where do you see yourself in ten years?
- What are your short and long term goals?
- What would you do if there were no MBA program?
- What would you do if you were not accepted anywhere?

12. SCHOOL CHOICE

- Why do you wish to attend this school?
- Name some other schools you have applied to.
- What would you do if (another school, w/ higher rank) accepts you?
- Why should we accept you at our school?
- Why should we accept you?
- Give me three reasons why we should admit you to our school.

13. CONTRIBUTIONS

- How can you contribute to your classmates at our program?
- What value will you add?

- What will your classmates learn from you?
- What legacy will you leave behind?

14. FINAL QUESTIONS

- Is there anything else?
- Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX D: Interview Skills Report Card

Interview Skills Report Card

These sheets will be referred to at the end of each interview practice session, in order to: a) designate areas that need attention, b) show improvement, and c) help plan and add focus to practice in-between sessions.

Body Language:

- 1) Eye contact strong good okay weak
- 2) Use hands effectively while talking strong good okay weak
- 3) Posturing strong good okay weak
- 4) Smile appropriately strong good okay weak
- 5) Appearance (looks calm, confident and poised) strong good okay weak

Comments

Language:

- 1) Fluency (speed) strong good okay weak
- 2) Clarity strong good okay weak
- 3) Enunciates key words/moments strong good okay weak
- 4) Pronunciation strong good okay weak
- 5) Recovery (ability to talk around forgotten words) strong good okay weak
- 6) Freshness (i.e. avoidance of canned/memorized speech) strong good okay weak

Comments

Conversations:

- 1) Small Talk Comfort Level (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 2) Introduction Clarity (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 3) Introduction Content (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 4) Goals Clarity (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 5) Goals Content (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 6) Enthusiasm (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 7) Stories Content (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 8) Balance (professional/personal topics) (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 9) Organization (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 10) Use of time (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 11) Conclusion: lessons learned (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 12) Conclusion Impact (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 13) Overall Content Interesting/Memorable (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)

Comments

Commitment to the School:

- 1) Awareness of the Curriculum (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 2) Awareness of the Culture/Atmosphere (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 3) Enthusiasm towards the school (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)
- 4) Ability to cite specific examples that demonstrate fit (strong/ good/ okay/ weak)

MBA Interviews

5) Overall impression of level of commitment strong good okay weak

Comments

Overall Assessment:

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Areas you need to improve:

Your key differentiators/messages that are/need to be stressed:

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