

# Preparing To Convert Your IIM Call into a Final Admit

So you have got that coveted call and now you have started fretting about the second stage! You have probably started prepping but are buzzing with questions and still do not have a structure to your prep. This post is geared towards giving you the right perspective to organize your prep and some prep goodies as well.

## What is the probability converting a first call into a final admit?

Well if we keep all other things out (your academic record, CAT Score, work experience and the weightage each college gives to each of these components) the probability of converting any one of the old IIMs will be around 20-25%. Usually around 4 to 5 people are called per seat for the second stage for the old IIMs. So honestly, it is not that easy.

## What should you NOT spend your time doing?

Do not spend time trying to calculate how much you need to score in your WAT-GD-PI round to get a final admit — it is not worth the effort. Your goal is simple, trying to score the maximum you can in the second round and leave the math to the college. You should spend your time preparing for the second round and not doing the math.

## What is the common thread tying WAT, GD & PI?

On the face of it might seem like WAT, GD and PI are different beasts altogether and besting each one of them requires different skill-sets. Well at some level they can be equated to the different formats in cricket — Test Cricket, ODIs and T20s (not in any order) — while the format is different and there are specialists in each format, the core skill tested are cricketing skills. Over the years the core skill tested in each of GD, WAT and PI is your awareness of GK and Current Affairs.

That GDs and WATs test GK and Current Affairs is something that need not be stated. But even in PIs interviewers want to test how aware you are of the world around you. For example, they might ask you to

- name all the districts in your home state as you travel from North to South
- the names of CEOs of leading companies in your sector
- your view on recent political events in your state or sector
- your view on events of national importance or policy
- your knowledge of people and important trivia about what you call your hobbies (it is trivia because it is just a statistic but it is important because you have mentioned something as your hobby)

So what you need to first understand is that at some level the second stage is closer to preparing for the Civil Services, albeit at a level that is much less demanding in terms of depth and width of knowledge tested

## You Need More Than the Manorama Year Book

Most aspirants shortlisted for the second stage of the IIMs and other schools start with the Manorama Year Book. But that is just what it is — a start. While you might be asked facts in an interview and need facts in a GD and WAT, what is more important is the quality of the arguments you put forth. When we evaluate essays written by aspirants we find that are desperately trying to fit in into the essay all the facts that they have crammed. To really make an impact one needs to go beyond facts and have an opinion.

The only way to do this is to read in-depth articles on various topics that can be a part of this year's GDs.

## Issues Most Likely to Be Part of This Year's GD/WAT/PI Topics

Every year has its share of hot topics going into the GD-PI season. If we look at the big topics over the last few years they fall into two categories:

Event/Phenomenon-Based: Delhi Rape Case, AAP, Social Media, Terror Attacks etc.

Policy-Based: FDI, Nuclear Energy, Direct Cash Transfers etc.

While topics based on events/phenomenon are unlikely to get repeated, policy-based topics usually get repeated since policies usually have a longer shelf life. For example, while direct cash transfers was finally implemented as the Jan Dhan Scheme only recently, it has been in the news for more than a few years. Similar FDI in different sectors becomes an issue at different points in time.

So what are the event/issues/policies that can be a part of the second stage this year?

- The Charlie Hebdo Attack and Freedom of Speech
- The Rise Of The BJP and Narendra Modi ( already asked in the S.P.Jain WAT)
- Religious Reconversion in India – Secularism & India
- Direct Cash Transfer Pros and Cons
- Faster Environmental Clearances – Economy Vs Environment
- Society in the Age of Social Media

Each of the things listed above can lead to more than one topic so you should read as many articles as possible on these to get the whole 360 degrees.

### **Research Previous Years Institute-Wise GD/WAT Topics**

Most of the premier institutes have a very specific style when it comes to the kind of topics they give as part of the WAT/GD. IIM-L for example, tends to favor the abstract over the topical. IIM-A tends to give short subjective topics as opposed to information heavy topics, whereas IIFT does the exact opposite. So you will do well to thoroughly research the format and topics from the previous years.

### **The PI Checklist**

Preparing for the PI starts with the five basic questions that can also become your IIM-B SOP:

- Tell Me Something About Yourself
- Describe Your Work Experience
- Why MBA?
- Short-Term & Long-Term Career Goals
- Strengths & Weaknesses

### **The GD-PI TOOLKIT**

We have suggested a lot of research and reading so we thought we should give you a goodie bag that will make your job easier with a GD-PI Toolkit which contains a compilation of

- Institute-wise WAT-GD Topics and PI questions from last year
- Articles across various sectors like economy, education, politics etc that can be useful for WAT-GDs this year

Most of these articles are not simple bulleted-lists but in-depth data-filled analyses. We are sure you will be better off reading one of these detailed articles than waiting for a certain new anchor to let the panelists speak!

Apart from this we have also put together a long-list of all the possible questions that can get asked in PIs and some stuff related to the whole second stage.

