MBAn For Dummies

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Introduction

tl;dr:

I've built this guide to help with MBAns' coursework and job search—the program's largest stressors.

- It is meant to be practical and personal; it includes solution links and educational resources
- To get you quickly to the most important bits and cut through personal fluff, every section includes a tl;dr.
- This guide is based on my understanding of the program and in no way reflects the thoughts or wants of the administration.

Motivation:

"MBAn for Dummies" is meant to cover the struggles that ~every MBAn goes through: the coursework and job search. I hope it will be a fun and informative read! Feel free to use the tl;dr:'s at the start of every section to cut through my ever-so-eloquent, riveting writing.

I aim to be as unbiased and holistic as I can throughout. The reality of the situation, though, is that this writing is heavily biased by my MBAn experience, likings, and understanding of the "real world." I am just one person—your experiences will be different. I hope that this can be useful to you, but I wrote it to be useful to past me. Take what you want from this.

Breakdown:

This guide is broken down into a few main sections: (1) *the program*, (2) *the job search*, (3) *additional resources*, (4) *conclusion*, and (5) *dedication*. *The program* covers the semesters and capstone selection process, contains solutions to an immense portion of the '22 fall's coursework, and categorizes students into a few categories. *The job search* provides base context about the variety of jobs that you might find after the program and why you'd want them. *Additional resources* include all the links I've provided throughout, along with additional resources (who'd have guessed?!?). Everyone knows what a *conclusion* is. I've put the *dedication* at the end because I realize that none of you have a reason to read it, but I care that the people who contributed to this know that they did.

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The Program Itself

tl;dr:

You get out of the program what you put into it.

- There's not enough time to take advantage of ALL the things that you could be doing with your time during the program.
- Spend time on what matters to you, cut mercilessly on what doesn't.

Program Opportunities:

There's so much that the program provides for!

- The administration does an exceptional job selecting people, so there's a wonderful cohort to become close with and learn from. Everyone in the program is your friend—you can rely on them to help you through your struggles.
- There's high-level coursework for you to learn the cutting edge material in your particular field of interest
- Research opportunities for you to make your own contributions to the research front alongside a top professor in those same fields
- Experiential, fun, practically-oriented coursework to help you become more "real world" capable
- Sloan community social activity, clubs, and wisdom-bearing professionals
- Strong, helpful alumni to connect with and learn from
- A whole host of high-paying job offers from great companies
- The opportunity to enjoy exploring Cambridge (And walking along the Charles!)

Program Optimization:

It would be impossible to take advantage of all of those opportunities to their fullest extent. Prioritization is the name of the game. Here in MBAn, everything must relate to Optimization somehow. For proper prioritization, I therefore recommend an optimization function! To get the most from the program, you should be thoughtful about designing your function's weights and constraints. Otherwise, it can be quite easy to default into exclusively doing the most pressing things, which can cause stress and missed opportunities.

The classes your workload will largely come from spend a lot of time on technical details of machine learning/close to the research front. Meanwhile, you will have to teach yourself the programming and statistics required for your intended job search. **Grades don't matter much. If you put in a good faith effort, you will not fail.**

The more you put thought into defining your optimization function and constraints, the earlier you mentally equate short- and long-term payoffs. This declutters your choice processes and de-stresses your life, leading to a more consistent feeling of progress and contentedness.

My Experience:

I struggled with my own optimization. I originally didn't put much thought into it, and defaulted into over-prioritizing coursework, subject to my health-maintaining constraints.

Around November, this changed. Coursework became harder to maintain between projects and illness, and I realized I was being wasteful with my time (and punishing myself arbitrarily for lack of coursework passion). I decided to weigh self-care more heavily, and aimed for coursework completion rather than complete understanding.

Right after finals ended in December, I began heavily prioritizing my job search. Same health constraints, but now with the addition of several informational interviews weekly, interview preparation, company research, LinkedIn browsing, and information finding constraints. I deprioritized technical coursework heavily/didn't take a technical class, so coursework understanding and completion cost dropped significantly.

By mid-March, I had figured out pretty well which jobs I wanted (and at which companies), had diminishing returns on interview preparation, and realized that I would have to wait until summer to apply for most of the jobs I'd want. For that reason, and a variety of other confounding factors, the second half of my Spring semester saw me shift my priorities towards socializing. I dropped the interview-prep constraints and added daily, planned social activity.

In mid-May, as the semester ended and as I moved west for capstone, the job search again became my main priority. Applying. Interviewing. Whatnot.

I signed my offer mid-June. Capstone was the biggest thing on my plate. Outside of my health, it was my life. But also, having an offer and knowing I was moving to Seattle, my desire to be with my people increased dramatically.

When I came back east in mid-July, all I wanted was the presence of my people. I spent a few weeks zooming around New England seeing everyone, then another few weeks working at my summer camp.

Each of these periods/optimization functions came with its own challenges. The fact that I was clear-eyed about what I was prioritizing made making choices easier. Rather than "I didn't get to do X when I should have," I said "I decided to do Y over X because I care about Y more than X."

If I hadn't been able to be open with my friends and had their support and presence, I would have had a much rougher year. Even the people in my cohort I barely knew treated me with such kindness.

Additional Commentary:

> "You will have classes of three types (mainly) while in the program: Sloan classes, ORC classes, and wider MIT classes. All Sloan classes are course 15 coded, and are usually designed for MBAs. These classes are technically easier and can be interesting and rewarding practically - *Power and Negotiation* is a good example. ORC classes are a subset of Sloan classes taught by the 'Operations Research Center', which the MBAn program is essentially part of. These are technically harder classes, being mainly designed for PhD students in the ORC. You shall come to respect these classes. Wider MIT classes will be ones you take as electives or in the spring, usually from course 6 (E. Eng) or course 9 (cognitive sciences) or course 14 (economics). These vary wildly in expectations and workload. Some students will also take Harvard classes in the spring too, and these can be even more varied."
>
> - Ian Tongs, MBAn '22

> "Ego death (of the topper ['I need to be perfect/the best around'] mindset) -> Mourning -> Rebuilding internal motivators (things that get you out of bed) -> (Lots of time passes) -> Finally start enjoying success again (as opposed to feeling on the edge from the fear of not being the best) -> Settle somewhere between altruism and selfishness -> Personal utility gets redefined in your own unique way (vs previously it was about being the best)"
>
> - MIT reddit

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The Fall

tl;dr:

Everyone has a rough fall. Take care of yourself.

- Take at least one of your projects seriously—every job application process will ask you about one.
- Use your projects/homework groups to help you identify potential capstone partners. Not everyone is expected to understand or care to understand everything; exposure to the technical coursework is sufficient for many.
- To get an A, you don't NEED complete mastery of content. Though many people are terrified of getting a C, you won't get one as long as you put in effort. Grades don't matter unless you want to get a PhD.

Working Standards:

The ~reported daily standard that I heard was 9 hours of work, 7 hours sleep, and the rest of the day spent either stressing or de-stressing.

In my opinion, the fall is all about buying time and removing stress. You can certainly do well on much less working time, if you are effective with it; time is a luxury you buy with effective execution. You'd be surprised at how well you can do working < 40 hours…

Coursework:

From Analytics to Action (FATA):

- Introduces you to the idea that high-quality communication and an understanding of basic human psychology are just as, if not more important than rigorous technical work when trying to bring about change in the real world
- Not meant to be too taxing on the workload

Advanced Analytics Edge (Edge):

- Gives you a high-level overview of different modeling methodologies, their use cases, and how to apply them using standard coding libraries
- It should take a few hours weekly, but overall will feel like the fun/relaxing part of your workload
- Data Scientist job interviews will largely be at this depth

Analytics Lab (ALAB):

- Opportunity for you to work with a real dataset, put something on your resume, and get an idea of what capstone will be like

- Aim for projects/teams that clearly have good/accessible data and clear problem scope. Repeat ALAB companies are usually a good proxy for this
- Avoid NLP or computer vision projects unless you have a particular interest—the data is likely to be unlabeled and/or impossible to work with
- For most teams, this workload is relatively light on a regular basis, but has some crunch around project delivery

Optimization:

- Optimization basics. Pretttttttty cool stuff. Many in the program end up wanting to use optimization in their full-time work, somehow
- The assessments are normal math tests, relatively formulaic and concept driven
- The homework is similarly challenging and concept-driven
- This class was thankfully changed for ’23 MBAns—though the previous class was high-quality and interesting, it was slightly misaligned with the rest of the program’s construction
- This will be one of your highest-workload courses.

Machine Learning Under a Modern Optimization Lens (ML):

- Putting it all together. The deeper, more academically-focused version of Analytics Edge that leverages optimization to obtain more precise results
- Last-mile ML, the final 80% effort and 20% information
- The book is VERY useful
- The tests are made to challenge your practical understanding of the material. To perform well on them, it is most important that you
    - Understand the general framework for editing a formulation
    - Know where to locate the content you need in the book or slides
- This class provides a good project to talk about in interviews in that you will use the whole Data Science (DS) workflow and can guarantee cool results (by good choice of data set)
- This will be your other highest-workload course

Grades:

For grades, relax! Grades here largely only matter for your ego. It can be challenging for people used to getting excellent grades (grade inflation blah blah blah) to suddenly be in a position where they might not.

The only scenario when excellent grades matter is for fellowship or PhD applications. To get into the ORC, for example, you have to go through Bertsimas, who certainly cares about how well you seem to be caring to understand his content. The people who want (and are competing for) PhD programs will get As in the technical courses semi-naturally.

For everyone else in the program, grades don't have practical impact. Your spring (and Capstone) elective grades will be more than enough to make up for any poor performance in the fall, especially since you can choose a collection of courses meant to be practically useful rather than academically rigorous (e.g. MBA classes ~ higher marking and lower workload tendencies). You can get all Bs in the fall technical classes (or even all of the fall classes) and still be safely above the 4.5/5.0 graduation requirement. Your minimum possible graduation GPA will be a 4.5, which looks good in all employers' eyes. You can also leave GPA off your resume. No job interview asked how well I did in my classes, and I imagine leaving school (as I was interviewing) is the time in your life you're most likely to be asked about grades. Only a tiny portion of companies ask for transcripts. Even then, transcripts have little bearing on job applications. You will be fine if you get some Bs.

Where You Stand (ML & Optimization):

A couple weeks into your classes, you should assess how well you understand or care to understand ML & Optimization.

If you understand a good portion of the technical content well and care to learn it, good for you! That's wonderful, don't change a thing :) Enjoy yourself! You're likely an RA, get As, and want to be an MLE/Applied Scientist or Research Scientist. Please help out the people who need help as much as you can.

The material in these classes is incredibly difficult for students without the background for it, which is stressful. So, if you absolutely hate the classes and have no idea what's going on, don't kill yourself trying to understand everything. Give yourself grace. Acknowledge you're getting helpful exposure to what's the cutting edge. You don't have to care or know everything. If you get Bs, that's ok. The content in Analytics Edge alone will give you what you need for Data Scientist job interviews. If you don't find yourself interested in Edge, even, you should consider product management rather than data science as a career choice (and potentially join the Sloane PM club).

There are a few strategies for going through the content: going solo, buddying up, or forming a group.

Soloing:
A divide and conquer approach is best. ~solo your fair share of everything and meet with friends to discuss solutions. This was my strategy.

Buddying up:

To most efficiently understand the content fully, you should spend a lot of time going through the content yourself, and then buddy up with someone who can help teach you the missing pieces. Try to go through the content yourself before having a peer teach it to you—you'll know what you don't know and what they can help you with, avoid some accidental misinformation, and also correct some of your partner's misunderstandings.

Group Work:
Similarly, group work is most effective when everyone has already looked at the topic/question and come up with their own thoughts. Otherwise, people taking first looks at difficult, unsolved problems in a group leads to a) wasting time on catch-up work and lack of new ideas, b) reveling in collective ineffectiveness, or c) distracting each other as you both look for answers to the same question. Situations like this are largely just social time (and that's ok!).

My Experience

I did a good job at buying time.

But I did a horrible job at reducing stress. Even though I was working short weeks, my fall was quite rough. I remember, 2 weeks in, texting Sarah that I was so tired and felt I needed to be constantly productive. I remember getting Covid in early October and being unable to function for a week. I needed my 8-10 miles of walking a day to stay sane. I talked to my dad around midterms, complaining that I couldn't muster the passion to do homework/coursework because I didn't care about the technical details. (He recommended finding something else to focus on, as I recommend to you should you find yourself in that situation). Standard deviation below the mean on both midterms. Nearly every time I worked in a group, I left feeling like I'd practically wasted my time being there (though the social side was refreshing). There were so many days where I felt completely destroyed. Every time I felt incompetent, I'd text the MBAn career advisor concerned I wouldn't get hired. (She'd nicely tell me everything would be alright.) I walked for an hour at 11PM to get a hug from a friend because I needed one. I ranted to my grandparents about the program over Thanksgiving, and was frustrated at them telling me to "just try my best". My meal prep became one-offs, became scuffed meals, became ShittyFoodPorn as the semester progressed. I remember telling my mom my chance at an A/B/C in Optimization was 5/75/20% respectively.