To access all of this, all you need to go is to <https://www.facebook.com/imschennaionline?ref=hl> and start downloading. Till the next post, which will be soon, start reading, researching and rehearsing!

All the best,

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## The Personal Interview – Introduction

In the next few posts, I'd like to share my thoughts about the PI, an integral part of the admission process in most top colleges (and incidentally, in most jobs as well). We'll start with an overview of the PI in today's post, and in future posts I will try to dissect and analyze individual "standard questions" and how to come up with answers for them.

Let's start by asking ourselves one simple question: "Why the PI?" When entering, let's say, an engineering college, one does not typically undergo a PI (*or a GD for that matter*). A simple written test suffices. But in most MBA colleges, the PI plays an important role. Why is this? One probable answer is that an MBA requires you to deal with people, first and foremost, and hence an aptitude test alone is not enough to judge one's abilities in this sphere. There are three types of people one would typically interact with in the corporate world – superiors, peers and subordinates. An interview tests how one deals with one's superiors. (*Similarly, a GD tests how well one deals with one's peers*).

From the candidate's point of view, though, a PI is a golden chance to sell yourself. In the first shortlist, which is typically done by cut-offs and cold equations, you get no chance to defend yourself in case something in your resume is sub-optimal (*for example, you have no work experience / you graduated as a five point someone / you have a gap of a year in your education*).

But once this hurdle is cleared and you get an interview call, you at least get a chance to explain, to justify your past sins. I often see people getting discouraged even after getting a call; a common remark I hear is "I only just cleared the cut-off. I have no chance whatsoever of making the final cut". I have even heard people say things like "They called me with such a low score... I am sure they are just calling me to laugh at me". However, nothing could be further from the truth. Remember that the people who will be conducting interviews will be important people (at least in their own minds!) and have a very inflated opinion of the value of their time. They are not going to waste time on interviewing you if they have no likelihood of selecting you. This means that once you have a call, you have a significant, non-zero, chance of getting through. Obviously you need to perform better in the interview than someone who cleared the cut-off with marks to spare; but it is not impossible.

Conversely, I see people who become over-confident (or at least complacent) because of a very high score in the written tests; who assume that it automatically guarantees them a seat. While it does increase their chances, it is not a certainty; in the second stage of the selection process, most colleges give relatively little weight to the written test scores and as much as 60-70% of weight to the PI/GD/WAT processes. And certain colleges will be harsher on the high scorers in an interview precisely *because* they are high scorers (for example, looking at the past few years' data, around 50% of those who get a 100 percentile in CAT do not get a final call from IIMA)

Either way, what it boils down to is this: for the interview round, a typical college would call maybe 5-10 people per seat. So if you have a call, you have a 1 in 10 chance or better of making it through; around 1 in 5 for the top colleges. While this might seem an easy proposition compared to the 1 in 100 chance of getting a call through CAT, you have to remember that in CAT over half the competition is fairly casual. But in the second round, nearly every single person is dead serious – and good enough to have made it to the top 1 or 2 % in the first round. In other words, your preparation has to be **very** thorough, else you will be found wanting.

Next time, I'll look at one of the standard questions – "*Tell me about yourself*"

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## The Personal Interview – Tell me about yourself

Today we'll look at a question commonly posed at the start of an interview: **"Tell me about yourself"**

The knee-jerk response to this question is often something like "My name is ABC. I am an EXTC engr from XYZ College. I come from a middle-class family. My father is a government servant. My mother is a housewife. I have a brother who is an engineer and a sister who is doing her MBA...." and so on. But it is worth asking yourself: is this what the interviewer wants to hear?

Let's examine this question from the interviewer's point of view. Is the interviewer interested in you as a person? Not really (though a good interviewer will pretend to be). Then why ask this question?

The key thing to understand is, the interviewer has a limited time with each candidate (around 20 minutes on average). To make a reliable decision in 20 minutes is already a daunting task. How should he go about it?

One way is to make a pre-defined list of 20-25 questions and ask them to all the candidates. But this is quite likely to be unfair as those topics might not lie in the comfort zone of some of the candidates.

Another option is to spend the first 7-10 minutes of each interview probing the candidate to find out his/her area of comfort and then going ahead to ask questions on those areas. While some interviewers do this, it can end up being a waste of already limited time.

A third option is to start off by asking the candidate "what do you want to talk about?" and then taking cues from the answer received. However, an interviewer cannot phrase the question in such direct terms, and therefore instead couches it in a more neutral way as "tell me about yourself" – the implied meaning being "tell me where you want to take the interview".

In other words, this question puts the reins of the interview into the hands of the interviewee; a skilled candidate can use this to guide the interview wherever he/she wishes to take it. There is a flip-side, of course – if, not being aware of this thought process, you mention a topic outside your comfort zone, the interviewer will assume that you are eager to talk on that topic and will judge you based on your answers.