Based on the sample size of the people I interacted with regularly, I'd say that I had ~median stress levels. Variance in stress levels among the middle 80 percent seemed relatively low.

I was never particularly stressed about any individual assignment or class. I stressed myself out significantly more than necessary concerned with my lack of care to learn the technical details. Identity crisis and imposter syndrome. BUILD IN TIME FOR WHATEVER HELPS YOU

FEEL BETTER. If I hadn’t done a good job spending my bought time on feel-better activities, I would have likely spontaneously combusted.

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IAP & Capstone Selection

tl;dr:

- Find a teammate who wants to put in a similar amount of work as you and has a willingness to do the parts of the work you can't or won't
- Then, find a capstone team that matches the things you care about most: team vibe, location, technical level of project, and/or project industry/problem space
- I recommend weighting compatibility with the capstone team more heavily than the project itself (I recommend this in life, too!)
- You will also want to ask about data sources/availability, work expectations, scope of project, and supervisor
- Capstone interviews are largely non-technical

Partnership Strategy:

Find a partner that you feel comfortable working and communicating with. More importantly, find a partner that either has a similar desire to work on capstone as you (or y'all are happy enough to make up for each other's slack). The projects and homeworks in the fall are a great way to suss this out. Don't be afraid to partner with a close friend.

For some time, no one is worried about settling on capstone partners. Then a couple people partner up. Then they go over IAP and Spring semester registration. Suddenly, everyone is partnered up. I think our class went from ~13% partnered up to 100% partnered up over the course of 48 hours.

Capstone Matching Strategy:

Interviews will be largely non-technical in nature (see Capstone Interview Questions). Get close with your partner and communicate about how you want to run them, and you'll be fine.

A unicorn is a project where there's 1) good data access, 2) a technically-oriented and helpful team, 3) high-quality scoping/fair work expectations, as well as an opportunity to 4) try something cutting edge that 5) has significant results and 6) gets implemented. Most of the projects have 3-4 of these qualities.

Some companies won't have good data to give you. Some ~research capstones are given clearly fake data as a basis for the company's next research project. Some data will be messy to the extent that you can't produce meaningful results. Many capstones are best served by a relatively simple solution for their problem—you shouldn't use the most cutting-edge algorithm/tool(s) to

solve the problem (even though you'd maybe wish to). Some companies will treat you as a full-time employee and expect that you do more than their full-time Data Scientists.

A couple of the most important questions that you should ask capstone companies in interviews is, "What does the data look like?" and "What will we need to do to access the data?" So many teams' capstone processes are made much more challenging by a lack of data (or its access). Outside of checking for that, do your capstone ranking however you want to.

Learn as much, be as helpful, and make your sponsors/faculty mentor as happy as you can. Don't worry about the minutia. Few teams have to work more than 40 hours consistently to get a high quality project done. Enjoy yourself :)

My Experience:

In terms of the Capstone, Lineage Logistics treated us wonderfully. They gave regular and easy access to supervision and input, but were hands-off until asked for. They gave us immediate access to data. They treated us incredibly kindly and understood when low data quality spelled out bad output, and were happy with our work. They never expected us to work on anything other than the capstone.

In the early summer, we all concluded that the data we had wasn't clean enough to generate implementable models. The problem was clearly something that had to be revisited down the line with more data—that initial exploratory data analysis was the most valuable contribution that we could have made to the company. Given the nature of the capstone class, though, we had to continue down the project line and deliver some models that translated into theoretical real-world value. In the real world, we would have pivoted to another project.

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The Spring

tl;dr:

Do what you want.

- If you want to start job prepping early, take a lighter load
- Classes you take will likely have very little impact on how well you perform in interviews
- Enjoy yourself!
- Invest further in your friendships!
- And do informational interviews.

Classes & Workload:

The spring is yours to make!

There are usually a few people who overload themselves with technical classes + an RAship (around 10% of the class). Then there's a good collection of people who take one technical class in a subject they're interested in (~50% of the class). Everyone else takes a collection of classes that maximizes their ability to focus elsewhere. Plan and research your classes with Firehose.

Really, though, enjoy yourself! No one's gonna look at your transcript. This is your last opportunity to vibe with the other MBAns before everyone splits off around the summer and to take the cool classes you care to take.

Figuring Out Jobs:

If you are unsure what you want to do or what type of company you want to work for, try to get a bunch of informational interviews under your belt early in the spring. Knowledge of what you want makes the later search significantly easier because it narrows your scope. Knowing what type of job you want also makes it easier to begin preparing for those interviews at a consistent pace.

The DS job-recruiting timeline seems to keep getting pushed later. Don't expect to have your job by the end of the spring. There are exceptions to this: "Other", some finance, and some consulting firms recruit early.

My Experience:

My main focus for the program was to get a job. In the fall we were told not to focus on it, so I geared into it heavily in the Spring. For the first half of the spring, all my free time went to prep, finding/making content, and informational interviews. After spring break, I took my foot off the

gas and told myself I'd do something social every day. That promise to myself was maybe the best decision I made throughout the entire program. Don't get so lost in the thought of a future job that you miss out on opportunities that you'd much more rarely find outside of Sloan.

Research Assistantships

tl;dr of Ian's writing:

Only apply for an RAship if you are considering a PhD or are passionate about the work your PI does. The fewer free hours you have, the more costly the theoretical 10–12 hours/week of a research assistantship are. If you're interested in researching with a professor, look into their area of research and be prepared to talk about it (and your motivation to join it) with them. RAships are just as much about being a good organizer/communicator as being a good researcher. RAship research is either well-directed under a PhD, ~self-directed 1:1 with a professor, or advocated for in a research group.

My one thought:

RAing is an opportunity to take advantage of MIT resources in a way that little else you do at MIT does. You work with a professor on their research. At a high and mighty research school, you're "not having the full experience" unless you join in on research. I say all this having chosen not to RA and having no regrets about having not RA'd.

This section was written by Ian Tongs - (Research Assistantship Award with Ananya Krishnan)

Who Should Do An RA-ship:

Put simply, if your first and only thoughts about an RA-ship are "this will look great on my resume" or "an extra 10k would be nice", an RA-ship isn't for you. By contrast, if you are thinking of applying for a PhD or are interested in the subject area, then an RA-ship can be a great way to further your passion or prepare to see if you actually want to do a PhD. It also lets you work closely with a world leading professor, which can be a great advantage.

To those who aren't in this category and want to know why I don't suggest an RA-ship: you will regret taking on the extra work you're not really interested in when fall semester gets going. Hours for an RA-ship are meant to be 10-12 hours a week, and while this sounds manageable, it will prove to be a big stress point for you during the semester. You'll be questioning if you REALLY need to do the at RA work when you're behind on

the Optimization HWs, and that results in you getting further behind in both. Without the motivation of passion, you will struggle to give your RA-ship the attention it deserves. That will negatively affect both the professor and PhDs you work with. Of course some professors demand more than 10-12 hours a week as well, but that is another issue.

How to Apply for an RAship:

Find one or two professors you are REALLY interested in the research of, and focus there. Don't go for a scatter-gun approach or you'll get nothing. Try to message previous RAs when researching professors - past RAs can give you a solid idea of their professor's work-style and habits. Finally, familiarize yourself with your chosen professor's research area and be prepared to talk about it. In the interview, be truthful with your professors, especially about motivation, professionalism, and time management ability. The professor and their PhDs have all the power in deciding who will be their RAs. If you're not chosen, it's not an indication of character but of interest mismatch.

Juggling Class with RAship:

A good RA must know how to communicate. Be professional, honest, and upfront. That means telling your team when you'll be too busy to get work done, replying quickly to emails, practicing before presentations, and talking with your PhDs regularly!

I would heavily recommend investing in a good time-management/task-tracking system, as your research will likely involve a lot of varied tasks and feedback. Keeping track of that is key. You don't want to be told to - or how to do - the same task twice.

RA-ship Structures:

RA-ships can be pretty varied.

Most likely it'll be you, a PhD who owns the research, and a professor overseer. You work under the guidance of a PhD, and can learn a lot quickly - especially if you're considering doing a PhD - while still having input. Working with a PhD is a great opportunity to have mentorship as well, including conversations about things you're not prepared to ask a professor. Professors who do many projects like this include Professors Perakis and Bertsimas.

A 1:1 project with a professor is also common, though much more self-directed. You don't get a PhD to rely on, but you do have a lot of freedom to explore the subject area.

This type of project is both professor and passion dependent. Professor Jacquillat and many non-ORC professors will predominantly do RA-ships of this style.

Finally, the third type of RA-ship is as part of a group. This is less common, but is essentially PhD-assisted RA-ships with more players. In this style of RA-ship you have to be more self-promoting to get interesting tasks. Based on my discussions with those who had such RA-ships, this didn't present any significant difficulties not already discussed. Professor Vivek (and Professor Retsef Levi?) often do research like this.

As always, RA-ships are very professor dependent. The most accurate information on what an RA-ship with X professor is like comes from those who had X professor previously.

There is also a research class that Professor Bertsimas teaches in the fall semester, which essentially becomes an unpaid RA-ship for credit. Students who are interested in working in Medical Data Science found this class useful, but its workload was high.

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Job Hunting — Finding the Right Job for You

tl;dr:

Everyone gets some job, if they want one. Do not worry about that.

- Finding the *right* job is much harder than finding *a* job
- Tracy is helpful for emotional support, general guidance, and company connections
- Companies do not expect you to be able to generate value immediately; they hire you for the potential they see in you

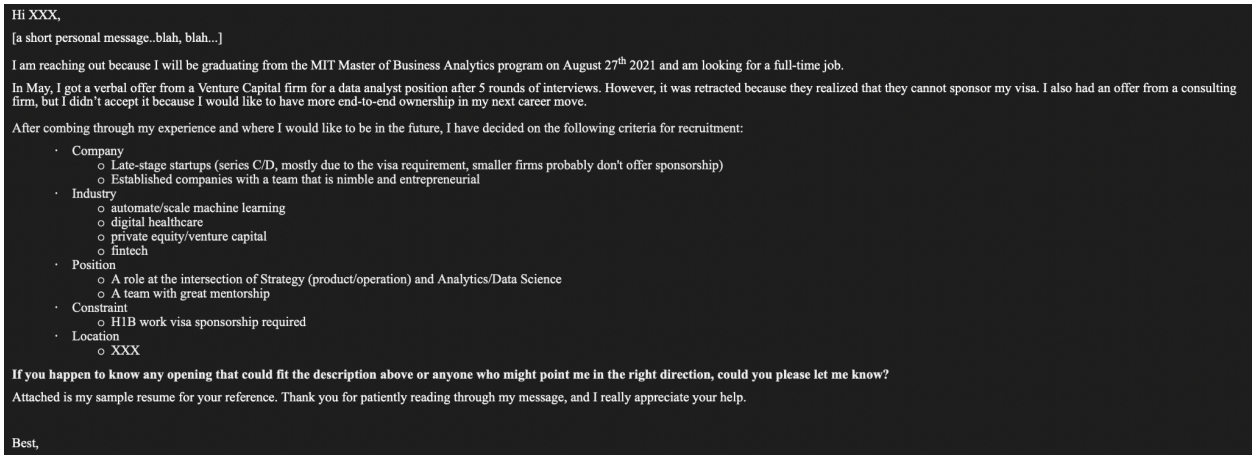
Figuring Yourself Out:

First, figure out what you care about through informational interviews, talks with friends, and self reflection. That can be an industry, technical level, pay, work-life balance (WLB), etc.

Next, expand your vision to find as holistic a list of companies that fit the bill as possible. You can do this by building a spreadsheet (e.g. Give Me A Job -- Please and Thank You), emailing your network (like below), or by diving into your niche space of interest.

Don't limit your options to companies that you (and everyone else) has heard of. There're a huge collection of opportunities (with interesting missions and competitive pay). Investing time early to find your fits are likely to leave you with an easier job search process, and long-term more happy and productive.

Then, talk to a bunch of people at companies that meet your criteria and filter down to your top few. Find someone that is willing to refer you at each of these companies. When a listing goes up that you're interested in, ask them if they can refer you and/or get you into a conversation with the hiring manager.



Hi XXX,

[a short personal message..blah, blah...]

I am reaching out because I will be graduating from the MIT Master of Business Analytics program on August 27th 2021 and am looking for a full-time job.

In May, I got a verbal offer from a Venture Capital firm for a data analyst position after 5 rounds of interviews. However, it was retracted because they realized that they cannot sponsor my visa. I also had an offer from a consulting firm, but I didn't accept it because I would like to have more end-to-end ownership in my next career move.

After combing through my experience and where I would like to be in the future, I have decided on the following criteria for recruitment:

- Company
  - Late-stage startups (series C/D, mostly due to the visa requirement, smaller firms probably don't offer sponsorship)
  - Established companies with a team that is nimble and entrepreneurial
- Industry
  - automate/scale machine learning
  - digital healthcare
  - private equity/venture capital
  - fintech
- Position
  - A role at the intersection of Strategy (product/operation) and Analytics/Data Science
  - A team with great mentorship
- Constraint
  - H1B work visa sponsorship required
- Location
  - XXX

If you happen to know any opening that could fit the description above or anyone who might point me in the right direction, could you please let me know?

Attached is my sample resume for your reference. Thank you for patiently reading through my message, and I really appreciate your help.

Best,

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The Job Search:

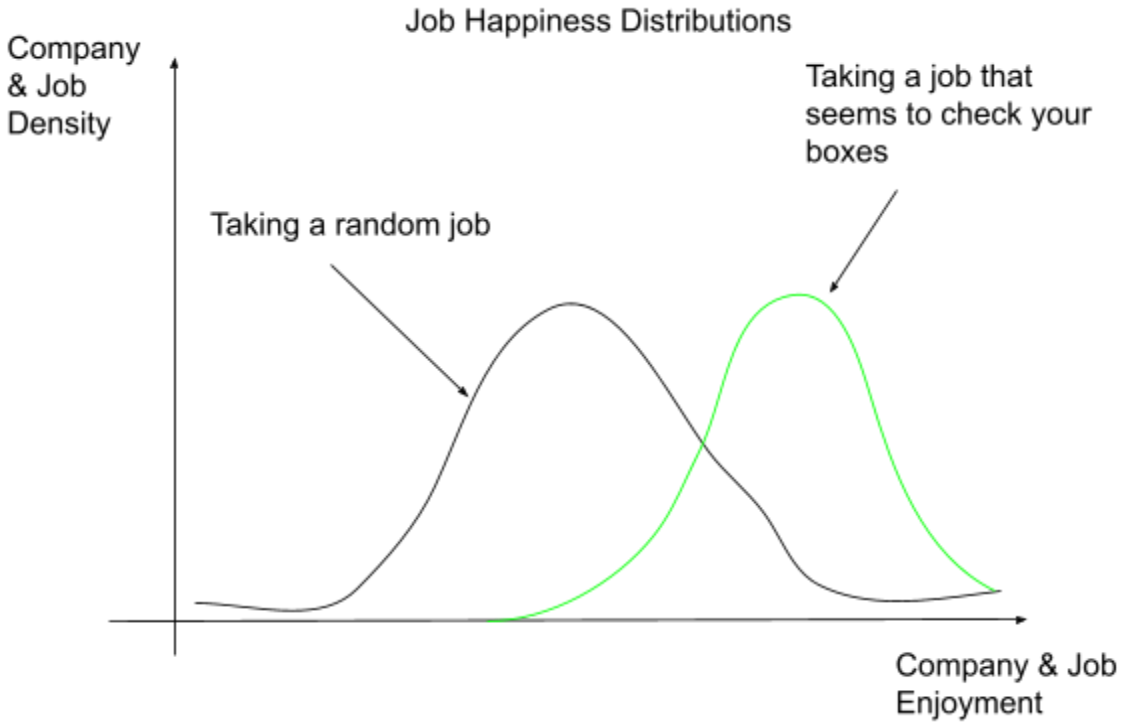
Know that your job search will likely take longer than you anticipated. The timeline for hiring is consistently being shifted later. I'd posit that less than a tenth of my class had jobs before the spring ended. This can be anxiety-producing if you don't expect it. And worse than being anxiety producing, it could cause you to hate searching, rush the process, and sign something you'll later become unhappy with.

There isn't really a question of whether or not you'll get a job because capstone companies are usually willing to hire MBAns with little to no interview process. Take comfort in that. These are great places to work and are a fantastic safety net.

Good Enough is Enough:

Spending the time to figure out what you care about in a job, then pursuing that dream, improves your chances at finding a highly fulfilling job. But if, for whatever reason, you're stuck with something else, know that your dream place might have turned out poorly or this other job could turn out exceptionally well (see my poorly drawn image below). Also know that if, for whatever reason, you end up disliking your job, you can switch.

If an offer meets your standards ("is good enough"), you can't extend the signing timeline, and you don't have something better in hand, sign it.



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Company Size

tl;dr:

The question is less the size of the company than the size of the team.

- Large teams on well-developed, profitable products (that meaningfully contribute to the bottom line of the company) have problems that need last-mile polish.
    - They'll need you to specialize as part of the product-incremental-improvement assembly line.
    - Because of this, you'll be more likely to be using cutting edge tech, have high-quality training and guidance, and have good job safety.
- Small teams have many problems that need to be solved, so it's more important that you get a minimum viable product working for many problems than have a perfect solution to a few of them.
    - Smaller teams give more autonomy, are results-driven (ability to potentially promote faster), and give you the opportunity to significantly change the product.

Big Companies:

Big companies/data science teams are essentially data-science assembly lines. The product is so large that they have hired someone to implement each part of the model creation process! That means you get to specialize and become incredibly good at the thing you are meant to be doing. Additionally, since the company is large, they will have a well-defined mentorship and onboarding program made to get you very good at that thing you'll specialize in.

With every product, there are questions that need to be answered. These products are well-developed, so most of their core problems will already have been worked on. Your job will be to improve these things incrementally. You'll likely use cutting edge tools and be on the research front of these problems. You'll likely make changes to a product that millions of people see daily.

Big companies have to be diligent to preserve their brand reputation. "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and 5 minutes to ruin it." As a result of this, getting things done at a large company is likely to require a good amount of bureaucracy to ensure that nothing goes wrong; there's a lot of red tape to get data, push code, or make large product changes.

Large companies and teams are consistent and safe. You will be well-trained and learn best practices. People will be familiar with where you work and the product you work on. You will be good at what you do. You will get to perfect something. Your job will be secure and you will likely have a normal promotion trajectory.

Small Companies:

Small companies and teams need all-rounders. Which means that they give you great opportunities to expose yourself to the whole data-science tech stack. You also get the autonomy to, once given a problem, pursue the solution that you think is best and develop the abilities you want to develop in order to implement your proposed solution.

Because the product is still new, all of the base problems need to be answered. Your job will be to develop a good-enough solution to all of these problems; a lot more of your work will be focused on moving quickly and doing the 20% effort for 80% results. Associated with this is very little red tape; if you see an opportunity to do something, you likely can do it. This is fantastic in that you can see meaningful changes being made as a result of your handiwork and always feel like you're making progress toward the team's larger mission.

Additionally, since every decision is meaningful at a small company/team, promotions will hinge very much on your results. This can lead to faster promotion timelines.

If you're at a truly small startup (e.g. <100 people), you will be doing every job. Which is awesome! You will be creating the product and then heavily editing it. You might be the person in charge of the whole DS space.

"Risk, especially when young, is not as big as you make it out to be. It's company dependent, but if a startup has raised a sizable seed, your salary won't be that much less than you'd be making at a comparably large place (particularly if early in your career)." - Airtable Mentor

Big Company, Small Team or Midsize Firm:

There's a middle ground. Big companies (tech companies, in particular), can be thought of as a collection of smaller companies under one umbrella. Smaller, fledgling products are similar to internal startups with good seed. Which is also similar to a midsize firm. If they are growing, they have all the best (and worst) things about being at a large or small company, but with lower magnitude in each regard.

I knew I wanted something midsize. I was unwilling to completely sacrifice mentorship/guidance starting my career, but was also looking for a "move quickly and break things" environment.

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Job Roles

tl;dr:

The spectrum of roles for MBAns ranges from very technical to non-technical.

	Machine Learning Engineer/ Applied Scientist/ Quant	Research Scientist & Quantitative Researcher	Data Scientist	Product Analyst	Product Manager
Technical Level	1st + Coding	1st	Depends, Generally 2nd	3rd	4th
Pay	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Specialized	Yes	Yes	Depends	Depends	No
SQL & Dashboarding	No	No	Depends	Yes	Some
Non-technical Stakeholder Interaction	Little	Little	Depends	Good amount	Non-stop
Leadership	4th	3rd	Depends	2nd	1st

Data scientist is often used as a blanket term — you could be called a data scientist and have a role anywhere on the spectrum.

- The more you directly interact with stakeholders, the less technical your role is likely to be.
- Read job descriptions and do informational interviews for the specific companies you're thinking about.

Applied Scientist (AS)/Machine Learning Engineer (MLE):

Half of your work is ML research/being a research scientist. You may be expected to publish. The other half is being a software engineer——scaling the ML algos you've researched, making them work in parallel with the larger company codebase (productionalizing code). Often, over time, you'll end up particularly familiar with some type of data and some type of model. You'll be involved in very little non-technical stakeholder interaction or dashboarding/SQL work. These roles most typically exist at companies that process a LOT of data: finance, big tech, fintech.

> “Applied Science (aka MLE) is arguably closer to SWE than to DS. [Amazon] roles require you to meet an entry-level SDE bar, as well as a DS bar. It's often harder for people from a ‘normal’ DS background to do the basics of the SDE stuff than it is for an SDE to do the basics of the science stuff. A lot of AS work can be done with strong SDE skills + leveraging core DS libraries.
>
> Put differently, a person who can train and deploy a distributed XGBoost model on a dataset that doesn't fit into memory is far more valuable than a person who can manually do some of the underlying math behind XGBoost.”
>
> - Reddit

Research Scientist (RS)/Quantitative Researcher (Quant):

You are essentially a well-paid Research Assistant. Your company/team has some problem that they are trying to develop a high-quality solution for, and you are responsible for helping them solve that problem. You may be expected to publish. I know less about this role, but I imagine that you create the minimum viable product (MVP) model to solve a problem, then the model is passed to MLEs to scale. You become quite familiar with your particular problem and model space. You will have relatively little non-technical stakeholder interaction and very little dashboarding. These roles largely exist at companies whose business is a data science problem (e.g. Waymo or Stitch Fix) or large companies that have money or time to spend optimizing for incremental return: big tech and finance.

Data Scientist (DS):

The Data Scientist role is defined differently at different companies. It can be anywhere on the spectrum from MLE to Product Analyst. Read the role description. For example, Facebook Data Scientist is “less technical” than Google Product Analyst. The data scientist role tends to be a linear combination of the research scientist and product analyst roles. As a DS you likely build some robust model or do some kind of literature review (and sometimes literature depthening), and then also work in SQL/generating dashboards/simple modeling/communicating with stakeholders. You may serve as the middle-person between the product and the MLEs, translating the needs of the product manager into something/prototypes that makes implementable sense to MLEs/research scientists. This linear combination of job roles is VERY company and team dependent though. The majority of MBAns end up in a data scientist role.

Product Analyst (PA):

You are fully on the product side — you are the analytical aid to the product manager. A lot of your work is creating metrics, building dashboards to analyze metrics, and conducting basic data generation/analyses with SQL/Tableau/Looker/whatever other tool. Occasionally, you'll do some ad hoc modeling using standard libraries. Essentially, product analysts analyze product trends/their customers, report on them, and make strategic recommendations based on these reports. You will very frequently be interacting with non-technical stakeholders (e.g. the product manager, higher supervisors, etc.).

Product Manager (PM):

The PM's job is to be the unofficial leader of the product. They develop the product strategy and roadmap, conceive new product features, interview customers and stakeholders, then coordinate with the engineers and designers to lay down schedules and outline project requirements. They use SQL and dashboards to some extent and likely have an analyst to help them. They have immense amounts of stakeholder interaction. Though some companies have an entry-level "Associate Product Manager" role, product management is generally not an entry-level job as its so heavily dependent on communication/leadership abilities (and an understanding of technical workload management/prioritization) that come with experience. Product managers are frequently previous computer scientists or product analysts.

Comparisons:

In regards to technical performance, and as an overwhelming generalization, an applied scientist could do anything a research scientist could do. A research scientist could do anything a data scientist could. A data scientist could do anything a product analyst could do. The communication side of things is the opposite. Product managers are completely separate. As technical ability required for a role decreases, so does pay.

My Experience:

When I first started doing my informational interviews, I wanted to be a machine learning engineer. They're the "smart" ones, at least in the traditional sense. As I continued to do my informational interviews, I realized I was not meant for that role. I didn't know how to code and had no research experience. I didn't care for the fall technical classes. It wasn't my vibe.

So I tried to get away from the technical side as much as I could; I decided to focus my search as much as I could on product management. I didn't get far. Like investment banking and management consulting, product management has a very specific preparation process that I didn't

understand how to break into (join the MIT Club!). Entry-level product management roles are also few and far between. Where they exist is largely at big tech companies that do their recruiting in the fall for jobs that start in the summer.