A sensible answer would thus be to very briefly introduce yourself and then quickly move on to those topics which you are eager to talk about. So your pre-work for this would be to identify (a) those topics in which you know you can make a good impression with your knowledge and passion and (b) those topics which you absolutely wish to avoid. So if your academics are stellar, you will quickly bring them into the discussion. But if your academics are terrible while your extra-curriculars are impressive, just pass over your education in one line and jump to your other interests. If you feel that your work experience is your USP, bring that in as early as you can.

Most importantly, don't bring in unnecessary, extraneous elements without a reason. If possible, every point you bring up should bolster your candidature. Bringing in your family to demonstrate that they inculcated good values in you is fine. Bringing them in just to introduce them is pointless – the interviewer is considering *you* as a potential student and not your family.

With luck, if you answer this one question right, the rest of the interview can be a breeze as the reins will be firmly in your hands.

## The Personal Interview – Strengths and Weaknesses

The next question we should examine is “**What are your strengths and weaknesses?**”

Again, let’s look at this question unemotionally. It is very tempting to say “my strength is my sincerity” (*or hard work, or determination, or any other standard prized quality*). But it is quite likely that the examiner will counter this by saying “So you mean to say all the other candidates are not sincere?” for which there is no good answer! Or even worse, that the examiner will just ignore the answer filing it as “standard cliché, no point questioning further”.

The thing is, the examiner is not really asking “what are you good at?” If he were, you could well answer “I am good at eating – I do it thrice a day without any particular effort” or “I am amazing at breathing, I do it all the time!” What the examiner really means is, “what are you **better at** than most of your competitors?”

Accordingly, you need to introspect and figure out what strength you have that you can defend with examples from your life (preferably genuine ones). If you want to claim that you are good at managing people, you will have to provide anecdotal proof of the same. If you state that you can handle pressure, you would need to show examples of how you have faced a pressure situation and overcome it. And you will also have to think about the repercussions of your answer – for example if, wishing to demonstrate the quality of hard work, you explain how you worked harder than anyone else for your CAT, the examiner might well foil this by saying “So how come you didn’t score higher than the others then? Are you more stupid than them?”

A weakness is an even more fraught question. I notice that many people try to present a strength masquerading as a weakness. As an interviewer, when a candidate comes up to me and says “My weakness is that I am a perfectionist” I frankly feel like doing a face palm. Being a perfectionist is not a weakness, folks. If it makes you behave in an unacceptable way towards your colleagues, then that **behavior** could be a weakness, yes (*Virat Kohli, I’m looking at you here*).

So why is the examiner asking for a weakness? Why shouldn’t you just reply “Sir, I have no weakness!”? The problem is that in the (justified) opinion of the typical interviewer, everyone has weaknesses. So if you claim not to have any, the only conclusion that would be drawn is that you have no self-analysis skills. So you would definitely be expected to identify some reasonably genuine weakness. The next logical question is, what is the point of identifying a weakness? To improve it, of course!

And hence, when choosing a weakness to present, you need to preferably identify a weakness about which you can present anecdotal evidence about (a) how it has cost you in the past and (b) what you are doing to improve yourself in that area. Whether you choose to claim to be short-tempered, prone to procrastination, or unable to stay focused doesn’t matter – the key is how you choose to elaborate on your choice.

To sum up, both in strengths and weaknesses you need to identify something where you can give examples from your past to illustrate the point you are trying to make; you need to find a way to make your answer relevant and memorable, while at the same time being consistent with the overall picture of yourself you are trying to present.

## The Personal Interview – Why MBA?

A question that bothers people a lot is the short and not so sweet “**Why MBA?**”

The true answer, for most aspirants, is pretty obvious – more money. But that seems such a crass thing to say in an interview (*besides which, the interviewers already know that part*). So you need to find some more palatable reason to present, which you can defend. Effectively what is being asked here is your statement of purpose, your manifesto so to speak. And a good answer is not just a matter of saying “*I want to learn how to manage a business*”. At best, that’s a space-filler answer which the interviewer will accept and ignore. At worst, the interviewer might decide to get into specifics and ask you exactly how an MBA is going to teach you to manage a business. The thing is, this answer is kind of missing the point – even if an MBA will teach you that, you need to explain why you wish to be taught how to manage a business in the first place, and why at this point in your career/life. So you need to lead up to what it is in your past life which led you to this fateful moment of the interview.

Note that this is not a clichéd or one-size-fits-all response. Like most of the standard questions, your answers needs to be tailored to you, and compatible with the other answers you provide and the overall picture of yourself you are attempting to build in the interviewers’ minds.

For example, a person with 2-3 years of standard work experience could talk with quiet sorrow about how there is little new learning and opportunity for growth in the role, and how an MBA would revitalize an otherwise dormant career. A fresher might talk enthusiastically about how a specific subject led him to consider getting into management (or even a specific field in management – for example Industrial Engineering leading to Operations, Organizational Behavior leading to HR, a course on Options leading to Finance). A budding entrepreneur might talk about how an MBA would enable him to avoid the common pitfalls which await careless start-ups, while someone who has already been part of a start-up might explain how they were often hampered in their work by a lack of knowledge outside their narrow and specific domain. You could mention a relative, or a teacher, or a well-known business maven, and enthuse about how that person has inspired you to go for an MBA.