Besides the lack of entry-level jobs in product management, I also eventually realized that my current skill set and tastes wouldn't make for competitive in a product management role, either. At least not yet, anyway. I don't have the experience or social battery needed, as it stands.

So I largely limited my search to Data Scientist and Product Analyst/Data Scientist positions. This is where I found the positions I was most excited about.

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Industry Profiles

tl;dr:

	Consulting	Big Tech	Startup	Finance	Other
Prestige	Yes	Yes	No	Depends	No
Pay	MBB meh, others good	Good	Depends on company performance	Good-Great	Bad
Work Life Balance (WLB)	Depends, unlikely	Good	Bad	Depends	Good
Job Safety	Good	Usually Good	Bad	Depends	Great
Travel	Yes	No	Depends	No	No
Culture Perks	Depends	Yes	Likely	No	No
Compelling Mission	No	Maybe	Yes	No	Maybe
Exit	F500 Management or some difficulty getting tech	Big tech, rare startup	Other startups, rare big tech	Finance, Big Tech	Well-sized firm
Additional Notes	Exposure, no implementation	Specificity and last-mile perfection	Wearing many hats, 80/20 rule	Intensity dependent on firm, hedge funds can be “eat what you kill”	

Consulting:

Consulting comprises both the analytics arms attached to traditional consulting companies (McKinsey, BCG, Bain, Accenture/End2End) and analytics/software consulting (Palantir, C3.AI, etc.). You will be exposed to a wide range of industries and data science problems, and interact

with a wide array of people. Consulting will also build your communication and management skills. Though the roles and projects can vary technically, you'll largely be applying standard DS practices to whatever problems come your way. If you're on a client-facing team at any of these firms, with the exception of C3 or Accenture, you will likely be working long hours and traveling frequently. Structure is relatively flat/meritocratic, but there are still consistent promotional timelines. Pay is usually ~standard and barely-negotiable. Pay at the traditional consulting companies is all in cash. Palantir and C3 pay like tech companies, with stock incentives. Jobs are safe, most people self-select out before they'd ever get fired. Roles at traditional consulting companies exit into management positions for those who enjoy it, or big tech individual contributor roles for those who want to escape it.

Big Tech:

You will serve a very specific role and your technical level will stay relatively constant. A large variety of roles exist, though. These companies tend to offer terrific, well-structured onboarding. You will quickly gain an understanding of industry best-practices for your role. You get to specialize and really bring the last-mile polish/perfect a product, using cutting-edge tech or research. Or you're doing cool work at an internal startup. There may be some bureaucracy to make sure that nothing would break with changes. Your job will be relatively safe, there's tons of money to go around. Usually good and consistent pay, though a lot of your pay comes in the form of RSUs. Most people who go to big tech stay in it. Or they save a bunch and eventually leave to start or join a startup.

Startups:

Move fast and break things. Though you're officially a data scientist, you could be wearing many different hats and get exposure to many different jobs surrounding the company's product. At a firm just beginning to invest in data science, this could mean that you handle the whole DS pipeline (e.g. data collection/engineering to analytics to building baseline models). At a tiny place, this could mean that you're even joining sales calls and venture capital pitches. Every contribution you make literally revolutionizes the way that the company uses data. When you join, the structure is relatively flat. As the company grows, teams are built under you and your position naturally shifts upwards. Pay is highly variable and VERY dependent on long-term company performance. Your job could also disappear if the company starts doing poorly. Because of this, work and life are usually quite intertwined—WLB exists through a totally different lens, if it does exist. Usually people who self-select into startups love startups, so stay in startups until they eventually want to settle down and pivot to a more consistent and safe working environment. Exits into more startups or big tech.

Finance:

A research environment. You'll get exposed to some particular niche in finance. The pressure of the environment is highly dependent on company and role; banks are lower-pressure environments than hedge funds and pure research is more relaxed than trading. WLB at banks and Two Sigma is good. WLB at other hedge funds is on average okay with high standard deviation. Hedge fund structure is relatively flat, but pay is highly performance/eat-what-you-kill/bonus driven so unchanging level doesn't mean unchanging pay. Banks are more hierarchical and have pay structures that reflect that. Pay is good and all in cash. Research jobs are relatively safe. Exits into finance and tech. If you don't have a non-trading, non-research role in finance, it's like you have a role in "Other Industries" as below.

Other Industries (Healthcare, Logistics, Manufacturing, CPG):

As a generalization, these are going to be massive companies that have existed forever and are just now developing their analytics arms. As a result of this, they have many analytics problems to be solved but lack teams devoted to each of the potential analytics usages. Therefore, in these companies, you end up as essentially an internal consultant being staffed on 2-3 projects simultaneously that may in no way relate to one another. Some of these projects will be close to the research front, but most of the time you're doing initial/basic implementations of DS solutions in the same way as small DS teams do. You'll get exposure to all verticals of the industry. The role is relatively low pressure and WLB is good. Lots of mentorship exists. Promotional timeline is likely slow. You will not get fired. Pay reflects this. All cash. Exits into similar roles or into tech.

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Cities

tl;dr:

	New York City	Boston	San Francisco	Seattle
Descriptive Phrase	"Work hard, play hard"	College Town	"Live to work"	"Work to live"
Industry Competitive Advantage	Finance, Consulting, Media	Biotech, Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG), Education, Consulting	Tech, Startups	None
MBAn Population	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Public Transport	1st	2nd	4th (Bay Area good)	3rd
Safety	2nd/3rd	1st	4th	2nd/3rd
Cost of Living	1st	3rd	2nd	4th
Vibe	Ambitious	Academic	Startup	Get Outside
Communication	Direct	Direct	Passive	Passive
Personality Type	A	B (relative to NY, if you're not in academia)	A	B
Diversity	1st	3rd	2nd	4th
Food	1st	4th	2nd	3rd
Weather	2nd	3rd	1st	1st in Summer, Last other times
Social Scene	Bars, Clubs, Food, Concerts	Bars?	Hikes, Food, Healthy Living	Outdoors, Dogs, Exercise
Dating (Assuming Heterosexual)	Male favored	Pretty Even	Heavily Female Favored	Female Favored

New York City:

Generally speaking, NYC takes the largest fraction of the MBAns. It's New York City! There are opportunities in every field. New York is very "work hard, play hard." The culture of the East Coast is generally fast paced, so usually you're expected to be grinding a bit harder than in other cities. This is compounded in NYC because it's run by finance, ambition, and the movement of money. The upside: the city truly never sleeps and is very socially driven. People are always out, about, and getting food—or into some shenanigans. At any time, 24/7, you can get to where you need to go by some combination of subway, walking, and the occasional bus. Public transportation is great! Culturally quite ambitious, fantastically diverse, and maybe a little vain or materialistic. Quite bustling. Some people can't stand the busyness. Generally speaking, it's pretty safe—I've been in many parts of the city past midnight without any concern. Slight male favor for dating. The most expensive of the four. You can live in Jersey City and take the PATH train to cheapen NYC a bit without too much inconvenience.

Boston:

You guys can reach your own verdict about this—you'll have lived here for a year! Driven by academia, biotech, and some tech. Safer, colder, type-B version of NYC. Still has the faster East Coast culture, but is slightly less hustle-y than NYC. Outside the context of the hyper-prestige schools, it is relatively less vain. Very walkable! You can easily get anywhere with a combination of the T and your feet. It's not very diverse and the food reflects that :/ If I had to choose a city among the four in which to raise kids, it would be Boston without question. Pretty even dating ratio. Third most expensive, cleanly cheaper than San Francisco.

San Francisco:

San Francisco is "live to work." The home of tech and startup opportunities. So many people seem to be consumed by their work: their work is their mission and their identity. The culture is more laid back than the East Coast. This is true socially and culturally, too —less "going out" and a greater focus on living healthily. The city proper is barely walkable, and the Bay Area certainly is not. Public transportation isn't great. Fantastic and consistent weather, year-round. Culturally quite diverse, particularly with a large Hispanic and Asian presence. Eye-opening amounts of homelessness—I walked an hour and a half to and from work every day along Market Street for two months and saw a bunch of dicks, an insane amount of crack pipes, and a small collection of truly disgusting and terrifying things. I appreciated this for the first awhile, knowing it was a good perspective to have. After a few weeks though, it became deeply saddening. It's the least safe of the cities because of this. Dating is heavily female favored due to male tech overpopulation. Second most expensive of the four, ~10% cheaper than NYC. In the Bay Area, you can get much more space for your money than in the city proper but will need a car to get around easily.

Seattle:

Seattle, “work to live.” A West Coast city, with a huge focus on the outdoors and sustainability. There’s a “Seattle Freeze” where outsiders just sorta have to adjust to the relative insularity of the city and people. Not diverse. Pretty grungy (it’s where grunge got its start!). Weather is, relative to the East, temperate. Gray for 2/3 of the year, beautiful late spring to early fall. It’s somewhat walkable and has usable public transport, but you’ll be better off with a car. Slight female dating favor. No state income tax and already the cheapest of the four.

City Comparison:

$215k in NYC = 200k in SF = 185k in Boston = 165k in Seattle for the same quality of life. Opportunity wise, go to SF for tech/startups, Boston for biotech (or a PhD lol), and NYC for anything else. Boston is to NYC as Seattle is to San Francisco—Boston/Seattle are NYC/SF’s type-B counterparts.

- Safety: Boston >>> NYC > Seattle > SF. Food: NYC > SF >> Seattle >> Boston.
- Weather: Seattle Summer > SF >> Boston = NYC >>> Seattle any other time of year. Walkability/public transport: NYC >>> Boston >> Seattle > SF.
- MBAn alumni population: NYC >> Boston > SF >> Seattle.

Generalization: West Coast people will say mostly what’s nice (communicate less directly), East Coast people will say mostly what’s true (communicate more directly). This makes East Coast people seem rude (but authentic?) and West Coast people seem laid back (but superficial?). The saying goes “on the East Coast they're kind but not nice, and on the West Coast they're nice but not kind.”

My Experience:

Seattle was my choice city. Though I loved Boston, I knew I wanted to have a new environment. I grew up and have family and friends on the East Coast and anticipated that I’d come back eventually. It was my opportunity to experience something different, so I crossed NYC off my list, too. I’m a saver, and Seattle is great for that. I also knew that I wanted to have a complete fresh start. Seattle (statistically, at the time of my decision) was also the best of the four for that. By happenstance, my top choice company was Seattle-based and the team I was to join would be heavily in-person. This of course added to the draw.

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Informational Interviews & Referrals

tl;dr:

You can learn a lot about what you want and get your foot in the door of any company via an informational interview.

- Request everyone on LinkedIn
- Though you don't need to message, a good copy-paste message wouldn't hurt (especially for those unaffiliated with you).
- Do every informational interview you can until you have significantly diminished returns.
- First interviews are for scoping (helping you figure out what you want), later interviews should largely be targeted.
- For the companies and roles you are interested in, ask to talk to hiring managers or, at the very least, to get referrals.

Informational Interviews:

Start by doing informational interviews across industries and roles. You'll pretty quickly figure out the general space you want to be in.

Once you've narrowed your scope to an industry and/or role, find companies you'd be willing to work for in that industry/role. Request to connect, message, and ask to chat with everyone you can in that company/role. Don't be shy. You are an MIT student about to graduate with a Master's in Business Analytics. You can connect with someone at essentially any company you'd like to work for. Someone will respond, and you'll get a pretty good feel for if you'd enjoy working at a company that way. If your chat with someone has you checking the clock and wondering when it'll end, stay away from them and their company.

Networking Can Be Wholesome

Don't feel bad for taking people's time. People want to help you. Informational interviews are a way for them to do that. If they didn't want to help you, they wouldn't take the time to chat.

I feel like there's an assumption nowadays that networking is transactional, especially for young people who seemingly have little to offer. "How can I convince this person to do what I want?" You feign interest to get the referral you want. You get what you want, then you disappear from each other's lives.

That's a sad way to view networking.

High quality “networking” is about building and maintaining friendships and adding to each other’s lives. You speak to a friend and think about how you could help them—you match them with another friend who has similar interests. You have some need for yourself and think “who could help me solve this problem?” Friends want to see each other succeed. Just as you’d help them, they’d help you. They see an opportunity to help you start your career. They do help. It feels good. You stay in touch. You help them, as you can. Everyone wins.

Frame your informational interviews as knowledge and friendship building sessions for the start of your career. Because that’s what they are. You’re interested in the person. You want to know more about what they do. You want to know about their experiences. If you feel like you gel with them, you’ll want to spend more time with them. If you feel like what they do is interesting, you’ll want to discuss their problems. Both of these may naturally lead to your wanting to work at their company. If you’re in the pre-application stage, ask them to keep in touch, and ask if they would eventually be willing to put you in touch with their manager or to refer you. If you’re in your application stage, or you’re coming into your application stage after having spoken to someone months earlier, ask them if they’d refer you, if there are any roles open on their team, and/or if they could put you in touch with their manager.

If they feel like you fit well with them, there’s a culture match. If you think that you’re interested in the work and competent to do it, there’s a technical match. They think you’d be a good fit for the company and add value. They want to refer you. Both of you (and the company) win.

At most companies, referrals cost the referring employee almost nothing to give. And, if you’re hired, the referring employee gets a bonus. Many people, alumni especially, would be willing to refer you for a role after limited interaction.

My Experience:

Informational interviews turned me away from consulting and towards mid-sized tech. I also got totally turned off by some companies after chatting with an employee. The conversations I enjoyed most were the places that I most wanted to work. My chat with a former MBAn from COMPANY NAME 3 was supposed to be 20-30 minutes and turned into 80! That led to a wonderful chat with her boss. I was later able to skip into and rush final-round interviews by communicating my interview timeline with my hiring manager (or rather, his boss). The culture matched, and now I’m with them and very happy about it. I hope the same for you.

I made a goal of having at least 30 informational interviews in the Spring. That kept me consistent. I also had a goal of getting to 50 application rejections. Having a goal can help keep your head up.

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Job Applications & Interviews

tl;dr:

BE PATIENT!

- You likely will not find a job within 2 months of the first application you send.
- ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS.
- Do not reveal your salary expectations.
- Apply even if the listing wants someone with more experience.
- Do some research about the role you're interviewing for on Glassdoor/blind/informational interviews.
- Focus on what you have to know for interviews of that role. Try to match stories to company values.
- If your interviewer is non-technical, code-switch to non-technical language and explanations.
- Be consistent in your studying and practice: Rome wasn't built in a day.

Rejections are not a reflection of how competent you are.

Where Interviews Come From:

Referrals, the program, or conversations with hiring managers are the path to consistently getting interviews. Assuming you apply at a reasonable time, application response rates for referrals are generally 10x higher than those without them.

I applied to 112 companies. Of those, I made it to the phone screen with ten. Of the ten, I made it past the phone screen/take-home with seven. Six of those seven I was either referred to or MBAn was connected to. All three of my offers were connected to MBAn or referrals.

This isn't just my experience. Brian Hsu, the winner of the academic achievement award the class before me (who had two years of big four consulting experience before coming to MBAn) had about a 5% hit rate on blind applications and close to 80% with referrals.

All this to say, a rejection is meaningless and isn't a reflection of your ability. Don't get down and don't take it personally. If you are deeply interested in a company or role, get a referral. You can connect with someone in any company. Do it, start a conversation, get a referral.

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Application Timing:

Don't worry about the timing of everything. Hiring always happens later than you'd expect or wish. The last few years, the majority of the class accepted their offer after the summer started. A third accepted after graduation.

Time your applications such that the companies you are applying to are willing to hire you. Besides consulting, some hedge funds, or capstone companies, companies are unwilling to hire too far out of your potential start date—particularly smaller companies who have roles open exclusively on an ad-hoc basis. If you won't be able to work in the role for more than a few months, it's not worth their time to talk to you. I applied all over at a semi-constant rate from February onward and only got real traction (all my processes began simultaneously) in early June when my potential start date was just a few months out.

Waiting until May to begin applying is fine—there's no rush. Even into the mid-late summer. Apply to places you don't care about as much early so you can use them as practice. Many *_cough_* me *_cough_* mess up their first couple interviews. For companies you do care about, hold your application and referral usage until they can hire you.

Interview Processes:

Different roles have different application processes. The general process is phone screen→take-home test (sometimes)→first round interview→final rounds. Read the job description and ask your recruiter directly about what types of experiences you'll have in your process. "Other industries" capstone companies' processes are generally light.

Skills Fit:
The following is a generalization of the skill sets and problems involved with interviewing for different types of roles.
Applied scientist:

- Leetcode mediums with optimal solutions
- High quality breadth across ML and statistics
- Depth in 1-2 topics you've used for projects/research
- Model creation case study
- Present a project you've worked on

Research scientist:

- High-quality breadth across ML and statistics
- Depth in 1-2 topics you've used for projects/research
- Potential timed modeling problem
- Model creation case study
- Present a project you've worked on

Data scientist:

- Good quality breadth across ML and statistics
- Good understanding of tools used in projects
- Business-oriented model creation
- Presenting technical details to a non-technical audience
- Maybe leetcode, python, modeling, and/or SQL challenges
- Present a project you've worked on

Product analyst:

- SQL challenges
- Heavily business-oriented modeling case studies
- Presenting technical details to a non-technical audience
- Present a project you've worked on

Product manager:

- Leadership "Tell me about a time"
- Communication "Tell me about a time"
- Product ideas "How would you improve X"
- Present a project you've worked on

Cultural Fit:
Some companies (e.g. Amazon, COMPANY NAME 3) care a tremendous amount about their "culture" and "values." Passing the cultural vibe check is just as important (if not more so) than passing the technical ability check. Technical ability is hard to measure, especially once you're over the minimum technical bar, and being willing to work with someone isn't. Try to find an anecdote from your life to match to each of their values.

Interview Tips:
Ask clarifying questions. If you think you understand the problem, check your understanding: "If I've heard you right, …, correct?" If you must make assumptions, "Is it fair to assume …?" If the problem is ambiguous, "Is … the problem we're trying to solve?" For data science and product roles, half of your interviewers will be non-technical. If asked a question about prior work/research or how you'd approach a data problem, ask "Would you like me to give a high-level overview or get technical/dive into the details?"

Ambiguous problems' proper first answers are questions. McKinsey's second round has two case-study interviews. I failed the second of them. The case was about using historical professional soccer data to predict injuries among players (imbalanced data set). My challenge was having no idea which problem I was trying to solve. I spent 30 minutes talking about

random approaches to different aspects of the problem. I ran out of time to solve the actual case. A quick set of clarifying questions at the beginning could have saved me.

Stay Positive:

Try to have fun! Interviews are not meant to be an adversarial, “you vs. them” situation. Ease the stress, make the whole experience more enjoyable, and help yourself pass the vibe check by imagining you are working with your interviewer to solve some real problem.

No matter how well (or poorly) your interviews go, nothing is guaranteed. I was sure I was failing my initial interview at a company early in my process, so I literally tried to end it early. Still got the offer! I also had friends who felt they had incredible interviews and didn’t get offers.

Don’t promise roles to your friends. You have no control over who gets what, no matter what they deserve. I lost sleep and felt terrible for my overconfidence in assuming a friend would get an offer they didn’t end up getting. There’s randomness involved.

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Understanding Total Compensation

tl;dr:

Compensation can come in the form of base salary, guaranteed bonus, target bonus, restricted stock units (RSUs), restricted stock options (RSOs), sign-on/relocation bonus, paid time off (PTO), and additional benefits.

- High portions of income being in the form of RSUs and RSOs can lead to "golden handcuffs."
- Public tech companies and late-stage startups often have RSU bonuses, and startups often have RSOs.
- RSOs are financially complicated instruments, are often lottery tickets, and have value that's difficult to comprehend.
- For most roles at mid-large size companies, there is a "band" in which you can be paid.
- Sign-on bonuses, which can also get you in trouble, are often used to allow for above-band compensation.

Normal Compensation:

The way that salary and guaranteed bonus work is clear. You get cash money in your bank account.

Target Bonus:

Target bonus is expected bonus given average or above performance. Sometimes this is also intertwined with company performance. Some places (usually financial firms) specify a very large target bonus range that is directly tied to your PnL (profit net loss).

Signing Bonus:

Signing bonuses come in a few different forms. You could receive a lump sum around the time you sign. If you get money at the time of signing, it is usually either meant to be used to relocate or to tide you over until your NDA runs out **cough** hedge funds **cough**. Signing bonuses meant for relocation sometimes have stipulations for their uses. A signing bonus could also be a specified bonus at a given time. Most of the time, this is at the start date (e.g. first paycheck). Some companies, though, distribute your "signing bonus" over time (e.g. 40% at start, 60% on your first anniversary). Be aware that if you leave the company early (usually before the two-year mark), you will likely have to pay back your signing bonus plus tax in "clawback."

Stock Bonus:

Restricted stock units (RSUs) are a form of compensation that will often show up as part of a tech company's compensation package. In contracts, these can show up in one of two forms:

They may give you X units of stock or purchase $Y worth of stock for you, either of which will vest over some number of years. X units means that the value is determined at signing. $Y, assuming that the stock is valued at the date of start (or average over the course of the month of start, in my case), means that the number of units is determined later. The choice between the two is usually the company's. Often, the vesting is subject to a "cliff." This means that you won't get your first large fraction (usually 1/4th) of this stock until after you make it to your cliff date, followed by a more regular interval of disbursement. Similar to the clawback on a signing bonus, this incentivizes you to stay for a while at least.

RSUs have very real pros and cons. The pro of RSUs is that they can potentially increase quite significantly in value over your tenure at a company. It's as though you're given all of your bonuses up front, and you invest them in your company. If you have trouble saving money, RSUs are also nice because they default you into saving—you can't easily access a portion of your paycheck.

The cons of RSUs are very real, though. First, they are illiquid and inherently risky assets. If your company performs poorly, you have no option but to watch your money dissipate. In the short term, cash is almost always better than RSUs. Even if your company does quite well, you'll end up in a "golden handcuffs" situation: it can become quite difficult to leave your job. Imagine the case above, but instead of 100 units, you have 200,000. That 200,000 is now $2,000,000, meaning that you're getting paid $500,000 a year on top of your base salary. It's hard to leave so much money on the table and/or take a pay cut for a company change or even a promotion.

Options Bonus (Startup):

Incentive stock options (ISOs), given by early- to mid-stage startups, are quite similar to RSUs, with a few key differences: Their value is subject to private market valuation, you have to pay taxes on them before you can liquidate, and their vesting doesn't mean that you can cash them in. If you are interested in reading more about ISOs, see the additional resources section. If RSUs are like gambling, ISOs are like buying lottery tickets.

Paid Time Off:

Paid time off (PTO) comes in three forms.

There's **building PTO**, where each hour you work earns you a portion of a day off (usually 49-50 weeks worked translates to 2-3 weeks off) and you have a cap on how much time off you save. Given there's a cap, this essentially forces you to take time off and the company to be alright with it.

Standard PTO is some number of work days off per year. These stack over the years, so if you didn't take your two weeks of PTO in your first year, you'd have earned a total of four by the end of the second. In either of these schemes, you will be paid for the saved days you had when you leave.

Unlimited PTO means that you can have any amount of PTO a year. If you leave/quit, however, you will not be compensated for time you didn't take. The con of this is that, in high-pressure work environments, it can feel as though you're never allowed to take time off. This leaves employees working to the bone and not compensated for it.

Which option is best is subject to both company culture and your values.

Other Benefits:

Additional benefits come in two forms: working benefits and long-term, life benefits. The first consists of your catered lunches, office gym, office view, co-working space provisions, etc. These provide value for those who care about them. Long-term benefits, like 401(k) matching, employee stock purchase programs (ESPP), and different types of insurance, are highly valuable for everyone. Some elections are particularly valuable once you have dependents or get older. The offerings are generally standard for every employee in the company. They can drive a LOT of additional value (and depend on your personal situation). Suppose your salary is X. Most companies have to spend ~1.3x to employ you with all the additional benefit bonuses.

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Negotiation

tl;dr:

Negotiate!

- Use outside sources (like levels.fyi, previous career reports, and pay transparency laws (depending on state) for compensation expectations.
- Make sure that your base salary is enough to cover your living costs.
- Your pay is based on how much you can convince someone else you are worth, not how much value you can provide.
- Sometimes, all you need to do is ask. If you don't ask, the answer is always no by default.
- Be VERY polite and always give an explanation for why you need what you're asking for.
- Set a high target, but ask only for help to "bridge the gap."
- Don't demand changes in your contract that would require a policy change or something that would be an undue annoyance (and not very meaningful for you) to implement.

Changing the Interview Process:

Before you get an offer, you may want to negotiate to speed up or slow down your process. You can use other offers or interviews as leverage to say, "I need this process to move along quickly. I'm quite excited about the potential of working at your company and wouldn't want to be forced into a position where I couldn't consider that. Is there any way you could help me speed up the process? I understand if it's impossible, but I'd be grateful if you could." On the other hand, if you want to slow down a process for any reason, you can say "Sorry, my classes/internship has gotten busy and I will have little time until xx/xx/xxxx. Is there any way we could push interviews until then?"

There is a danger in attempting to leverage other offers/interviews to attempt to speed up processes: the company might have a candidate pool large or strong enough they'd rather skip on you. The danger in delaying is that they get through the process with someone else and hire them for what could have been your role. Being gracious helps keep you from accidentally ending the conversation.