But in every one of the above cases, you have to be willing to defend your answer, and for that you need to think about the *further* questions which are likely to ensue from your statements.

To take just one example, if you claim that entrepreneurship is what drives you, then it wouldn’t hurt to be able to talk confidently and passionately about the kind of company you intend to start up, the current state of that particular sector, the potential initial investment needed, the number of people would you need in the first couple of years... Too much, you think? Perhaps – but remember that saying “*I want to be an entrepreneur*” is a very fashionable answer among aspirants (who seem to think that it will sound impressive while saving them from specific questions on Finance or Marketing or any such field). What’s an interviewer to do when everyone claims entrepreneurial talent? Quite often he’ll decide to check. And so you had better be prepared!

Also, if you claim entrepreneurship, the interviewer is well within his rights to ask something on the lines of “*so why do you need an MBA? Tell me three famous entrepreneurs who are MBAs*” and for an unprepared candidate, this line of questioning can be quite a googly...

## The Personal Interview – Hobbies and Interests

Another popular question which you should be ready to face: **“What are your hobbies/interests?”**

As with “strengths”, this is a very deceptive question. Again, it is not really asking “*what do you do in your spare time?*” but “*what do you do better than most other people you know?*”. In an attempt to impress, a lot of people claim hobbies which they are not really all that fond of (or good at), and this can lead to their downfall on occasion.

For example, statistical evidence (*and my experience with interviewees*) suggests that 60-70% of people mention reading as a hobby (*and more than half of those mention it as their first/only hobby*). The idea presumably being that reading sounds like an intellectual pursuit and marks one out as being erudite; not a bad impression for a potential MBA candidate to make. As usual, though, the problem is that one also has to be able to defend one’s claim, and that is where a lot of people fall short. At one extreme I have known some desperate optimists who claim to be readers, yet when asked “what books have you read?” confidently reply something like “The Alchemist, by Paulo Coelho” and when asked “and what else?” give the interviewer an indignant look as if to say “what, one book isn’t enough?”. But even if you are not quite so literally challenged, can you really claim that you are among the most voracious and attentive readers you know? (*In passing, I should mention that I myself read between 40-60 books in a typical year. And I still hesitate to mention reading as my main hobby!*) If you are lucky, the interviewer might ask your favorite authors, some books by them, why you like that author or those books, who are the protagonists of the story, what you learned from it, and so on. If so, at least you can defend yourself if well prepared. But it is a real possibility that the interviewer might just look at it and say “*oh, another wannabe claiming to read stuff*” and not even bother to check!

Claiming a more interesting hobby (*a true one, mind you, not just taken up for a month for interview purposes*) can make you more memorable, more likely to stand out from the crowd of aspirants. In addition to the relatively standard ones like trekking, cricket, dance and music, I have encountered hobbies as diverse as macramé, karate, chocolate-making, Sudoku, android app development, minesweeper, origami and scrabble. And some people have even successfully defended hobbies like “watching TV” or “playing computer games” or “listening to music”.

If you plan to claim something as your hobby, therefore, take the time to do a little research. If you say “listening to Bollywood music”, research 4-5 favorite songs – movie, actors, composer, lyricist, what you find special about that particular song. If you mention “reading”, do the same research with a few books and authors. If you like “watching cricket”, know some of the major records and the important recent occurrences, if you prefer “playing cricket” know the basic rules – ways for a batsman to get out, size of the ball, length of the pitch...but in all cases, show your passion for it.

Additionally, if you claim something which can be tested on the spot, it is entirely possible that an interviewer will do so. If you sing, or dance, or play the flute, they might ask you to demonstrate, if you sketch, they may ask you to draw them, if you do Sudoku, you might find yourself handed the day’s paper and asked to prove your claim. (I claimed a high reading speed in one interview, and they tested it!). The good thing is, if you live up to your claims, they are more likely to give credence to everything else you claimed (but the reverse is true as well, so claim nothing you can’t back up!)



# How to Approach Your IIM Interview

The IIM interview season has already started and aspirants would be trying to get as much insights as they can right from how to dress for the interview to how to reduce India fiscal deficit without affecting our growth!

Amidst all of this clutter how does go in with the right perspective? What is the state of mind with which one should approach an interview?

## The Interview Is Not A Test

For almost every aspirant this interview is a test, albeit an oral one, in which they will be interviewed or interrogated and they have to somehow find a way to get through this successfully.

Everything — your answers, your body language, your facial expressions, your composure — is determined by this, your attitude towards the interview. The panel being this set of two or three gods (benevolent or violent) upon whose mercy your life hangs.