Potential Negotiation Areas:

Once you get an offer, the main points of potential negotiation are location, base salary, guaranteed bonus (either in the form of RSUs or cash), sign-on bonus, relocation bonus, and start date.

Assuming that you're not going to work at a tiny startup or a trading firm, companies have "bands" that delineate the maximum and minimum total guaranteed yearly compensation. Assuming you can give some valid reason for needing higher compensation, companies are usually relatively flexible up to this maximum level band.

Signing bonuses are often used to take your "yearly income" above whatever would be your typical level band. The signing bonus at some companies (e.g. Amazon) isn't an amount that you get immediate access to upon joining—it comes at either the one- or two-year anniversary of employment. This strategy is used to give you an additional incentive to stay. Some companies (e.g. Amazon) have a later-biased vesting scheme (e.g. 5/15/40/40), so the first two years' signing bonuses act as the additional cash to ~flatten expected earnings over the four years and bridge the gap until the later stocks vest. My experience is that you can negotiate from no signing bonus to some signing bonus for a standard one (a bonus that you get at sign or at start date). After you get one, though, they usually don't move.

If you NEED to relocate to join the company/team, you can usually negotiate for some type of relocation bonus if it's not already included in signing. This can come in the form of direct deposit at signing your contract or as a reimbursement scheme earmarked for specific moving costs (e.g. temporary housing, flights, movers).

Beware that if you leave your company shortly after joining (usually within two years), you have to pay your signing/relocation bonus back plus whatever tax was taken from it. Read your contract.

Start date is usually a hard one to negotiate at smaller companies, as they hire on an ad-hoc basis. They will want the role to have someone in it SOON. Large companies, particularly consulting companies, are usually more lenient when it comes to negotiating the timeframe of your start. If a company REALLY needs you to start IMMEDIATELY, you should be asking yourself why that is.

Negotiation Tips:

When you're negotiating any/all of these things, there are three important things you should do:

1. Consider Your Happiness
    - Think about what would make you beyond happy.
    - Make that proposal clear.
    - This happiness threshold should be some high anchor. This way, either they match your requests and you're over the moon to sign, or you know they gave you the best that they can. You can easily make your own decision from there.

- If they match your wants and you don't have a higher competing offer, trying to go higher afterwards just makes you look bad and/or greedy. This type of situation is the only time that I've ever heard of offers being rescinded.
- "I would be happy to sign an offer that included X, Y, and Z."

2. Give reasoning for your requests.
    - Reasoning gives the recruiter/manager the ability to fight for you.
    - They want you to sign. They need to argue with the compensation committee to get approval for their offers. If they can offer some legitimate reason for changes, they will.
    - Use your other offers. Classmates' offers. "My first job." Past career reports. Needing to pay for your wife's boyfriend's flatscreen TV. I don't care. Just give a reason for why you need whatever you're asking for.

3. Be gracious.
    - You want your recruiter/manager to believe that you are excited about the prospect of joining the team. You want them to be your ally, to want you to have the best possible compensation.
    - Being rude or giving ultimatums only limit your options and their desire to help you.
    - Aim to get them to adjust the offer as much as possible, then make your own evaluation as to whether or not you'd be willing to take it.
    - "I'm really excited about this opportunity. Let me know what's possible :) Thanks!"
    - If, for whatever reason, you end up with an offer that you're unwilling to sign, walk away nicely.

From an employer's side, they want to hire you because they think you're the best person for the job. Which means they already think you're at least a few % more valuable than the other interviewees. Additionally, it takes tremendous time and resources to continuously be interviewing more candidates for roles (e.g. at least 5 hours per candidate, with each interview costing the company several hundred dollars on average). It's very likely more worthwhile for them to pay you 10-20% more than to try to get another candidate. Don't worry about having offers rescinded if you're gracious when negotiating.

I would argue that I was a bit too aggressive in my negotiations, and still didn't have an offer rescinded.

My Experience:

COMPANY NAME 1: Pushing Timeline and Getting a Better Offer

Original offer received 4/13/2022:
105 base, 5k sign-on, 10% target performance bonus, acceptance deadline: 4/19/22

Negotiation email:
Hi Name,

Thank you for giving me a wonderful interview process with the team and extending me a job offer. I'm hugely excited about the opportunity! That being said, there's a bit I would like to discuss in regards to compensation and time to accept.

Last year's MBAn (the people in my program's) average salary was $127,750 with an average signing bonus of $20,439. I've been told that the job market is quite hot right now, even relative to last year. Additionally, inflation rate is ~8% which would signal that these numbers should be increasing as a whole this year. I think something in the 120-140 range with a larger signing bonus would be more fair. Also, given that the role is remote, would there be funding for home-office setup?

This is one of the biggest decisions that I'll have had to make in my life. I want to be quite confident that when/if I take it, I have given it enough thought and gotten advice from all those I go to for counsel. I don't think that I truly have capacity for that right now, given my course schedule. I would like to delay the offer acceptance deadline (to the end of June if possible).

Again, I want to reiterate how grateful I am for this opportunity and how wonderful I think it'd be to work at COMPANY NAME 1. I think I could add a tremendous amount of value to and learn an immense amount from the team.

Let me know what's possible!
Best, Harry

Post-negotiation offer received 4/19/2022:
120 base (top band), 10k sign-on, 10% target performance bonus, acceptance deadline: 5/9/22

COMPANY NAME 1 Decline:

Dear [Manager] and [Recruiter],

Thank you again for spending so much time with me and helping me to fully understand the role and life at COMPANY NAME. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to talk with the team and consider joining it.

I've been deliberating for a long while about whether or not to take the offer and I've gone back and forth, both with my mentors and in my own head. I know the team is wonderful and has strong mentorship, and that the role would have interesting and fulfilling work. I don't think that

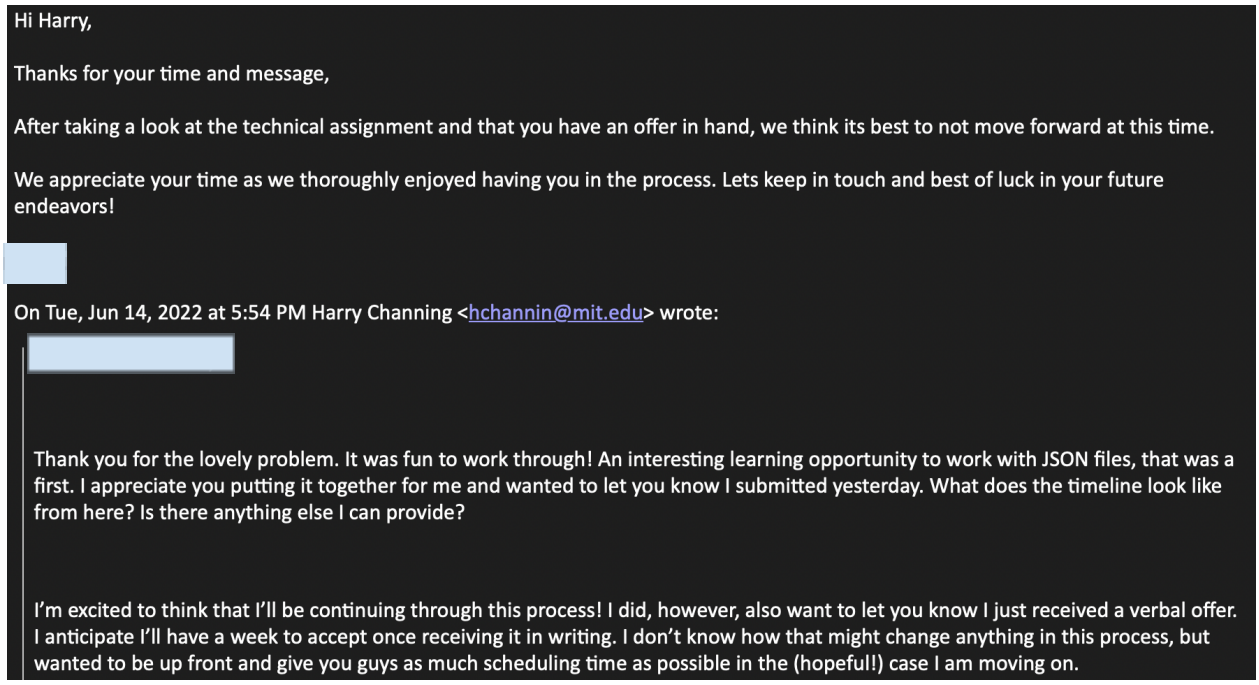
this is the right role for me at this juncture in my life – I'm currently looking for something more risk-on and in person. Unfortunately, I feel that I must decline your generous offer.

I appreciate you giving me this opportunity and apologize for any inconvenience my hesitance has caused. I admire the work that you all do and, when this type of opportunity makes sense for me, you will be at the very top of my list for places I'd like to work. It has been a pleasure.

Thank you so much and very sincerely,
Harry

COMPANY NAME 4:

I had a take-home from COMPANY NAME 4. After getting my DIFFERENT COMPANY NAME 3 offer, I sent them this with the assignment:



Hi Harry,

Thanks for your time and message,

After taking a look at the technical assignment and that you have an offer in hand, we think its best to not move forward at this time.

We appreciate your time as we thoroughly enjoyed having you in the process. Lets keep in touch and best of luck in your future endeavors!

On Tue, Jun 14, 2022 at 5:54 PM Harry Channing <hchannin@mit.edu> wrote:

Thank you for the lovely problem. It was fun to work through! An interesting learning opportunity to work with JSON files, that was a first. I appreciate you putting it together for me and wanted to let you know I submitted yesterday. What does the timeline look like from here? Is there anything else I can provide?

I'm excited to think that I'll be continuing through this process! I did, however, also want to let you know I just received a verbal offer. I anticipate I'll have a week to accept once receiving it in writing. I don't know how that might change anything in this process, but wanted to be up front and give you guys as much scheduling time as possible in the (hopeful!) case I am moving on.

Obviously, I was promptly rejected. But I don't believe it had to do with the exercise given — it was an easy assignment after data read-in (linear regression had ~95% accuracy).

I followed up by asking the recruiter about processes and if/when people would rush them:

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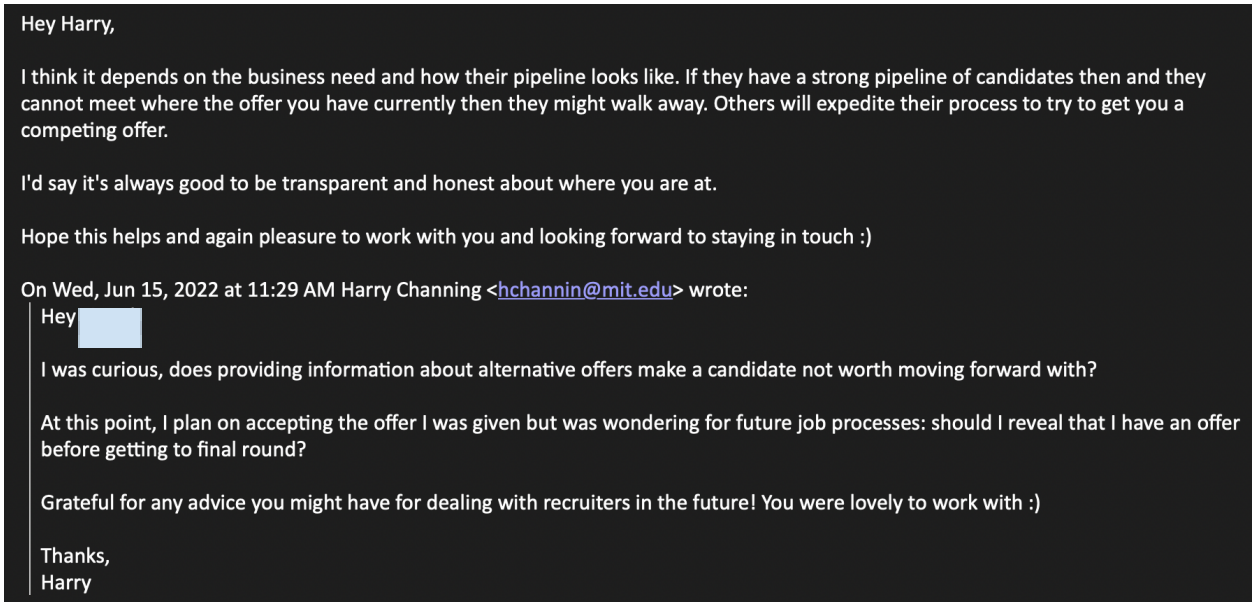


Hey Harry,

I think it depends on the business need and how their pipeline looks like. If they have a strong pipeline of candidates then and they cannot meet where the offer you have currently then they might walk away. Others will expedite their process to try to get you a competing offer.

I'd say it's always good to be transparent and honest about where you are at.