To start let us drop the test metaphor and try to view the interview as something else.

## The Panel Is Your Prospective Client

Why is the panel your client? Firstly, because they have a problem — they need to fill a certain number of seats. Well that might not seem like a problem but it is. It is problem because they want the *right candidates* for the seat. And finding the right candidate is not an easy job because just aptitude won't do, they expect the candidate to have many more traits that cannot always be evaluated objectively. Hence, the IIMs go through the trouble of organizing interviews spread out across the country and across many weeks. If every seat they have to fill is a problem, then each IIM needs about 300-400 solutions. What is your job? To convince them that you are one such solution.

Why the prospective client metaphor?

Simply because it determines what attitude you take to the interview. Prospective clients can be very similar to interview panels: generous, expressionless, grumpy, combative, and high-handed and many more as those among you with work experience will attest.

So how would you handle a prospective client?

## How Would You Handle a Prospective Client?

- Would you be walking in trembling and under-confident?
- Will you sit passively across the table and expect them to ask questions and provide answers or will you try to establish a connection?
- Will you go unprepared or will you go in with the best pitch you can make about your form and your product?
- If the client throws a tantrum or is asking you uncomfortable questions will you sweat and give up or will you handle it with poise to the best of your abilities?
- Would you give false information and expect the client to not question or probe further or will you say I am not aware of that I will get back to you on that one?

The answers are self-evident and so are the traits you need to display Self-Belief, & Confidence, Communication Skills & Reasonableness, Preparedness & Purpose, Poise & Ability to Handle Stress, Honesty & Prudence.

## A Test of Potential

You might not have all the above traits in abundance but a few of them like Honesty are must-haves. The rest of the traits cannot be imparted through specific courses at an IIM but can only be polished through the presentations and internship you will be required to do as part of the program.

So at some level you are supposed to demonstrate these traits to some extent and show that you have the potential to become a business leader if you get a chance to learn at a premier business school like an IIM.



This might seem similar to the *Selling/Marketing Yourself* idea and may be it is to a certain extent, but there is a vital distinction you have to make — you are not marketing yourself to an individual like in B2C Marketing (Business-to-Consumer), you are marketing yourself to an institution like in B2B Marketing (Business-to-Business).

So all the traits we spoke about have to display with the assurance of a solution-provider than with the spirit of a salesman.

If you are able to approach your interview through this lens, I am sure you will be able to give a good account of yourself in your interview.

All the best,

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## The Personal Interview – Goals

Another pestilential question which bothers people is **“What are your long- and short-term goals?”**

One key to answering this sensibly is to avoid extremes. It is not a good idea to aim for the moon (in an interview at least – in real life please aim for the moon all you wish), nor is it good to appear too uninterested in a successful career. So you need to find out what is the spectrum of achievement typical for a graduate of the college you are interviewing with after a certain number of years (*which represent the range of realistic possibilities you could achieve*) and mention something from the higher end of that.

These two questions are among the few where people with solid work experience can have a genuine advantage; often such people have a much clearer idea as to which field they wish to specialize in, and can articulate better how an MBA would be able to help them grow in that field (*alas, software engineers usually lack this advantage, the only thing most of them know is which field they do NOT want to work in!*)

The short-term goal (say next 5 years) is relatively straightforward; get an MBA for the theoretical knowledge and put it into practice at the trainee or junior management level (or if you have enough pre-MBA work experience to qualify for lateral placements, perhaps even at middle management level). There isn't too much divergence in career paths in 5 years; some people might choose to enter their family business or start up their own company instead, but generally the expense (and opportunity cost) involved in an MBA means most people prefer to first work in the corporate sector till they are financially stable.

A long-term goal is a more delicate question. There is no easy answer, and ideally you should research well before blurting out anything here. Should you say *“I wish to be the CFO of a multi-national company in 15 years”* they could ask *“so what exactly does a CFO do?”* and woe betide the poor fresher who has to reply to this! Or they could say *“why a multinational company and not an Indian one?”* (*Note that if you say “Indian” they could ask “why not foreign?” they are not really objecting to your choice, rather they want you to defend it so that they can see the clarity of your thought and the depth of your resolve to do an MBA.*) On the other hand, if you try to escape this line of questioning by saying something like *“I want to start my own company”*, then that opens a whole other can of worms, as I mentioned in an earlier post. If you seriously have no clue, it might be safer to hedge your bets by not committing to a specific post or role, but instead saying something like, for example, *“I look forward to being in a position of authority and responsibility in a reputable company, while at the same time having a fulfilling personal life”* (*I tried this, by the way, and was still grilled quite mercilessly – “what if you have to make a choice between personal and professional”, “You seem to have no clear idea of what you want to do” etc etc. Whatever you say, you need to have answers!*)

Being vague is still fine, but saying something outright stupid or indefensible is a no-no. Going for an interview at a B-school ranked 20-30 in India and saying *“In five years I want to be a Trader at an Investment Bank in their New York office”* is rather unrealistic, for example. I used to be the undisputed champ of saying stupid things in interviews in my day, and as a result, more often than not, I found myself in swiftly escalating trouble, trying frantically to talk my way out (and failing more often than not).

# How to approach the IIM-A AWT

The IIM-A process involves an AWT as opposed to the WAT. The best way to understand the difference is to view the two as the two essays that the GMAT had earlier – Analysis of an Issue and Analysis of an Argument.

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## AWA Versus WAT

**Analysis of an Issue** is closer to a WAT where you have to write an essay on a topic of general interest. The topics are usually related to current affairs and require you to present your views on the same. There is I suppose no need to elaborate on the same.

**Analysis of Argument** though is an entirely different kettle of fish. Here you are presented with an argument based on a set of premises — in essence a CR passage, the only difference is that there is no one question that follows. the passage is followed by the following prompt –

*Discuss how well reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion, be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative explanations or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion. You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in the argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.*

The prompt is in effect asking you to look at the passage and answer the whatever CR question types are relevant to it

- Which of the following is the assumption behind the argument?
- Which of the following will weaken the argument?
- Which of the following will strengthen the argument?
- Which of the following will help you evaluate the argument better?

The only catch is that there are no options!

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## IIM-A AWT Questions

The IIM-A AWT questions sometimes follow the same format as above and at other times differ from it. The following examples illustrate this

- **Money should not be given to NGOs. They often end up spending it on themselves. Look at how many of them hold their meetings in expensive hotels. Moreover government is there to help the needy. Why is needy asking help from NGOs? Also the emotional advertising they use is very manipulative. These activities should be banned. Analyse the argument. What is author's line of thought and assumptions made by him and evidences provided? What statements will strengthen the argument and what alternative statements will weaken it.**
  - **"A lady smokes daily. She likes smoking even if it is bad for health. But she says that women in India are not given enough freedom." Analyse the argument and state your opinion.**
  - **Tourism should be restricted by government as it leads to breakdown of family structure, promiscuity, drug use etc. Is the argument justified?**
  - **Galileo and Pythagoras should be respected more than Shakespeare and Mozart because they impact civilisation as it is today. Give logical points against this argument.**
- If you see all the questions do not follow the same pattern as the first one, which is closest to the GMAT Analysis of an Argument. But the second and the third one use premises to make an argument —**

**Premises: Tourism leads to breakdown of family structure, promiscuity, drug use etc.**

**Argument: Tourism should be restricted by government**

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How to approach the IIM-A AWT

**Any argument is only as good as its premises and to strengthen or weaken an argument you should check the validity of the premises. So to tackle the AWT effectively you need to start by examining each premise that is stated and evaluate whether it is committing standard logical fallacies.**

- **Is the argument making a hasty generalisation using a narrow premise? If yes, what sort of examples can you think of that would give premises that counter the one stated**
  - **Is the premise based on facts or is a judgment? If yes, what sort of data is required to validate the premise?**
  - **Even if the premise is validated using data is it enough to arrive at the conclusion**
  - **Is the argument any other fallacies such as committing fallacies such as**
  - **Correlation-Causation — simultaneous occurrence of two events means one is causing the other**
  - **Post Hoc Ergo Propter hoc — after this therefore because of this**
  - **Circular Reasoning**
- While all arguments need not involve all the fallacies you have to examine the argument for the same.**
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ESSAY I

***Money should not be given to NGOs. They often end up spending it on themselves. Look at how many of them hold their meetings in expensive hotels. Moreover government is there to help the needy. Why is needy asking help from NGOs? Also the emotional advertising they use is very manipulative. These activities should be banned.***

**The argument made above makes many generalizations based on insufficient evidence.**

**Firstly, the argument offers no data to substantiate the claim that many NGOs spend money on themselves. For this claim to be valid the argument has to offer evidence showing the funds that NGOs across the country receive and what proportion do they spend in a way that do not meet their objectives. Even if the claim is true in some cases the solution is not to ban all NGOs since it would be similar to throwing the baby out with the bathwater!**

**The second argument is that the government helps the needy. While the government is there to help the needy it is also a fact that very little of the money earmarked by the government reaches the poor and the needy. The amount of corruption and wastage in the PDS of food grains highlights this fact. Also the government has to manage the fiscal deficit and thus we cannot afford to turn away NGOs that use their funds to reach out to the needy. For example, the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation spends a lot of money in developing countries to improve the quality of life of the underprivileged. It would be unwise for developing countries such as ours to ban them. Also NGOs use professionals from colleges such as TISS to ensure that they are run efficiently and the funds reach the needy, whereas the government might not be able to attract such professionals because of the image of corruption plaguing government initiatives.**

**Lastly, the argument talks about the ads being manipulative. The situation of the underprivileged is such that it will always be an emotive issue. Many corporates now use emotional advertising showcasing their CSR initiatives to garner goodwill such as TATA tea *Jaago Re* campaign or the Coca-Cola ad that shows their contribution to education using Saurav Ganguly. If NGO ads should be banned then these ads should also be banned.**

**The argument overall uses very little evidence to make blanket judgments about NGOs as a whole. It would be strengthened if it showed more data regarding the expenditure of NGOs and if it showed that the expenditure of the government across various sectors is sufficient and effective to cater to the needy.**

ESSAY II

***Galileo and Pythagoras should be respected more than Shakespeare and Mozart because they impact civilization as it is today. Give logical points against this argument.***

**The argument in essence posits that Math and the Sciences are more important than literature and music. The argument is flawed for the following reasons.**

**Firstly, science and math deal with our understanding of the external world whereas literature and music deal with the human being and the human condition. To say that all we need to know is an understanding of the external world but not the emotional core that guides our actions is akin to saying that all we need to perfect is our understanding of the external instrument but not the person using the instrument. Shakespeare's plays delve into the emotional motivations behind our actions and reflect the problems involved in human beings relationships with each other. Should Julius Caesar have been killed for what they thought he would become? Did Brutus betray his friend for an ideal and is it worth it?**

**Also it presupposes that such a clear dichotomy exists between science and art. This is may be a reflection of our age of increased specialization. People like Leonardo Da Vinci have with their contribution to both the arts and the sciences have shown that the human being is a composite whole and . Human beings are a part of nature and if our examination is limited to what is outside of us we will never be able to be in harmony with nature. Also math and music are not unrelated but are in fact closely related.**

**If we can imagine a world and a life without Shakespeare and Mozart or rather without art or music and if we can imagine it being worth living then we can agree with the author. To take examples from India, Aryabhatta and Ramanujam should be as celebrated as Vyasa and M.S.Subbalakshmi.**

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**What does the AWT test?**

**What the AWA tests is your ability to use your critical reasoning skills to identify flawed arguments. They will be giving flawed arguments like is the case with GMAT AWA and testing your ability to logically pick out the flaws and present them in a coherent fashion**

**So ensure that you do not follow what you usually do for a WAT, where you try to correlate the topic to all current affairs or look at the topic from various angles — social, political, economic etc. Treat the topics like CR questions and do not pile on superfluous statements and write unnecessarily long essays.**

**All the best to the all IIM-A call-getters for their AWT and PI!**

# How to approach the Indian B-School Personal Interview

Over the past few weeks, I was travelling around taking sessions at the IMS NAW, which explains why the posts have become sporadic. Now that we are done with the Achievers Workshops there is more breathing space to do some writing that captures the essence of the closing session that I took at the NAW.

The IIM interview season has already started and aspirants would be trying to get as many insights as they can right from how to dress for the interview to how to reduce India fiscal deficit without affecting our growth!

Amidst all of this clutter, how does one go in with the right perspective? What is the state of mind with which one should approach an interview? How you approach an interview will make all the difference.

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## The Interview Is Not A Test

For almost every aspirant this interview is a test, albeit an oral one, in which they will be interviewed/interrogated and they have to somehow find a way to get through this successfully.

Everything — your answers, your body language, your facial expressions, your composure — is determined by this, your attitude towards the interview. The panel being this set of two or three gods (benevolent, hectoring or bullying) upon whose mercy your life hangs.

To start with let us drop the test metaphor and try to view the interview as something else.

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Do not become a child again because you want to get into a school

Over the years, I have seen that irrespective of whether they working professionals or freshers, most candidates turn into children the moment it comes to a b-school interview. I have seen this not just with people with 3-5 years of work experience but even while interviewing candidates with 10-plus years of candidates having a call from a PGP-X program.

While mock-interviewing one such candidate, I asked him what he will do the if we do not select you. The moment he heard that question his face immediately dropped, instead of looking at it as a professional question about his plan-B, he took it as a rejection, as if someone he really looked up to and was desperate to seek approval from just told him that he is not worth it.



The candidate had more than 10 solid years of work experience, had spent huge amounts of time abroad at client locations and knew his domain inside out. He had a call from one of the twins among the old IIMs for its PGP-X programs.

To think of it, the PGP-X programs at the IIMs are not really that great in terms of the options they offer. They are leagues below ISB when it comes industry perception about 1-year programs in India. In fact, when they do information sessions for their PGP-X programs, IIMs attract 25 to 50 students at max, whereas ISB has its halls full. The way I looked at it, the IIM would have benefited more from this guy joining them that the other way around.

But we place education from elite institutions on such a pedestal that we immediately become 15-year old children yearning desperately to be liked and admitted to a school.

He should have just told them that he will take more time out next time, get a better GMAT score and apply to international programs as well.

So the first thing is to realise is that the interview is a professional meeting and not a teacher-student meeting. If you do make this switch in your head then you will have lost the battle between the ears.

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## The Panel Is Your Prospective Client

Why is the panel your client?

Firstly, because they have a problem — they need to fill a certain number of seats. Well, that might not seem like a problem but it is. It is problem because they want the *right candidates* for the seat.

Secondly, finding the right candidate is not an easy job because just aptitude won't do, they expect the candidate to have many more traits that cannot always be evaluated objectively. Hence, the IIMs go through the trouble of organising interviews spread out across the country and across many weeks. Else they would have shortlisted people based on CAT Scores and weights assigned to different aspects of the profile.

If every seat they have to fill is a problem, then each IIM needs about 300-400 solutions.

What is your job? To convince them that you are one such solution.

Why the prospective client metaphor?

Simply because it determines what attitude you take to the interview. Prospective clients can be very similar to interview panels: generous, expressionless, grumpy, combative, high-handed and many more as those among you with work experience will attest.

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## How Would You Handle a Prospective Client?

- Would you be walking in trembling and under-confident?
- Will you sit passively across the table and expect them to ask questions and provide answers or will you try to establish a connection?
- Will you go unprepared or will you go in with the best pitch you can make about your firm and your product?
- If the client throws a tantrum or is asking you uncomfortable questions will you sweat and give up or will you handle it with poise to the best of your abilities?
- Would you give false information and expect the client to not question or probe further or will you say I am not aware of that I will get back to you on that one?

The answers are self-evident and so are the traits you need to display

- Self-Belief, & Confidence,
  - Communication Skills & Personableness,
  - Preparedness & Purpose,
  - Poise & Ability to Handle Stress,
  - Honesty & Prudence.
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## A Test Of Potential

You might not have all the above traits in abundance but a few of them like Honesty are must-haves. The rest of the traits cannot be imparted through specific courses at an IIM but can only be polished during your stay at the b-school and the internship you will be required to do as part of the program.

So at some level, you are supposed to demonstrate these traits to some extent and show that you have the potential to become a business leader if you get a chance to learn at a premier business school like an IIM.

This might seem similar to the *Selling/Marketing Yourself* idea and maybe it is to a certain extent, but there is a vital distinction you have to make — you are not marketing yourself to an individual like in B2C Marketing (Business-to-Consumer), you are marketing yourself to an institution like in B2B Marketing (Business-to-Business). So all the traits we spoke about have to be displayed with the assurance of a solution-provider than with the spirit of a salesman.

If you are able to approach your interview through this lens, I am sure you will be able to give a good account of yourself in your interview.

If you approach the interview panel as you would a client then you will end up displaying these qualities.

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A few dos and don'ts

It is tough to cover the whole gamut of questions and possible scenarios in which a PI can play out through a blog post since it largely depends on the profile of the candidate.

**But be that as it may, we can still look at some general principles that will hold you in good stead to handle a PI.**

**Be prepared for all the standard questions (Tell us something about yourself, Why MBA, Career Goals, Strengths & Weaknesses)**

**Be genuine, if you do not know say I am not aware if you are making an educated guess then preface your answer saying I am not sure but I think.**

**Do not throw jargon such as I want to do brand management or investment banking unless you have done quite a bit of research about that and have are genuinely prepared to answer questions such as what is your favourite brand & why**

**Do not seek affirmation for or evaluation of your performance in the form of visual cues from the panel. They might maintain expressionless face, stonewalling you into feeling stressed and losing your composure.**

**Be prepared to think on your feet to answer questions that you are not expecting, your brain has to be alive and ticking not frozen**

**Be prepared to handle questions from your engineering, I know you are want to do an**

**MBA to escape engineering but you have to for one last time**

**Be prepared with GK & Current Affairs especially policy related ones such as Make in India, Odd-Even, Climate Change, Net Neutrality, Startup India, Smart Cities and even controversial issues such as Award Wapasi and the likes.  
and**

**Wear a smile, it looks good on almost all everyone.**

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**Fake it till you become it**

**I know all of these are easier said than done and some of you might not feel that these qualities do not come naturally to you but everyone need not be a natural on everything, successful people conquer their weaknesses by reading and learning about it and confronting it.**

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**Visualize yourself doing the right things**

**During the posts leading up to the CAT, we had discussed a lot about visualization — seeing yourself executing certain a set of behaviours/moves in certain situations. For example, in one of the posts we had clearly discussed that the DI-LR section can end up being the make or break section. We had discussed how you should not take the performance on one section into another. But despite all of this on test-day a lot of aspirants did adhere to it and went on to spoil their Quant section on the back of a sub-par DI-LR section.**

**You need to talk yourself into making the right moves. At that time we had used the example of Brian Lara and Michael Jordan and how they used the technique of visualisation. Well the *Cricinfo Monthly* has done even more detailed story with an entire issue dedicated to BCL. The writer Rahul Bhattacharya seems to be as crazily passionate about the batsmanship of The Prince as I am and has penned an awesome article for the issue.**

**<http://www.thecricketmonthly.com/story/954549/fly-lara-fly>**

**Prepare well and all the very best for your upcoming interviews!**