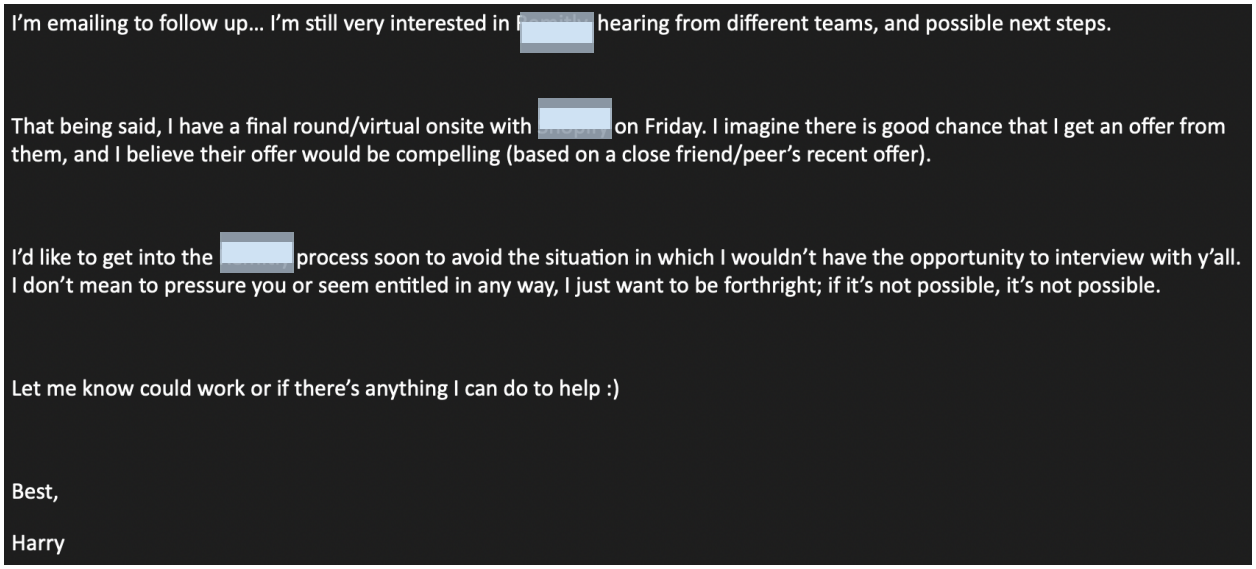
Hope this helps and again pleasure to work with you and looking forward to staying in touch :)

On Wed, Jun 15, 2022 at 11:29 AM Harry Channing <hchannin@mit.edu> wrote:

> Hey [redacted]
>
> I was curious, does providing information about alternative offers make a candidate not worth moving forward with?
>
> At this point, I plan on accepting the offer I was given but was wondering for future job processes: should I reveal that I have an offer before getting to final round?
>
> Grateful for any advice you might have for dealing with recruiters in the future! You were lovely to work with :)
>
> Thanks,
> Harry

Earlier on in my processes, I had phone screens that I didn't make it past -- I said I already had an offer from COMPANY NAME 1. I imagine I didn't make it past those phone screens at least partially because I seemed to be rushing them too hard, too early on.

COMPANY NAME 3: Moving Processes Forward



I'm emailing to follow up... I'm still very interested in [redacted] hearing from different teams, and possible next steps.

That being said, I have a final round/virtual onsite with [redacted] on Friday. I imagine there is good chance that I get an offer from them, and I believe their offer would be compelling (based on a close friend/peer's recent offer).

I'd like to get into the [redacted] process soon to avoid the situation in which I wouldn't have the opportunity to interview with y'all. I don't mean to pressure you or seem entitled in any way, I just want to be forthright; if it's not possible, it's not possible.

Let me know could work or if there's anything I can do to help :)

Best,

Harry

COMPANY NAME 2: Initial Offer Dance

From the recruiter:

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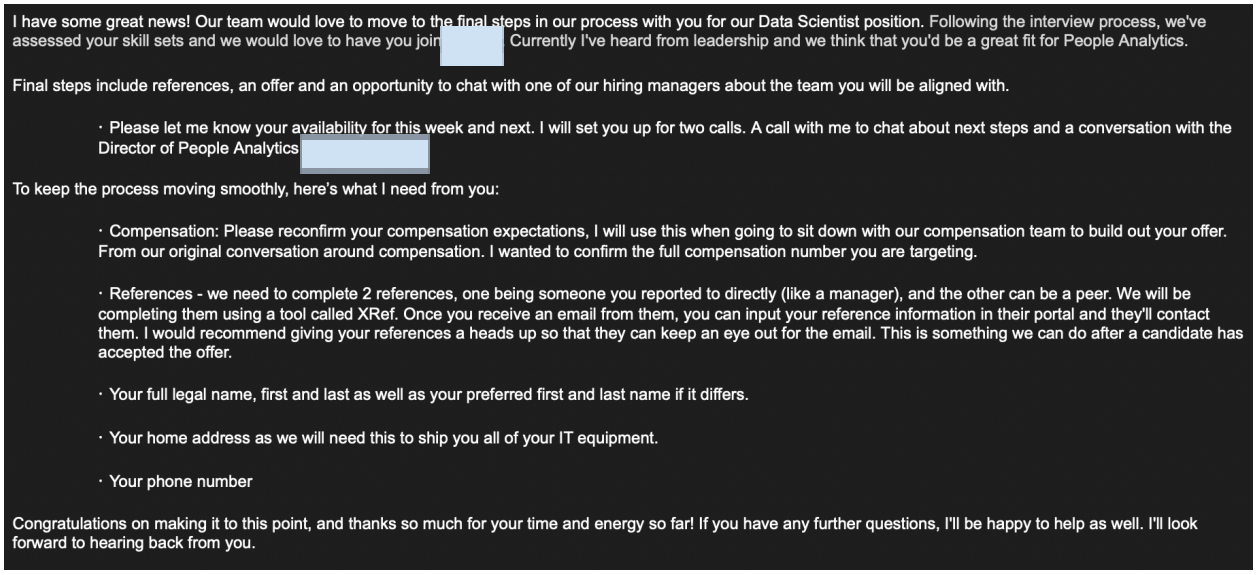


I have some great news! Our team would love to move to the final steps in our process with you for our Data Scientist position. Following the interview process, we've assessed your skill sets and we would love to have you join [redacted] Currently I've heard from leadership and we think that you'd be a great fit for People Analytics.

Final steps include references, an offer and an opportunity to chat with one of our hiring managers about the team you will be aligned with.

· Please let me know your availability for this week and next. I will set you up for two calls. A call with me to chat about next steps and a conversation with the Director of People Analytics [redacted]

To keep the process moving smoothly, here's what I need from you:

· Compensation: Please reconfirm your compensation expectations, I will use this when going to sit down with our compensation team to build out your offer. From our original conversation around compensation. I wanted to confirm the full compensation number you are targeting.

· References - we need to complete 2 references, one being someone you reported to directly (like a manager), and the other can be a peer. We will be completing them using a tool called XRef. Once you receive an email from them, you can input your reference information in their portal and they'll contact them. I would recommend giving your references a heads up so that they can keep an eye out for the email. This is something we can do after a candidate has accepted the offer.

· Your full legal name, first and last as well as your preferred first and last name if it differs.

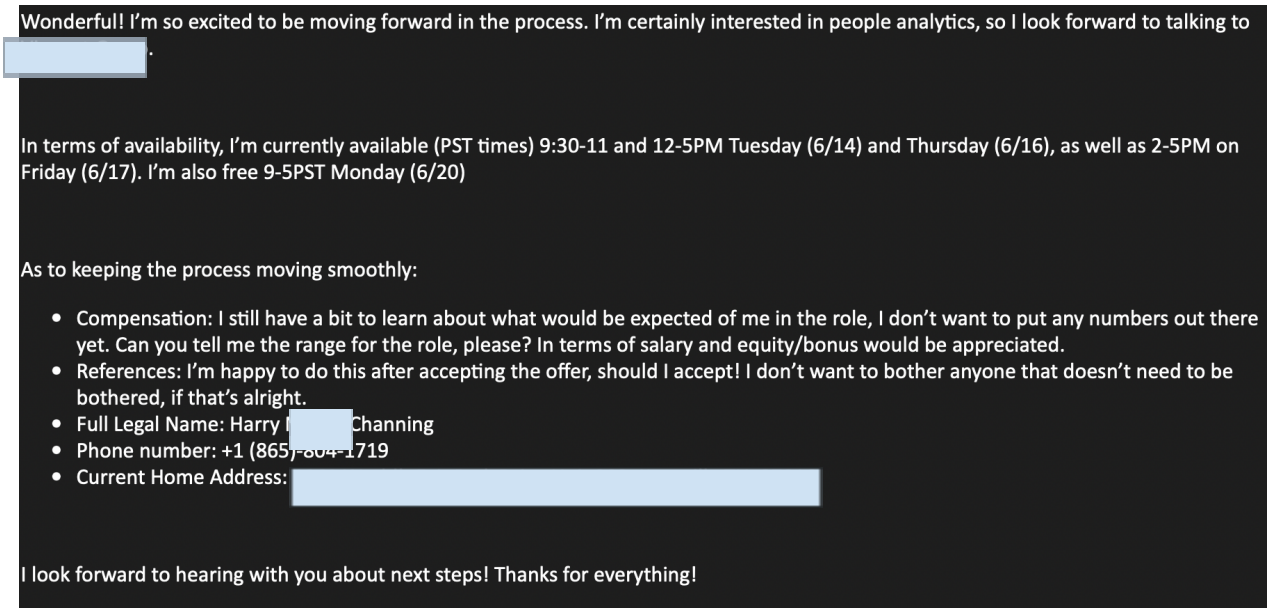
· Your home address as we will need this to ship you all of your IT equipment.

· Your phone number

Congratulations on making it to this point, and thanks so much for your time and energy so far! If you have any further questions, I'll be happy to help as well. I'll look forward to hearing back from you.

- I used this and my knowledge of my friend's signing to negotiate with COMPANY NAME 2, see below.

My Response:



Wonderful! I'm so excited to be moving forward in the process. I'm certainly interested in people analytics, so I look forward to talking to [redacted].

In terms of availability, I'm currently available (PST times) 9:30-11 and 12-5PM Tuesday (6/14) and Thursday (6/16), as well as 2-5PM on Friday (6/17). I'm also free 9-5PST Monday (6/20)

As to keeping the process moving smoothly:

- Compensation: I still have a bit to learn about what would be expected of me in the role, I don't want to put any numbers out there yet. Can you tell me the range for the role, please? In terms of salary and equity/bonus would be appreciated.
- References: I'm happy to do this after accepting the offer, should I accept! I don't want to bother anyone that doesn't need to be bothered, if that's alright.
- Full Legal Name: Harry [redacted] Channing
- Phone number: +1 (865) 804-1719
- Current Home Address: [redacted]

I look forward to hearing with you about next steps! Thanks for everything!

Her Response:

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Hi Harry,

Thanks so much for the information provided! I'll take a look at his schedule and work to get that call set-up between the two of you!

For some of our roles we have wider ranges and we typically have to go to the compensation team to get more specific information based on a number of factors such as candidate expectations, location, interview performance, experience related to the role, internal parity, etc.

What I can share is that the role typically starts in the $80K's. An offer is formulated based on the factors I shared as well as candidate expectations. We want to ensure we have alignment when going to the comp team to get an offer approved. If you can provide a range you're seeking that'll help with alignment as well as help with the communication with the comp team.

We don't conduct references until a candidate has expressed that they plan to accept our offer so it's not a problem to hold on that piece! I know what you mean about time spent! :)

My response:

Thanks for the additional detail. I still look forward to having that call set up! And the allowed delay on references is lovely, thanks.

I'll be completely open about my understandings of [redacted] compensation and expectations as it pertains to role and pay:

- I would be coming in as an X3 data scientist
- The X3 role band includes a $150k salary with $25k yearly RSU (TC of $175) America. My data point for this is a very recent offer to an American worker who didn't have competing offers and similar experience levels as me.

Assuming I'll be coming in at X3, I'd expect to be at least payed at my data point's level. Also, I received a verbal offer this morning for $177.5 TC (just salary and equity) plus a signing bonus to help, thought not completely, bridge the gap to my ideal (and maybe overly-aggressive) target of 210k. I'm very interested in signing with [redacted] and was hoping you'd provide me with something competitive!

Let me know what's possible :) Don't hesitate to reach out if there's anything else I can do to help or clarify.

I appreciate you putting this all together for me and am excited to hear back!

Her Response:

Thanks so much for the transparency of your targeted total compensation and the other offer you've received. Do you have a deadline when you need to get back to them by? I don't know that our total compensation is going to match either amount at this time. What I can do is check-in with the comp team and update you as soon as I hear back!

Had there not been a hiring freeze & layoffs at COMPANY NAME 2 due to recession, this would have translated well I think. We went in circles waiting weeks for the compensation team before the mass emails went out.

COMPANY NAME 3: Compensation

Recruiter: We have an offer for you: 110 base, 160k/4 RSU. We understand that you have another offer from COMPANY NAME 2 and ask if I can disclose it.

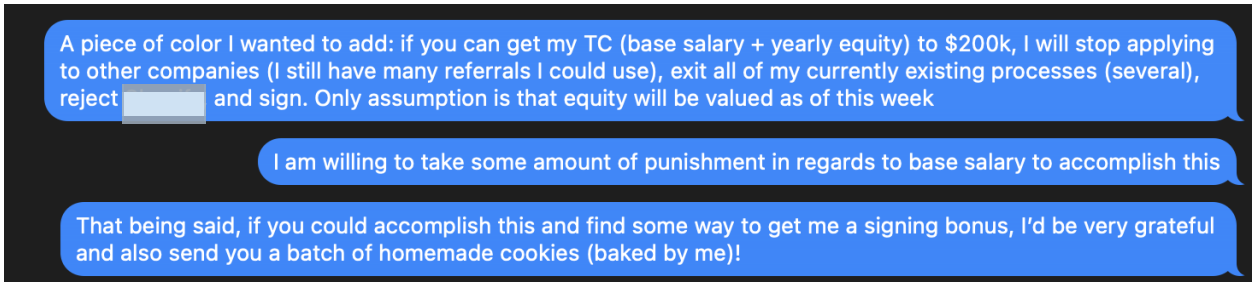
Me: Oh, exciting! Well, I have an offer coming from COMPANY NAME 2, but I don't have official numbers yet. What I can tell you is that my friend got 175 TC

Recruiter: Ok, I'll see what I can do. Are you alright with a more stock leaning TC?

Me: Ya.

Next Morning

Me:



I got a call within 5 minutes.

Him: We're putting an offer in the works for $120k base, $230k in RSUs over four years and a $10k sign on. That's the absolute best we can do.

—I later got verbal confirmation that this was the top of the band for base and RSUs, and that sign-on was not common.

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Signing an Offer

tl;dr:

If you are happy to work for the company/team, the offer is good enough, and you believe you can't negotiate further, sign your offer.

- You are not married to your first company and can always leave—location, team, or whole firm.
- If you are given a strict deadline and are waiting for other offers, try to push.
- Don't be afraid to renege or attempt to renegotiate if you need to.

Settling For vs. Settling On:

There's a big difference between settling for something and settling on something. Settling for something means that you've lowered your standard. You're too tired to keep looking for better, so, even though you're not particularly happy with what you have, you take it. When you settle on something, that thing has met all of your standards well enough that you're happy not to have to go exploring other options.

If you think you're lowering your standards to accept a job, don't accept the job. Having an offer doesn't mean you have to take it. You could use the job as a waiting room for you to get what you want elsewhere (but then you have to commit to moving quickly or else get stuck).

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. If you have something that meets your standards, take it. The only horror stories I've heard are from people who didn't figure out what they cared about, settled for the first thing that came their way, and then didn't make an effort to get themselves out of their poor positioning.

Your First Job Doesn't Have to Define Your Career:

The wonderful thing about data science is that it is a widely-applicable and transferable skill-set in a growing, remote-possible field. If you don't like your company, you can leave. If you don't like where you live, you can move. If you don't like your job, you can pivot. You are a demanded asset, and that means that you have options.

The amount you get paid in your first job doesn't necessarily translate to how much you'll be paid in your second. It's not particularly uncommon for MBAns to leave their first job for a better one six months in. Your first role doesn't necessarily dictate your second. Everything, especially for the first few years after you start, is subject to change. We are largely getting entry-level positions.

“Where tracking becomes a concern is when you start moving into mid-career roles (mid-late 20s, early 30s, and yes age is quite relevant). Changing tracks is still doable, but it's harder. You're seen as having less potential, and you need to sell a story about why you're changing roles. If you're entry-level anyway, it's an obvious story - you got some experience, learned what you liked and were good at, and went into it. Ideally, if you want a specific kind of role, you transition from your first job (which are generally pretty fungible, regardless of title) into the kind of job path you want for your second job. First job, just get in. Then work on transitioning and skill development.” - Reddit

Reneging:

Avoiding reneging as best you can. It doesn’t look good for you, the MBAn program, or MIT. You’ll likely never be able to work for the company you reneged from. You might never be able to work with that recruiter/manager again. It may impact other MBAns’ ability to work at that company or with that recruiter. You’ll lose access to the MIT Career Development Office (CDO) for two years.

But, at the end of the day, it’s not the end of the world if you have to renege. If you have to renege, be gracious and thankful.

> “Unfortunately, I need to withdraw my employment. I apologize for this inconvenience, and I realize this puts the company in a challenging position to make a replacement. I wouldn’t have made this choice unless it was for serious reasons.
>
> I’m so grateful to have had the opportunity to join the team and hope this doesn’t diminish the opportunity for us to work together in the future.”

We are getting entry-level jobs, not team-defining roles. Assuming that you’re at your preferred job for two years (the standard quick-moving timeline), the loss of the CDO for that time is insignificant. It’s unlikely that MIT or MBAn opportunities are significantly affected by your decision. There are plenty of companies, so not being able to work for one you were already willing to walk away from isn’t that impactful. It’s possible but unlikely that you would cross paths with that recruiter/manager again. Even if you did, if you were gracious, they likely wouldn’t think that poorly of you—they’d have to be spiteful to dismiss you out of hand. And chances are, they get it: You’re a catch who got a better offer that they couldn’t compete with. If they could hire someone better for cheaper, they’d do it too.

My Experience:

Before I began interviewing with COMPANY NAME 1, I knew I was going to turn them down. I knew I wanted something ~smaller and rapidly growing in the tech space. When I got the offer, it became more challenging to say no. The manager and team were both good, and there would

certainly be mentorship and opportunities for growth. I knew it wasn't what I wanted, but my thought was, "How privileged am I that I can and will say no to a job that others would kill to have? To an amount of income that is more than I would know how to spend? That could meaningfully change the life of the large majority of American job seekers?"

Life is unfair. It's good to acknowledge it. But there's no reason to punish yourself for life's unfairness. You wouldn't be making the world a fairer place by taking a job that you don't want. In the fall and in a totally different context, my friend Simon gave me good advice: "If it hurts no one, be selfish."

By the time I was interviewing with COMPANY NAME 3, I was pretty confident that, given an offer, I'd sign with them. They were my dream, and I'd only have gone somewhere different if they truly weren't in the same realm of compensation. After negotiation, I couldn't have been happier with my contract. Dream company and role, top pay bands, signing bonus, the whole nine yards. I had wanted a full-time job since age 13.

Even after negotiation, though, I still had some struggles signing. Signing meant acknowledging that MBAn was ending—that school was over. That I'd have to restart again. That I had no idea what my life would look like in 6 months time. And more than that, it meant actively choosing to end it myself rather than just being forced out by graduation. Though I knew COMPANY NAME was exactly what I wanted, I had never felt less certain of a next step in my entire life. I was terrified.

And I wasn't alone in this struggle. I texted my people, and I think I spoke to 6 MBAns over the course of 24 hours. ALL of them were having their own similar difficulties. ALL of them were aware of others suffering from the same. I took comfort, as you can, in the knowledge that I wasn't alone—all of us were stepping into the next new, exciting, and unknown stage of our lives together.

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Additional Advice and Resources

tl;dr:

Nearly any question you have, someone has answered before. Any feeling you've had, you're likely not alone. Find a way to grow using your questions and feelings.

Resources:

Capstone Interview Questions: Ya see, not many technicals! 30 minutes is not a long time.

Give Me A Job -- Please and Thank You : An example of a list you can construct to help filter through companies and narrow your search. I manually scraped all the numbers which took a while. If you can figure out how to automate it, please let me know and send it to me.

Simplify: Autofill applications, New-Grad Position List: Job List

The Tech Interview Handbook & Data Science Interview Prep Github: Interview Prep

Company and Comp & MBAn Career Reports, Negotiation, & Offer Template Spreadsheet: helpful for figuring out if your compensation would be in line with industry standard.

Equity Compensation Guide & Startup Equity Guide (ISOs)

Easy Classic Chocolate Chips : My chocolate chip recipe

Thoughtful Advice I Read/Received:

"Comparison is the thief of joy. Strive to be content."

"Time is a luxury you buy with effective execution. Waste all the time you want, just pay for it."

"The perfect is the enemy of the good."

"Clarity over comfort."

"Sometimes you can do everything right and still lose. That is not weakness, that is life."

"Remove the word 'should' from your vocabulary."

“Things I told myself when I wanted to give up: (1) this is the challenge you came here to seek, (2) you don't have to be the fastest or the strongest or even enjoy this at all, you just have to not give up, and (3) you have to, no choice” - friend/mentor hiking the Pacific Crest Trail

“From 21-25 it was all about building the resume, developing skills, and climbing the ladder via promotions. 25-30 was continuing to climb and aggressively pursuing opportunities with upside (high comp, equity, RSUs, etc.). 30+ is coasting and cherry picking better opportunities that 10 years of hard work have afforded me.”

“No job is forever. Choose the company and people, not the job.”

“It can be easy to be swayed by money, but it can be frustrating if you get caught in a bad role. Make sure you understand the kind of work you do in the role that you’re getting”

“[Knowing CS and math] just makes you good at math and CS. The world would be better off if people had the humility to understand that expertise in one area means nothing with respect to expertise in others.”

“Hunt for the work you want. Don't sit around hoping someone will bring you a project, or advocate for you. Hunt. Look for openings, help, ask questions, do some work, position yourself for that next big break. It's not going to land on your lap.”

“You're not being paid to build models or code or run cutting edge algorithms, you're being paid to deliver business insights. It just so happens that those things lead to business insights.”

“Self care is sometimes admitting that you need to stop pursuing something that isn’t working and is making you miserable, even if it’s what you thought you wanted and even if everyone is telling you to keep going and not to give up.”

“A rising tide lifts all boats.”

“The harder you work, the luckier you get”/“You make your own luck”/“Luck is when preparation meets opportunity”

“If it hurts no one to do something and helps you, be selfish.”

“The only true metric of success is the magnitude of the vibes.”

“Soft skills are going to be at least as important as hard skills.”

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“Facts are stubborn things, statistics are pliable.”

“There is no victory without sacrifice”

"It's only a failure if you stop trying, otherwise, it's an experiment."

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

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Conclusion

tl;dr:
Good luck. You've got this.

MBAn was one of the most emotionally challenging years of my life. It was also easily one of the best years of my life. It can be for you, too.

Everyone comes into the program with different backgrounds, interests, and levels of mathematical rigor. You don't have to understand everything. Given you try, there will be no question as to whether or not you graduate.

The administration wants you to engage with MIT's community as much as it wants you to gain from its classes. Put effort into participating, whether that be in the form of research, peers, or clubs.

Figure out what you care to pursue and pursue it. If you prioritize carefully, you will have time to do most everything you care to do. The things you don't have time for don't matter.

You will get a job. Be thoughtful in your standards of selection. Put the effort in to get what you want. MBAn alumni are here to help.

You will run into your own emotional difficulties. Take care of yourself. Your classmates can help hold you up. You are not alone. And you are cared about.

Take a walk along the Charles for me. When you're worried, remember everything is gonna be ok. When you're not, celebrate! You're killing it :)

If you ever need a chat. Don't hesitate. No judgment. Harry Channing. +1 (865)-804-1719.

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Dedication

tl;dr: My friends are dope. I've learned so much from them. They've given me so much support. I stand on the shoulders of giants. The view from up here is stunning. Much love.

For my mom, who keeps ALL my ideas and ramblings company ALWAYS. For sharing all of my excitement.

For my dad, who motivates me to feel content with my life. For empowering me to do me.

For my sister, Simon, Jay, and Sarah, my trusted moral council. For always having the right advice or thought at the right time.

For Dayna and Cami who taught me it's ok to not be ok. And for being there for me when I'm not.

For Ian, who keeps me curious about the world. For being my partner in the job search and random philosophical discussion.

For Chris, who inspires me to believe in myself and take risks. For bending time/habits for me.

For Gabriel, who reminds me to treat myself well. For keeping a sense of wonderment about the world and dreaming about the future with me.

For Manik, who encourages me to rethink my habits. For making me a healthier human being and a better friend. For joining my night walks.

For Mariana, who exemplifies thoughtfulness and kindness. For bringing back my IDGAF attitude. For all of the shenanigan and Event creation.

For Jessica, who makes me honest and assertive. For taking me on her adventures and including me in her life. For picking up all of my slack. And for taking me to the hospital.

For the rest of my fellow MBAns and friends, who made my year everything it could be.

And for all of the cool informational interviewees that brought me here and helped create this.

I'm so grateful. It's been a privilege.

"How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard."