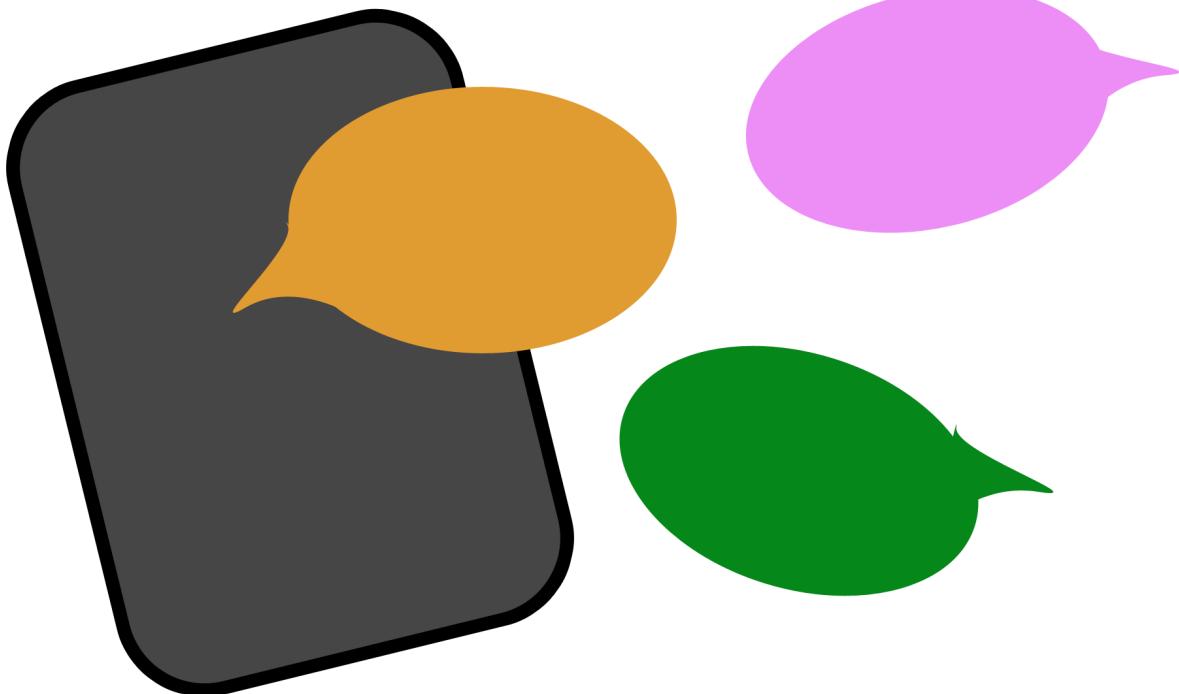


Admissions Essays & Interview



Myrna Bazan and Jorge Bazan

Guide: Admissions Essays & Interview



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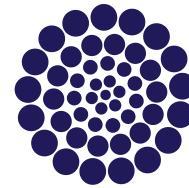
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CONACYT

Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología

PRESENTACIÓN

En un mundo cada vez más interrelacionado, en el que las demandas de personal con altos niveles de capacitación y competencias laborales, son cada vez mayores, es necesario generar nuevas oportunidades de formación de alto nivel en las distintas áreas del conocimiento.

El CONACYT, consciente de estas demandas que el mundo exige y con cuarenta años de experiencia en sus programas de becas, abre ahora un nuevo mecanismo de apoyo para orientar y acompañar a sus candidatos para potenciar así, las posibilidades de ser aceptado en la Universidad y programa de estudios de su interés.

El manual del participante de TOEFL iBT, ha sido concebido como una herramienta de asesoría y soporte para los aspirantes a ingresar a un programa de posgrado de calidad en México o en el extranjero, con el propósito de que se preparen de manera adecuada para la aplicación de la prueba TOEFL iBT y acompañarlos a paso a paso en cada de una de las etapas de este proceso para alcanzar su objetivo.

Con este esfuerzo, el CONACYT hace patente su compromiso con la educación y el desarrollo de nuestro país, al ofrecer mejores oportunidades a quienes desean conseguir el sueño de continuar con sus estudios de posgrado.

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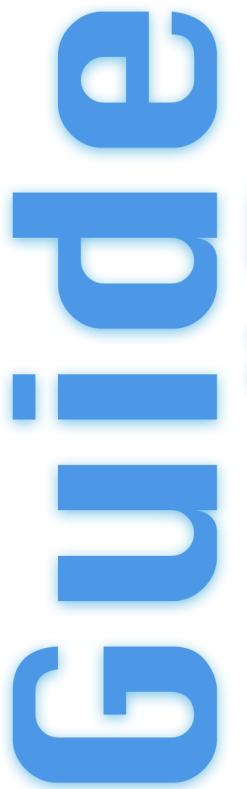
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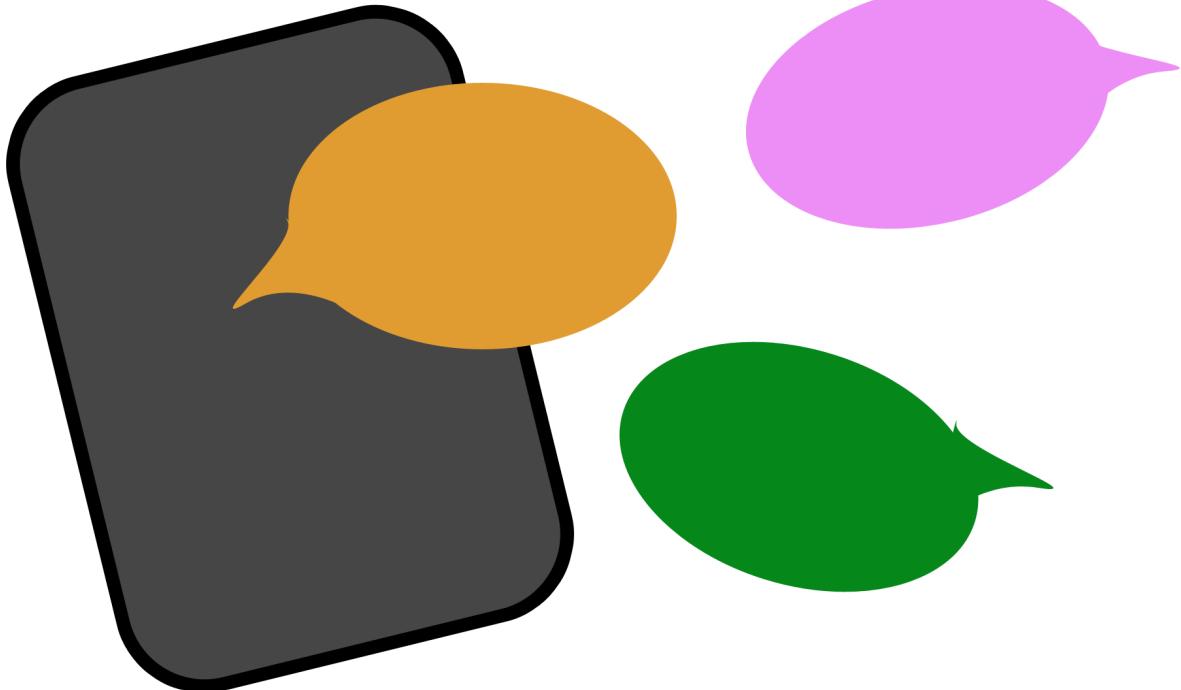
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Contents

I. Admissions essays	6
Introduction	7
How to Use this Manual	8
Educational Purpose	9
Manual Objective	10
Learning Objectives	10
Diagnostic Evaluation	11
Unit 1: Types of essays	16
Unit 2: Know yourself	20
Unit 3: Know the institution	28
Unit 4: Structure	32
Unit 5: Revision, editing, touch-up	39
Final Evaluation	43
Tips	50
References	52
Appendix	54
Notes for the instructor	63
II. Admissions interview	67
Introduction	68
How to Use this Manual	69
Educational Purpose	70
Manual Objective	71
Learning Objectives	71
Diagnostic Evaluation	72
Unit 1: Purpose and types of interview	75
Unit 2: Know yourself	79
Unit 3: Do your homework	83
Unit 4: Proactive questions	87
Unit 5: Facing the friendly interview	91
Unit 6: Facing the competitive interview	96
Unit 7: The interview: beginning to end	101
Unit 8: Mock interview and feedback	105
Final Evaluation	108
Final Words and Follow Up	110
References	113
Notes for the instructor	116



Admissions Essays Guide



Introduction

The construction of well-organized and adequately focused and directed essays for applications to educational institutions should be carefully planned and reasoned. The overall application package represents who the prospective student is. Thus, it is extremely important that he/she present his/her qualities and strong areas in an intelligent manner. The written version of goals, potentials and talents are a very important way for committee members to get to know the candidate and determine his/her fit for the school. Moreover, competition for admission to highly ranked institutions has increased. Despite the considerable effort that is required to write an original and well-constructed essay, drafts, a good disposition and attention to detail can pay off for a candidate when he/she is offered an interview. A good essay takes time and a bad one can literally end the admissions process. Graduate schools make their decisions greatly based on these written descriptive versions of candidates, so this part of an application must be prepared wisely. Besides personally working towards a good result, it is still strongly advisable that prospects show all drafts to an expert on this issue.

There are diverse types of essays and hence different approaches to write these, but the most important and commonly required are the Statement of Purpose, which describes the candidate's goals and interests as well as the specific program and institution that will aid in the achievement of these, and the Personal Statement, which presents the qualities and strengths that the candidate offers and brings to the institution and classmates. These two types of essay will be explained and thoroughly described throughout this manual.

How to use this manual

Much information can be found both on the internet and in literature about the personal essays. Good and bad examples with details are offered to all people interested in this issue. So, this manual is rather meant to condense relevant points and elements that need special attention in order to guide the reader to a successful start out in the pathway to complete a competitive application.

This manual is intended to aid students through the preparation procedures to write intelligent personal essays. The different sections included in the contents encourage the reader to work out each task and then, according to a model structure, actually write his/her personal essays. Therefore, this manual should be used as a guide, either aiding a workshop or on its own. Participants should carefully advance in the step-by-step process and practice the writing activities. Upon completion, application prospects are advised to submit these documents to an expert for revision.

Educational Purpose

The aim of this manual is to familiarize you with all aspects of graduate admissions essays in order to aid your preparation in this step of the admissions process.

Through a practical and interactive approach, the material and activities are meant to help you understand: the purpose of the essays as admissions criteria, the two main types of essays, the necessary preparation before writing the essays, two successful models to construct the essays, and suggestions for writing and editing the final drafts of these documents. This manual also intends to strengthen your abilities to use the essays in an effective and ethical way to represent yourself honestly as a worthy graduate candidate. Among these abilities, the following are considered: critical thinking, self-learning, analysis and synthesis of information, creativity, decision-making and goal-oriented work. The relevant values and attitudes enhanced throughout the manual will be: responsibility and honesty.

Manual Objective

The main purposes of this manual are: to acquaint prospective graduate applicants with the elements that are required for effective admissions essays and to guide them as they build the two most important application essays: the Statement of Purpose and the Personal Statement.

Learning Objectives

The specific learning objectives for this manual are that students:

- Identify the elements needed to fulfill requirements in graduate admissions essays.
- Understand the difference in contents and structure between the two types of essays: Personal Statement and Statement of Purpose.
- Identify their own strengths and areas of opportunity among the needed elements.
- Become deeply familiarized with the institutions and programs that they are interested in attending.
- Build relevant and effective drafts of personal essays for applications to educational institutions.
- Learn to revise and edit the drafts according to proposed aiding models.

Diagnostic Evaluation

Answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge without consulting any additional sources.

I. True / False. Read each statement and evaluate whether it is true or false. (4 pts. each, total 20 points)

1. The main objective of the Statement of Purpose is to communicate the candidate's career vision, interest in the academic area and justification for pursuing graduate studies.

- A) True
- B) False

2. In a Personal Statement, community awareness and extracurricular activities are important elements the candidate should analyze and choose to write about.

- A) True
- B) False

3. Within the academic aspects that a candidate must research about the institution, it is recommended that he/she find out about specific professors and classes offered within the program of interest.

- A) True
- B) False

4. A Personal Statement should always begin with the contributions that the candidate offers the program.

- A) True
- B) False

5. A revision should occur on the contents level and on the grammar level.

- A) True
- B) False

II. Multiple Choice. Read and select one answer for each question. (8 pts. each, total 80 points)

1. Which of the following MUST be included in the Statement of Purpose?

- A) a list of achievements
- B) the candidate's initial interest in the academic area
- C) an anecdote
- D) the candidate's academic needs
- E) the candidate's community service

2. What are the Personal Statement's main objectives?

- A) to portray a person's goals in the short and long terms
- B) to depict a person's strengths that will enrich the chosen program and/or institution.
- C) to carefully show details about the person's experiences that are peculiar and different.
- D) to provide the Admissions Committee with a complete picture of the applicant's interests.
- E) to make the applicant reflect on his/her problems and successes.

3. In an assessment of a candidate's professional strengths, which of the following MUST be considered?

- A) work achievements
- B) community service
- C) extracurricular activities
- D) empathy
- E) hobbies

4. The qualities and strengths of a candidate should be mainly oriented to which of the following in a Personal Statement?

- A) to why a particular program is chosen
- B) to link to the applicant's achievements and areas of development
- C) to fit the professional aims
- D) to goals and interests in the personal realm
- E) exalt the contributions of the applicant to the school chosen.

5. Which of the following could be highlighted as part of a program's academic strengths to be included in the Statement of Purpose?

- A) student groups
- B) community non-profit organizations
- C) extra-curricular activities
- D) multicultural class make-up
- E) lecture series

6. How can knowing about the school clubs be used for a Personal Statement?

- A) by linking them to personal interests and overall enrichment and growth.
- B) describing them as some of the goals of the institution for the students
- C) because they represent activities that will enrich the person's traits
- D) using the information to apply a direction in the essay towards achievements
- E) showing that the person has to be involved in other situations besides the academic.

7. In a Statement of Purpose candidates are recommended to begin with their professional vision because this...

- A) displays their focus and direction
- B) shows their professional strengths
- C) inspires with their dreams
- D) assesses their academic needs
- E) justifies their desire for knowledge

8. How can a Personal Statement end?

- A) with a friendly joke
- B) with a closing unifying sentence
- C) with a description of the relationship with the school
- D) with a personal remark
- E) all of the above

9. Which of the following is recommended that candidates DO when revising their application essays?

- A) change the vocabulary to erudite words whenever possible
- B) use detailed descriptions of feelings and motivations
- C) make sure to include plenty of narratives as support
- D) use the services of an expert whenever possible
- E) keep an informal and relaxed tone throughout the document

10. Which would you say is crucial to remember as a DON'T?

- A) Don't write with bad style
- B) Don't bore the committee with a personal experience.
- C) Options B and D.
- D) Don't get the name of the school or a staff member wrong.
- E) Options A, B and D.

Answers:**I. True / False.**

1. **A) True.** Justification: This statement is a paraphrase of the specified main objective for a Statement of Purpose.
2. **A) True.** Justification: Activities outside the academic also build the candidate's personality and develop abilities and values that will help him/her stand out from the crowd.
3. **A) True.** Justification: These academic aspects are recommended for inclusion in the Statement of Purpose.
4. **B) False.** Justification: A good beginning should capture the reader's attention and a good idea is to use a personal experience to lead to the rest of the contents and to a directed conclusion.
5. **A) True.** Justification: Both areas are important in the successful completion of these essays.

II. Multiple Choice.

1. **D).** Justification: A) a list of achievements is NOT an assessment of the candidate's career path and professional strengths. B), C) and E) although this could be included, it is not a main component of the Statement of Purpose. D) this is a main element in the Statement of Purpose.
2. **B).** Justification: A) belongs to the Statement of Purpose, C) and D) that is not the point or objectives, and E) this is rather the means to obtain the objectives.
3. **A).** Justification: B), C), D) and E) these must be considered in an assessment of personal strengths to include them in the Personal Statement. A) career achievements are used to support professional strengths, which must be included in the Statement of Purpose.
4. **E).** Justification: A) and B) and C) belong to the Statement of Purpose and D) is rather in relationship to contributing to the institution or program chosen.
5. **E).** Justification: A), B), C) and D) this could be included as part of the institution's integral strengths, it is not an academic issue. E) this is mentioned as a relevant academic aspect of the program.
6. **A).** Justification: B), C) are out of scope working exactly in opposite direction; D) would be, if any, related to the Statement of Purpose, and E) is not the sought endpoint.
7. **A).** Justification: B) – E) this is the objective of another part of the Statement of

Purpose. A) this is a main reason to start the Statement of Purpose.

8. **B).** Justification: A) and D) are completely off the point. C) is not exactly what is required – it is relationship of all values and traits with the enrichment of the class from the pursued program.

9. **D).** Justification: A) and E) the opposite is recommended as a DO. B) and C) are not necessary DO's. D) is recommended.

10. **D).** Justification: A) refers to “bad style”, which is ambiguous. B) is half right: “don’t bore”, yes, but not “with a personal experience”. For obvious reasons, C) and E) are also wrong.

Guide to Writing

Types of essays

Unit

1

Unit 1: Types of essays

In terms of admissions to graduate programs, most institutions will ask for one or both of these essays, maybe even as a combination. Ultimately, it is relevant to distinguish between them and their purposes, not so much to write “what the university wants”, as to portray oneself in the “best light possible”. Also, it is important to remember that some programs (especially competitive MBAs or other selective programs) will offer an invitation-only interview based on their assessment of a candidate “on paper”. Thus, the essays become the “ticket” to get the interview.

Unit 1 Initial Activity

Complete the following statements with your previous knowledge and in your own words.

The main differences, in terms of contents, between the two types of graduate admissions essays are that:

a Statement of Purpose should contain... _____

while the Personal Statement includes... _____

Answers:

First blank: ... a professional vision of the candidate’s future, including his/her short and long term plans after graduation, a brief assessment of relevant achievements summarizing the candidate’s professional strengths as well as academic needs, and the specific reasons that the candidate has chosen the particular program and institution for his/her graduate studies.

Second blank: ...a personal reflection about the candidate’s own strengths within an academic community, highlighting community work, extra-curricular activities, teamwork and a multicultural appreciation, and linking them to how he/she will contribute to the particular program and institution (including its student groups) chosen.

1.1 Statement of Purpose

A Statement of Purpose has the objective to: uniquely portray the candidate in terms of professional vision. It includes an assessment of the career path that has been chosen with the reasons or motivations for the professional field of study and a summary of academic strengths. It is meant to justify why the candidate needs a graduate degree, why in the academic area, and why at the institution chosen.

The elements that a Statement of Purpose must contain are:

- Short and long-term professional goals
An assessment of the candidate’s career path and professional strengths
- An assessment of academic needs
- Specific characteristics of the graduate program that will meet the candidate’s academic needs

1.2 Personal Statement

The Personal Statement is a picture of the prospect at his/her best in the individual realm. It is a crucial part of an application because it represents the only means by which the student can be known as a person; it actually sets the candidate's academic record into the perspective of his/her chances and hurdles. This essay basically "sells" the person putting him/her in the position of a desired student because of all that he/she has to offer the programs or class. It discusses the candidate's life, experiences and goals. Through this essay the applicant must show enthusiasm and commitment, and most importantly, ensure that he/she truly stands out from the mass and has a unique fit for the particular program.

The candidate describes and explains the package of traits, values, experiences and personal growth that has built him/her into who he/she is today. The essay invites the reader to get to know the candidate and thus should include personal moments or meaningful people described, as well as indicate priorities and abilities to discern and judge on the part of the applicant. It is an opportunity for a creative inner reflection. Therefore, the applicant's personality should arise from the text and showcase his/her uniqueness and how this will contribute to the class and program in an exclusive and significant way.

The prospect student should be careful not to expose situations that might be self-defining yet work against him/her because it portrays something negative that may be unnecessary. Many students focus on very specific moments and take too much space to describe something that should not be shared, should not take the central character's place or simply is not meaningful enough.

The basic components of a Personal Statement are:

- Qualities, traits and values
- Community Involvement
- Extra-curricular activities
- Personal Interests, development areas and new opportunities

There is no perfect way to write a Personal Statement but those that are considered good documents should include evidence that is not reflected in other parts of the application and how the described events have shaped the person's center, attitude, motivation, intellectual drive and inner growth.

Unit 1 Final Activity

Using what you learned, complete the following statements by selecting an answer.

1. A summary of my experience organizing community outreach campaigns during Christmas to feed and clothe the disadvantaged would greatly serve to support my leadership, as I include this characteristic in...

- A) The Statement of Purpose B) The Personal Statement

Admissions Essays

- 2.** If I want to mention my plans to return to the family business and expand its operations internationally, I would include this in...
- A) The Statement of Purpose B) The Personal Statement
- 3.** I describe how I overcame a disease and the deep learning that arose from that experience as part of...
- A) The Statement of Purpose B) The Personal Statement
- 4.** Explaining about a work experience that led me to make decisions related to leadership and teamwork should be written in...
- A) The Statement of Purpose B) The Personal Statement
- 5.** A significant revelation that has shaped my personality and made me mature greatly could be explained in...
- A) The Statement of Purpose B) The Personal Statement

Answers:

1. **B**
2. **A**
3. **B**
4. **A**
5. **B**

Guide

Know yourself

Unit

2

Unit 2: Know yourself

The prospect student should prepare a thorough list of characteristics that depict him/her both in the professional and personal realms. In order to do this, the applicant should begin brainstorming on these essays early enough so as not to rush in the writing and in an organized continuous way. Soon, the candidate could have a definite list of situations, experiences and traits to consider those that best characterize him/her. Each point on this list would then have to be developed and described carefully, as well as identified and classified as part of one of the essays, the Statement of Purpose or the Personal Statement.

The professional characteristics include the academic and work backgrounds, the skills and strengths developed through these, the short and long term goals that derived from this path and the academic interests that result in the present decision to pursue a particular program.

In the personal realm, on the other hand, all personal characteristics revolve around making the candidate a distinctively unique person who has valuable traits and experience to share with his/her peers in his/her intended pathway.

It is also important that the candidate be aware of his/her weaknesses or areas of opportunity that he/she needs to reinforce or develop. Even though the negative aspects will not be mentioned unless asked to do so precisely, it is important that the applicant identifies his weaknesses, so as to be ready to address them when asked, while also be careful not to focus on these when building personal or professional essays.

2.1 Professional Characteristics

Before writing a Statement of Purpose, candidates are strongly advised to make an inventory of professional achievements in order to back up their professional strengths. This exercise will not only aid in the construction of this essay, but also prove quite helpful in building a resume. Aside from the achievements earned throughout a career path, a clear definition of short and long-term professional goals, along with the corresponding academic areas of interest, will complete the assessment for candidates to graduate programs.

2.1 Initial Activity

Read each of the following statements and evaluate whether it is true or false.

- 1.** A candidate's academic background (undergraduate degree) must be aligned to his/her career path in order to write an effective Statement of Purpose.
- 2.** A list of professional achievements is enough to account for a candidate's strengths.
- 3.** Short-term goals should be clearly described, but long-term goals need not be as definite when a candidate expresses them.
- 4.** A candidate's academic areas of interest (including research options) should be highly correlated with his/her proposed career vision.

Answers:

- 1. False.** Although this can be the case, it is not absolutely necessary. Actually, a career change is a good justification for studying a graduate degree.
- 2. False.** A candidate not only needs to count his/her achievements, self-awareness of his/her strengths is also necessary for a complete self-assessment.
- 3. True.** A candidate is advised to clearly define his/her immediate goals after graduation because it demonstrates focus. Long-term goals are likely to change and could include more than one possible path.
- 4. True.** It is strongly advised that these aspects be aligned to build a stronger case in the Statement of Purpose.

2.1.1 Background

Although someone's academic background might not be completely aligned to his/her career plans, it accounts for an important portion of his/her professional profile, so it should be mentioned. If the area of study is directly related to the candidate's job history, then it stands as support of his/her career strengths. If it is also related to the career plans, then it even makes a stronger case for a candidate. In any case, the academic background should be mentioned. A candidate's initial interest in the area could be mentioned anecdotally to provide a personal touch if no Personal Statement is required in the application. Also, relevant diplomas or certifications should be included if they are aligned to the candidate's proposed career vision.

Example of relevant background description in a Statement of Purpose:

"Seeking to balance my interest in finance with my commitment to social development, I majored in Economics at the University of X. As a Mexican witnessing the contrast between rich and poor, I became interested in how such gap originated and why it persisted. Working as a research assistant, I understood how Mexico's financial system does not provide affordable capital sources for the lowest-income segments in, and realized the need for capital access channels."

2.1.2 Skills and strengths

Candidates are encouraged not to repeat a list of achievements from their resume when they assess their career progress. Also, they should not focus on results just for the sake of them or for their impact on a company or institution. Instead, they should highlight the professional aspects that they developed as a result of their achievements. Someone's "takeaways" (what they took/acquired or learned from the experience) can really provide insight into his/her professional maturity to assess strengths and areas of opportunity.

Example of an **INEFFECTIVE** assessment of career progress:

"A proven record of achievements supports me, including the most representative:

At just 22, I co-founded Grupo X-Pro-ciudadanía, an organization of nearly 70 that assists disadvantaged women, youth and children in State MMM. Our group has achieved such success in its nine years of existence that it has been awarded the highest honor: the "Carta Real".

As the youngest member in the direct team of advisors for the Mayor of State MMM, I developed one of the most important and revolutionary tools for the formulation of governmental strategies in a Mexican city. I also designed State MMM's Council for the promotion of Micro and Small Enterprises, a Micro-financing organization.

My greatest achievement is the definition and application of one of the most practical and comprehensive Knowledge Management (KM) models in a Mexican company (Company X)."

Example of an **EFFECTIVE** assessment of career progress:

"After graduating, I joined Company X to develop its Knowledge Management Department. By defining this new area in a ground-breaking field, I shaped my managerial and leadership skills, while innovating and reducing knowledge-transfer costs by almost 60%.

Afterwards, I moved to Company P to become the head for its Talent Management Initiative. Leading a four-member team, I optimized the collaboration dynamics and talent management for about 1,000 employees. Through this integral project, I enhanced my change management skills convincing and motivating an initially unwilling group."

2.1.3 Goals

To illustrate what a candidate's career vision, consider the following analogy: A man gets his eyes checked since he believes he needs glasses. The first thing the optometrist does is give the man a vision test. He asks him to look at a chart with letters on it. The man starts reading and as he goes down the chart to the smaller typeface he squints and starts misreading because his eyesight is not as sharp.

In the same way, a candidate's immediate goals after graduation, like the E at the top of the vision test chart, must be clear and well-defined. Further goals and plans might be a bit blurry or not as clear, but this is fine, since it is expected. Both of these aspects, short and long-term goals, are necessary to provide support for a candidate's focus.

Short-term goals should include:

- A job position after graduation
- A possible employer, including type of industry or business and even an example with a name.

- The expected learning or growth for the 2-5 years following graduation.
- A description of mid-term goals is optional but recommended.
- A plan from the completion of the short-term goals to the long-term goals is also recommended.

Long-term goals should include:

- A 10-year goal after graduation.
- The inclusion of a social or community-related endeavor is suggested.

2.1.4 Academic interests (development areas)

A candidate's search for specific knowledge and tools is what drives him/her to pursue a graduate degree. Thus, these interests must be intimately related to the short and long term goals. The "gap" in skills or knowledge found between the assessment of strengths and what is needed to effectively fulfill professional goals determines the academic areas of opportunity for a candidate. However, it is necessary to explicitly name these for admissions officials to appreciate a candidate's complete self-analysis, maturity and sharp professional vision.

To determine your academic interests, please answer the following questions:

- Why do you need a graduate degree?
- What specific knowledge and skills are you looking for?
- Why are you applying to the specific program or institution you have chosen?
- What are the main academic strengths of the program or institution that can help you improve?

2.1 Final Activity

Using what you learned, complete the following statements.

- 1.** The important points that I must cover as a candidate in my professional assessment are:
- 2.** When mentioning my background it is important to link it to:
- 3.** In order to effectively assess my career progress I must not only list my achievements but relate them to:
- 4.** When I describe my goals, it is essential that my short-term goals are presented:
- 5.** The "gap" between the professional strengths and the skills/ knowledge I need to fulfill my short-term goals helps to determine my:

Answers:

1. background, strengths, goals and academic interests.
2. either my strengths or my goals.
3. my "takeaways" or what I learned from them.
4. clearly and definitely, including a position and type of business upon graduation.
5. academic needs or interests.

2.2 Personal Traits

For an excellent Personal Statement, the candidate should wisely build a list of personal traits that make him/her valuable and exceptional. All of these personal traits, qualities, and values are to be supported by life activities and experiences that can portray the precise individual that the applicant is today; these personal characteristics will be brought into the institution to which the applicant is accepted enriching the diversity of the class. Thus, global vision enhanced by multicultural experiences will make the prospect a much more appreciated and desirable person.

2.2.1 Qualities, traits and values

These essentials are all those characteristics that build the candidate's personality and have shaped him/her into who he/she is: values taught at home, personality traits, developed or innate qualities. These should all be enhanced by definite examples or experiences, leading to the ultimate goal, which is offer them as class heightening elements.

2.2.2 Community involvement

All activities that correspond to community awareness and well-being should be included in a Personal Statement. The activities and/or groups involved have to be carefully described and the candidate's participation enhanced in the description. This is also important as to let the institution know that among the goals of the prospect student is giving back to society after graduation, when he/she has enough tools and skills to do so in a rightful efficient way.

2.2.3 Extra-curricular

Other extracurricular activities will also enhance personal development, a balanced life and extraordinary passion to fulfill personal interests. All types of activities can be included here, such as sports, arts, debate groups, ecologically oriented activities and other cultural, leadership or team work enhancing actions that have involved time and effort.

2.2.4 Personal interests

Additionally, personal interests and hobbies are important and give a shining touch to a personal statement. The candidate can include those areas, things or activities that he/she feels attracted to, such as cooking, reading, collecting coins or peculiar objects, playing guitar or listening to a special kind of music. These final bits can many times, if mentioned and explained in creative ways, mark differences among the many applicants.

Using the personal knowledge about yourself answer the following questions as an exercise to pinpoint your main features in the personal realm.

What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?

What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?

Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?

What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?

What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?

Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school—and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?

What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

2.2 Final Activity

Complete the following statements according to what you have learned in this section.

1. The basic elements that I must include in a Personal Statement are:
2. When mentioning my background it is important to link it to:
3. A very important characteristic that is desired in a candidate who fits in perfectly to make his/her way into a successful life in the 21st Century is:
4. Hobbies and personal interests are also important because:
5. Extracurricular activities can portray and support:

Answers:

1. qualities, traits, values, extracurricular activities, community aid activities and personal interests.

Admissions Essays

- 2.** the way in which I will enrich the program and/or class.
- 3.** global or multicultural experience.
- 4.** they enhance and make a candidate stand out from the rest.
- 5.** a person's development, balanced life and passion.

Guide

Know the
Institution

3

Unit

Unit 3: Know the institution

Before applying to a program, thorough research must be done on its particulars and the characteristics of the university.

Unit 3 Learning Activity

Complete the following statements with your previous knowledge and in your own words.

All universities seek to fulfill both academic as well as integral needs for candidates.

1. Thus, the academic aspects of a program or university that I must research before applying should include:
2. To complement the academic aspects, it is advisable for me to also research the following integral aspects:
3. To do my research, I can use:

Answers:

1. university mission, program educational objectives, faculty and areas of specialty or research groups, specialties or majors within the academic program, specific classes, program flexibility (electives), and lecture series or conferences, among the most important aspects.
2. class make-up in terms of professional and cultural backgrounds, student groups and extra-curricular activities, internship opportunities, career counseling or services for graduates.
3. university catalogues, publications (such as US News or BusinessWeek), the university website, interactions with admissions officers through email or at fairs, interactions with alumni through email or in person, and campus visits with current student interactions.

With many online resources nowadays, university admissions officials expect candidates to do their homework and research programs thoroughly often prior to emailing or chatting with them. A candidate's interest in a program is mainly shown through his/her thoroughness in researching it. Also in-depth knowledge can help a candidate determine whether a particular program provides him/her a good "fit". The insight from alumni is extremely valuable, so candidates are encouraged to interact with them either through personal acquaintances or by directly requesting their contact information from the office of admissions.

3.1 Academic aspects

Among the main academic aspects to research in an institution, the most important are:

- Its general information and mission statement
- The program of interest and its specifics
- The staff and research areas

3.1.1 General information

As part of the university's general information, the following should be researched by candidates to evaluate whether these items are aligned with their professional and personal expectations and qualifications:

- General mission and values
- History and traditions
- Location / different campuses
- Admission requirements and process

3.1.2 The program

Candidates are encouraged to find out all the particulars they can about their particular academic program of interest. These include:

- Program's academic strengths (evaluated in rankings)
- Majors or areas of specialty within the program
- Electives and for-credit projects, research, trips or activities
- Partnerships with other universities for abroad program
- Lecture series or conferences offered as complements to the formal curriculum.

3.1.3 The staff

A more thorough research in specific aspects of the program will not only provide valuable information that can be decisive for the candidate, but also give him/her tools to show his/her interest. A program's most important academic specifics are:

- Classes, especially if these are multi-disciplinary, specialized or practical
- Professors and their areas of specialty or research
- Publications within the program or by researching faculty

3.2 Integral aspects

Other aspects that are to be analyzed are the class itself; who makes it up and how all members interact and relate in everyday activities inside and outside the courses. In addition to these, opportunities and activities outside the curriculum are also important. The resulting information should be linked to the applicant's personality, values, interests and personal goals.

3.2.1 Peers / class make-up

It is important to know how diverse a group will be in a particular institution, in order to be prepared as to what the applicant will face and how he/she can contribute to the class.

Some important aspects would then be:

- Percentages of students from different countries in the world
- General qualities required from the accepted class members
- Impact or experiences of interaction in classes with such composition

3.2.2 Extracurricular opportunities (clubs, research, internships, etc.)

Activities and development outside the curricular responsibilities should be researched in each particular institution to which the candidate is applying to. According to the applicant's interests and goals, he/she will need information to participate on the different activities offered by the educational organization to which he/she is applying. Usually there are a number of Clubs that the applicant could attend. Also, the opportunities of research and internships will lead to the sought growth and enrichment of the candidate. These areas do not need to be inside the professional pursued goal, but rather fortifying the personal realm. Thus, the applicant should investigate:

- Clubs related to interests, either to follow-up on some pathway already begun or to initiate special experience or development on some area that might need it.
- The chances of working on research related to personal interests, thus resulting in a more focused and well-directed work towards the acquisition of aims.
- Whether he/she will have opportunities to grow finding internship jobs and real life experiences while working on the degree or specifically after graduation.

Guide

Structure

Unit

4

Unit 4: Structure

The way each essay is built or structured is also an important aspect in writing these competitive and descriptive documents. Other than the typical introduction, body and conclusion that all essays should have, a step by step description of each essay structure is necessary in order to include all the information required in each one, as well as to be careful not to include those points that should not be introduced in such writings. Also, more importantly, the order of the information involved in each essay should be carefully crafted to give the overall expected results.

4.1 Statement of Purpose

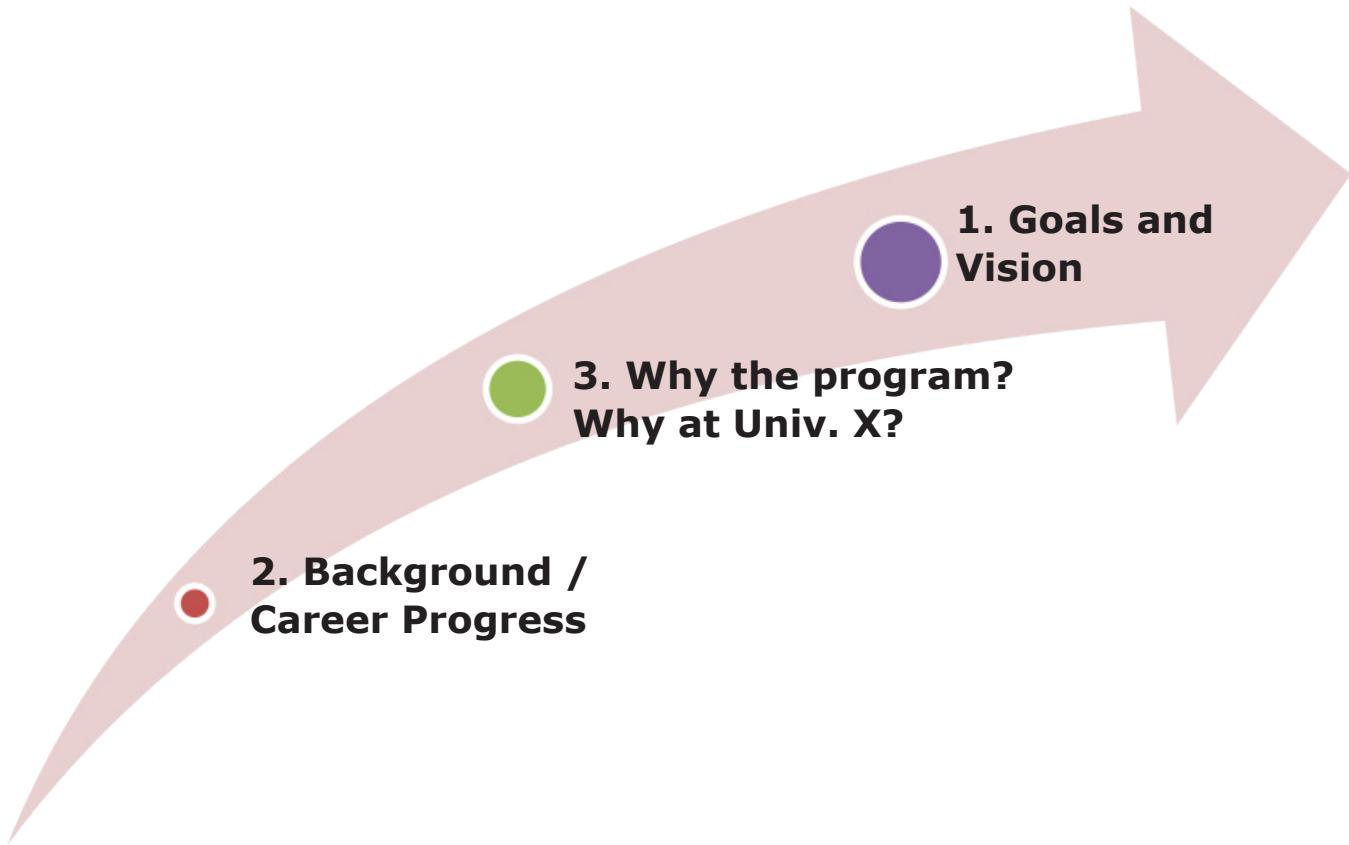
Once a candidate has done a complete self-assessment and evaluation of the academic program and institution he/she is applying to, the writing task must be executed. Although there are many different ways to structure a Statement of Purpose, the proposed model has proven its effectiveness because it makes logical sense and caters to the intended readership, the admissions officers.

Candidates often think about organizing their essay in a chronological order, starting with their initial interest in the academic field, covering their background, work experience and developed skills, and then expressing their desire to study at a particular university, to finish with their future career plans and vision.

INEFFECTIVE MODEL



However logically organized, this approach is not very effective because admissions officers have no idea where the candidate is moving towards in his account of his personal history. Also, it leaves the justification for his/her plan to get a graduate degree until the end of the essay. A better idea would be to place this vision first, providing focus and a defined sense of direction to the whole piece. Then, an assessment of the past can be stated, including the initial interest, background and career progress. The “logical gap” created between these two ideas would justify acquiring new knowledge and skills through a graduate degree that specifically addresses the academic needs of the candidate. In this way, the readers (admissions officers) would initially “check the vision” of the candidate, clearly noticing his/her focus and knowing exactly where he/she is headed in his/her intentions for graduate studies. Then the readers would learn more about the strengths of the candidate, to also appreciate his/her assessment of academic needs, which would be logically addressed through a graduate program. The admissions officers would finally read everything the candidate has researched about the specific program, noting his/her marked interest in attending.

EFFECTIVE MODEL

The following outline for the Statement of Purpose details its structure following an effective model that caters to the admissions officers. The questions and statements are included as guidelines.

Statement of Purpose Outline

Lifelong dream (Optional). Who do you hope to be when you reach 80?

Immediate plans after degree (Detailed and clear). What will you do for years 1 to 2 after graduating from the degree?

Path to reach mid to long term plans. How do you plan to go from your immediate job to your later jobs or plans?

Long term goals. What do you want to do in the long run (10 years after graduating)?

Initial interest (Optional). How did your career vision / interest in your academic area begin?

Assessment of your career progress (Brief and including your takeaways). List only the relevant achievements leading up to your degree plans.

Academic needs (Specific and concise). What academic needs do you currently have?

Program/Degree description (Specific and detailed). Why the degree and why at University X? Include both academic and integral aspects

Closing (Ties in with lifelong dream or goals).

As an added advantage for the candidate, this model allows customization of the Statement of Purpose for several applications by simply changing the paragraph or section corresponding to point VIII of the outline.

4.1 Learning Activity

Complete the following statements with what you learned in this topic.

1. It is best to start the Statement of Purpose with one's goals because they provide it:
2. By reading about my short and long-term goals, admissions officers will be able to check my:
3. After stating my goals, if I follow the second step in the model then I should be presenting:
4. The "gap" created between my goals and my current status (after assessing my career progress) provides me the opportunity to explicitly state my:
5. When I describe the program and degree I must mention:

Answers:

1. focus and direction
2. career vision.
3. an assessment of my career progress and background
4. academic needs and reasons for desiring a particular program and university.
5. both academic and integral aspects, specifically and in detail.

4.2 Personal Statement

Having done enough reflection to complete an adequate amount of information regarding the personal realm, the applicant is now ready to organize it into a logical, solid and persuasive essay about him/her own self. As a good creative beginning, the person could start by telling a story that sets a scene and captures a major or significant moment of his/her life. The aim is to basically make the readers feel that they are there with the main character. Actually, the setting can be a

specific character that influenced the candidate's life in a powerful changing way. An example of this type of beginning is:

"Wanting to reach the peak of the mountain, I kept walking. I could see to my left the concrete city that raised me; to my right the remains of a mountain that slowly surrendered to over population. Why is humankind against its own surroundings? While carefully passing around a risky path that the last hurricane formed, I knew Mother Nature was not going to let us win without giving a fight. I kept thinking and walking. What are we humans doing? We are so small, yet so dangerous. My passion over ecology and substantiated green actions was boiling inside me, seeking to find solutions to the wrong decisions people continue making until today. I was eleven when I began organizing ecologically conscious groups to make a difference in my community." (sample from applicant to a Master in International Affairs)

The style of an opening that shares a personal and guiding story can go from the flashy to the plain as long as it is truly personal and leads the readers in a previewed direction. Most people's lives lack drama, so depicting a story in an interesting way could become a challenge. It is important to find a good angle or hook. The lead or beginning paragraph is the most crucial. It grabs or loses the reader's attention and turns into the framework for the rest of the statement.

Other beginnings include much shorter personal stories, using only one line of text to set the context and lead to a description of an individual's most important characteristics. An example of this type of beginning would be:

"I spent the morning of my eighteenth birthday in an auditorium with 500 strangers." (sample from candidate to MBA)

The choice of words also makes a difference when writing a personal statement. For example, if the situation calls for good descriptions and summaries of relevant situations, active verbs are a good choice. Transitions between two ideas or paragraphs also allow the construction to result well organized and interesting.

The writing should be persuasive and always include specific examples to illustrate all ideas, traits, values and learning. Of course the conclusion of the personal statement with an excellent closing will make the final outcome be truly effective.

Plan the layout of the personal statement and divide it into 'pieces'. Both an "attention grabbing" introduction and a "punching" conclusion are needed. There is no design for the faultless personal statement; nevertheless, candidates might consider an essay body focusing on sections such as the following:

Qualities, traits and values.

Extra-curricular activities and community involvement in relationship with the characteristics of point one.

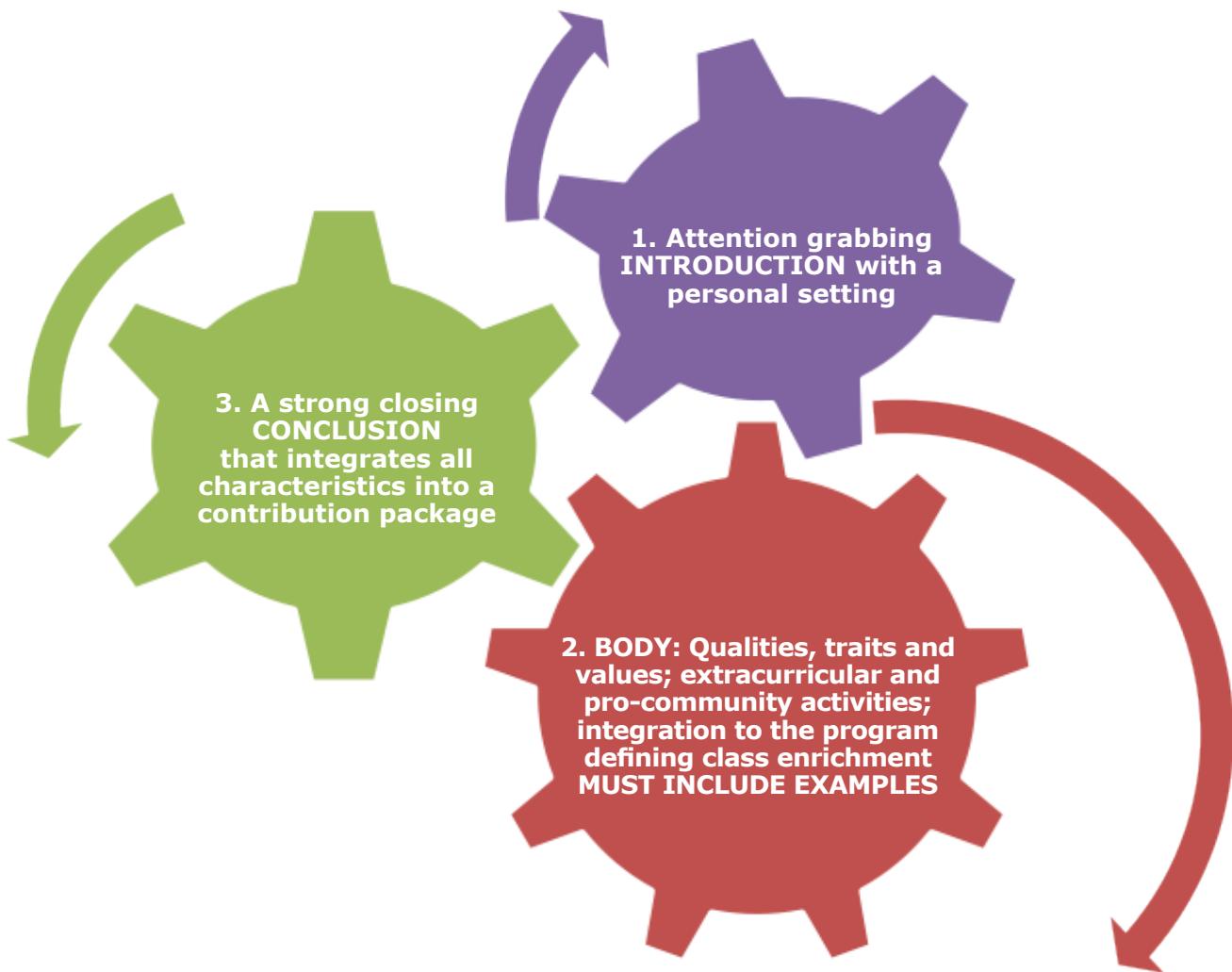
The relations between personal individualities and interests integrated to the program, class and opportunities offered by the institution applied to.

A holistic unifying paragraph, including multicultural experiences and global vision, determining the contribution or enrichment for the class.

Thus, the points to care for in a personal statement should overall result in a neatly wrapped up package that encloses all significant characteristics and experiences that the candidate brings with him into the educational program that he wishes to attend.

The following is a proposed schematic model for a Personal Statement.

MODEL FOR AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT.



4.2 Learning Activity

Read each of the following statements and evaluate whether it is true or false.

1. A Personal Statement should include as many personal experiences as possible.
2. Including personal qualities, traits and learned values is important for a Personal Statement.
3. A strong creative beginning that sets a context for a personal experience is desired.
4. Since the most important part of this essay is the beginning, the conclusion can just adjust to the endpoint that was marked by the writer.

Answers:

1. **False.** Although it is necessary to include personal experiences to enhance this essay, they should only be included if they are significant and relevant to the flow of the statement.
2. **True.** These are required elements to describe a person's qualifications and special features.
3. **True.** Any beginning that can creatively hook the readers' attention and bring a candidate to be considered a desirable student for a program is advisable.
4. **False.** Despite the importance of the beginning, the information rendered in the body and a solid conclusion are crucial elements in a Personal Statement.

guide

**Revision, Editing,
Touch-Up**

Unit

5

Unit 5: Revision, Editing, Touch-Up

Because these pieces of writing are designed to either get the applicant an interview or a place in a school program, it is vital that he/she allows him/herself enough time to revise them thoroughly. This revision needs to occur both on the content level (Was the question addressed? Is there enough detail?) and on the sentence level (Is the writing clear? Are the mechanics adequate?). While tools such as spell-checks and grammar-checks are helpful during revision, they should not be relied on exclusively and there are other stylistic suggestions that are strongly recommended.

Even though content is critical, form must also be followed in order to convey a message effectively. Thus, editing and revision should not only be done personally by the writer, but also by a second pair of eyes. In these cases, the advice of an expert can prove valuable, since his/her sensitivity and critical assessment can provide insightful comments to improve both the content and the style.

5.1 Do's

Please follow these important recommendations:

- Be concise and direct. Especially when it comes to describing your achievements, avoid flowery language and wordiness.
- When stating your goals, be as clear and detailed as possible. Remember that the clearer your picture, the more focused you will come across as.
- Try to vary the language with which you begin each paragraph. Ease the transition from one idea to the next, so that the reading flows smoothly through the essay.
- Use formal, yet accessible vocabulary. Keep the tone of the writing sober but friendly.
- Write in the first person; do not be afraid to use the word "I", but do not overuse it.
- Use a readable font, leaving at least one-inch margins around the paper and double-spaced text.
- Follow the word limit or other length recommendations.
- Do take a lot of time writing your personal statement and Statement of Purpose.
- Do read the question carefully and answer precisely what is asked.
- Do as much research on the university as you can.
- Accentuate your positive qualities but do not overdo it.
- Be definite in your writing – do not waver or show yourself indecisive.
- Do use your best English style and usage, and don't let spelling and grammatical errors spoil your statement.
- Do ask an expert for feedback on your essays.
- Use relevant and significant examples.

5.2 Don'ts

- Don't use the same essay identically for all institutions because it might not answer the precise question included.
- Don't try to second-guess admissions faculty and don't flatter them.
- Don't be phony. - Be honest.
- Don't glorify yourself, don't exaggerate and absolutely don't lie.
- Do not repeat materials that are already on the application.
- Don't leave the writing to the last minute: start and plan carefully to have an excellent result.
- Don't feel that you need to use elaborate language. If you try too hard to impress with long words that you are not confident using, the focus of your writing may be lost.
- Don't say too much about things that are not relevant – this might work against you.
- Don't be too concise and don't overelaborate or make a very long essay either – don't bore the admissions committee.
- Don't overuse or wrongly use any style or form: humor, literary devices, unconventional or gimmicky devices, personal pronoun "I", clichés and stereotypes, uncommon or technical language, fancy words, quotes and quotations, etc.
- Don't use informal or colloquial language/idioms.
- Don't get the name of the school or a staff member wrong.
- Don't preach to the reader – do not come out as a fanatical or extreme person.
- Don't complain about circumstances in your life
- Don't use money as your motivation.
- Don't discuss your minority or disadvantaged background or status unless you have a significant story to it.
- Don't talk or remind the readers about things they already know.
- Don't restate your resume in the essays.

Unit 5 Learning Activity

Classify the following statements as DO's or DON'TS.

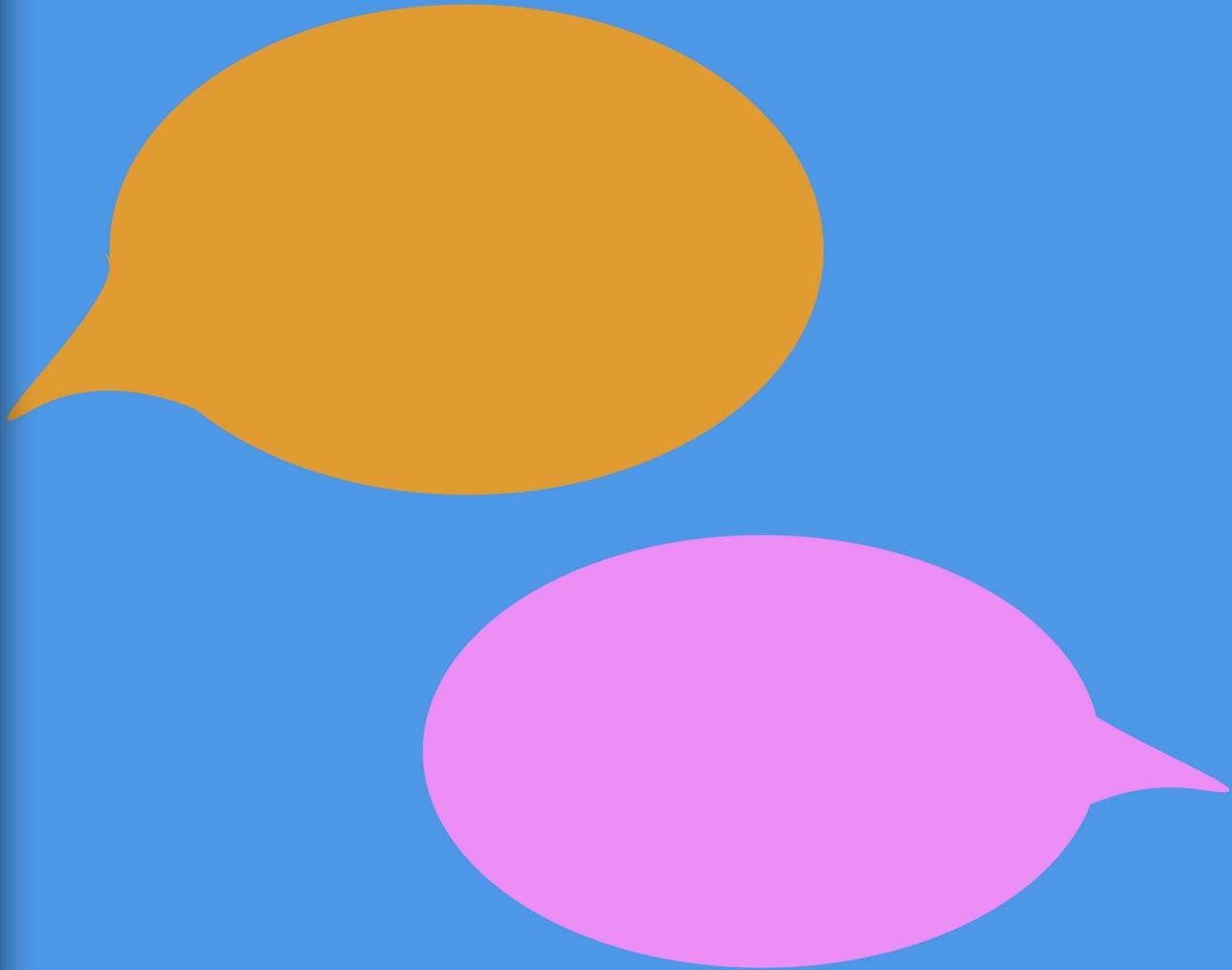
1. Include facts in the essay informing about the curriculum followed in the program.
2. Use colloquial language combined with some technical vocabulary.
3. Talk about the death of a pet in two paragraphs.
4. Ask an expert for feedback on the contents of your essays.

Answers:

1. **DON'TS.** Never repeat something the committee knows already.
2. **DON'TS.** Use formal, yet accessible vocabulary. Keep the tone of the writing sober but friendly. Don't use informal or colloquial language/idioms.
3. **DON'TS.** Use relevant and significant examples.
4. **DO'S.** It is advisable to go to experts for feedback before sending or submitting these essays.

Guide

Final Evaluation



Final Evaluation

Answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge without consulting any additional sources.

I. True / False. Read each statement and evaluate whether it is true or false. (4 pts. each, total 20 points)

1. The Personal Statement must cover all experiences related to professional goals.

- A) True
- B) False

2. In making an inventory of professional strengths for the Statement of Purpose, a candidate must consider his/her experiences traveling around the world.

- A) True
- B) False

3. Integral aspects from the institution, such as clubs and internships, should be rounded up in the Personal Statement in relationship to personal interests and goals.

- A) True
- B) False

4. A chronological model for the Statement of Purpose caters to the admissions officers as readers.

- A) True
- B) False

5. In revising their Statement of Purpose, candidates are encouraged to not show it to others in order to protect their ideas and secure the integrity of the document.

- A) True
- B) False

II. Multiple Choice. Read and select one answer for each question. (8 pts. each, total 80 points)

1. Which of the following is a reason to pursue a graduate degree that should be stated in the Statement of Purpose?

- A) to address personality weaknesses
- B) to share talents with the academic community
- C) to prepare for a career change
- D) to develop intellectual agility
- E) to seek a job promotion

2. Which of the following should not appear in a Personal Statement?

- A) values learned at home
- B) personal traits
- C) influence from a significant person
- D) job experience
- E) the applicant's biographical summary.

3. The term used to describe what a candidate learns from a work achievement, in assessing his/her professional strengths is:

- A) a "takehome"
- B) a "castaway"
- C) a "result"
- D) a "takeaway"
- E) a "putaway"

4. A term that can be interchanged with "traits" and means important features is:

- A) characterized by great challenges overcome by the candidate.
- B) characteristics and represents inner qualities in this essay
- C) behaviors and portrays a specific personality
- D) professional goals and represents the interests of a candidate.
- E) activities that are significant for the candidate and the reader.

5. In researching a professor, it is important that a candidate consider and mention which of the following?

- A) the professor's pass/fail statistics
- B) the professor's research publications
- C) the professor's tenure status
- D) the professor's department position
- E) the professor's classroom policy

6. How can knowing the percentages of students from different countries in the world that will attend the program help a student make a better Personal Statement?

- A) because he/she will understand how much he will be positively affected by cultural aspects
- B) because multiculturalism is a big issue in the present.
- C) because he/she will better know how to contribute with his/her own experience.
- D) because having the experience of a multicultural class will develop wealthier capacities.
- E) because if the percentages are high he/she has a higher probability to be accepted in the program.

7. Which of the following is an OPTIONAL point in the outline for the proposed effective model for a Statement of Purpose?

- A) Assessment of career progress
- B) Short-term goals
- C) Long-term goals
- D) Academic needs
- E) Lifelong dream

8. Which of the following could the body of the Personal Statement include?

- A) job history
- B) daily experiences from childhood
- C) various quotes
- D) all of the above
- E) none of the above

9. Which of the following is NOT a recommendation given in the DO's when revising application essays?

- A) Be concise
- B) Use a spell-checker
- C) Follow word limits
- D) Use technical language
- E) Use transition words

10. Which of the following is an important DON'T mentioned more than once in the workshop?

- A) Don't be too concise
- B) Don't lie
- C) Don't leave the writing to the last minute
- D) Don't overuse literary devices
- E) Don't use money as your motivation

Answers:**I. True / False.**

1. B) False. Justification: The Personal Statement is a personal reflection of the candidate's strengths linking them to how he/she will contribute to the institution and program class chosen.

2. B) False. Justification: Academic background and professional achievements are used in a candidate's professional inventory. Travel experiences could be used to support a global vision, which is a personal trait to be included in the Personal Statement.

3. A) True. Justification: These aspects, though part of an institution, relate to the personal realm enhanced by the Personal Statement.

4. B) False. Justification: A chronological model is mentioned as an INEFFECTIVE structural model because it does NOT cater to admissions officers.

5. B) False. Justification: Candidates are encouraged to ask other people to critique and correct their Statement of Purpose so that it truly represents them in "the best light possible".

II. Multiple Choice.

1. C). Justification: A) and B) this is a personal issue, not a professional one. D) and E) although these could be reasons to pursue a graduate degree, it is not recommended that they mentioned as such in the Statement of Purpose. C) a career change is part of a candidate's professional goals, which must be included in the Statement of Purpose.

2. D). Justification: A), B), C) and E) are all aspects that belong in a Personal Statement, in order to make a complete picture of the applicant's personal profile

3. D). Justification: A), B) and E) this word sounds like the term defined in the topic discussion, C) this is what benefits a company or institution, not what the candidate learns. D) this term is defined in the topic discussion.

4. B). Justification: A) and C) are completely out of scope, D) is mixing Personal Statement with Statement of Purpose and E) is part of a Personal Statement but has nothing to do with "traits" or "features".

5. B). Justification: A), C), D) and E) these have no relation to the candidate's academic interests. B) this is mentioned as relevant when aligned to the candidate's academic interests or needs.

6. C). Justification: A) though true, it does not appear linked to what the question is asking. B) is also true, but not the point. D) is answered in opposite direction – the Personal Statement is not about gaining wealthier capacities, though this most probably will happen; it is rather about contributing to the class diversity. E) is completely out of the scope of the question.

7. E). Justification: A) – D) this point MUST be included in the Statement of Purpose, it is not optional. E) this is a recommended but optional point in the Statement of Purpose.

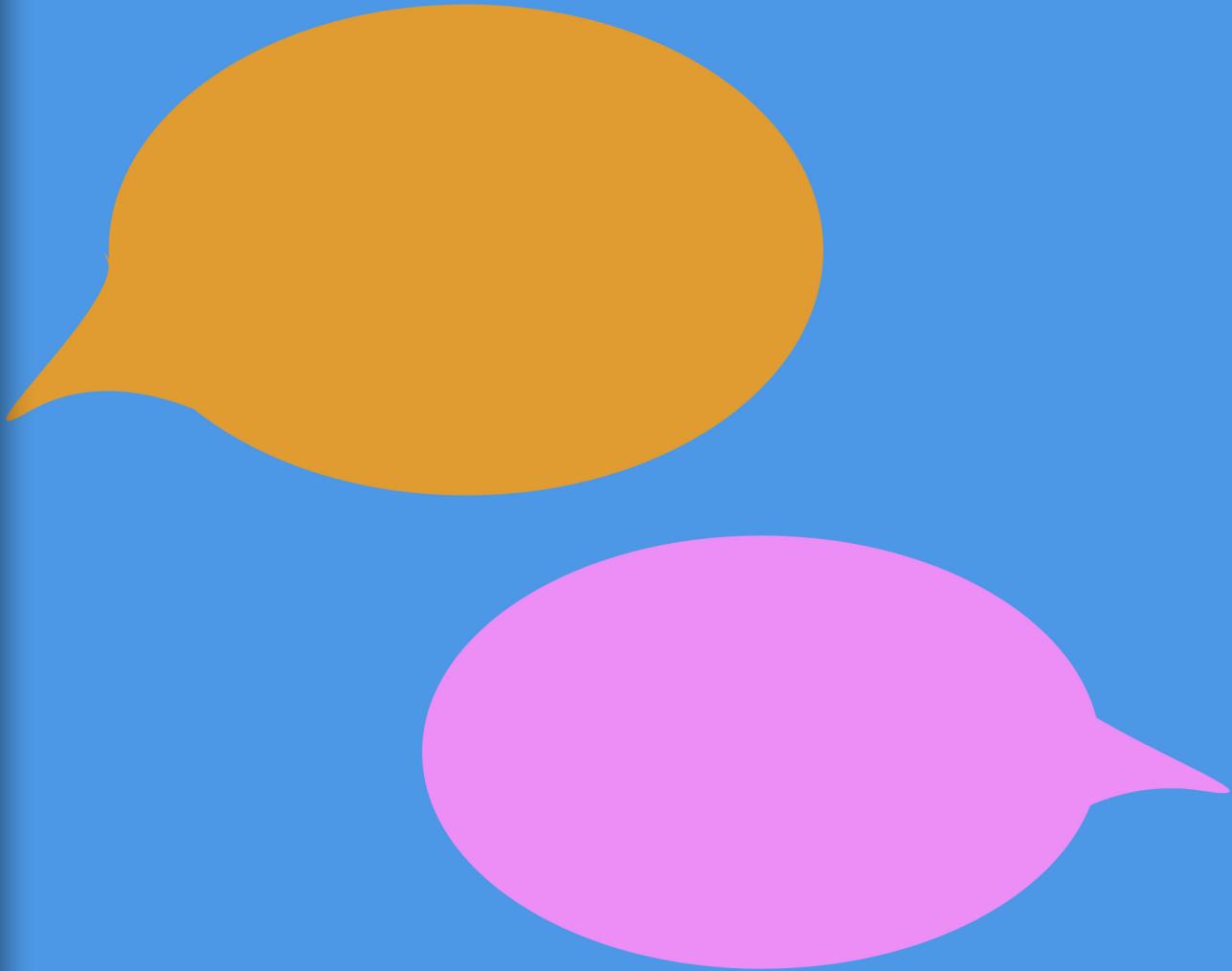
8. E). Justification: A) is part of the Statement of Purpose, B) “daily” is not what is needed, but rather significant or life-changing; C) quotes can be used, but usually one is enough in all the essay and should be chosen with care. D) is obviously wrong because A) through C) are not appropriate.

9. D). Justification: A), B), C) and E) are mentioned in the DO’s list. D) not mentioned in the DO’s list.

10. C). Justification: A), B), D) and E) are not mentioned in any other stage of the workshop.

Guide

Tips



Tips

Do not use big intellectual words; they mostly work against you.

Always be yourself.

Conclusions are critical, so make sure you think before you write.

Revise and edit, and revise and edit again until you are content with your job.

Someone else, preferably an expert, should check your essays.

Be careful with extremes; mostly, do not elaborate on personal feelings or beliefs.

Since "diversity" is an extremely important word of today, be original when you address this issue regarding your experience.

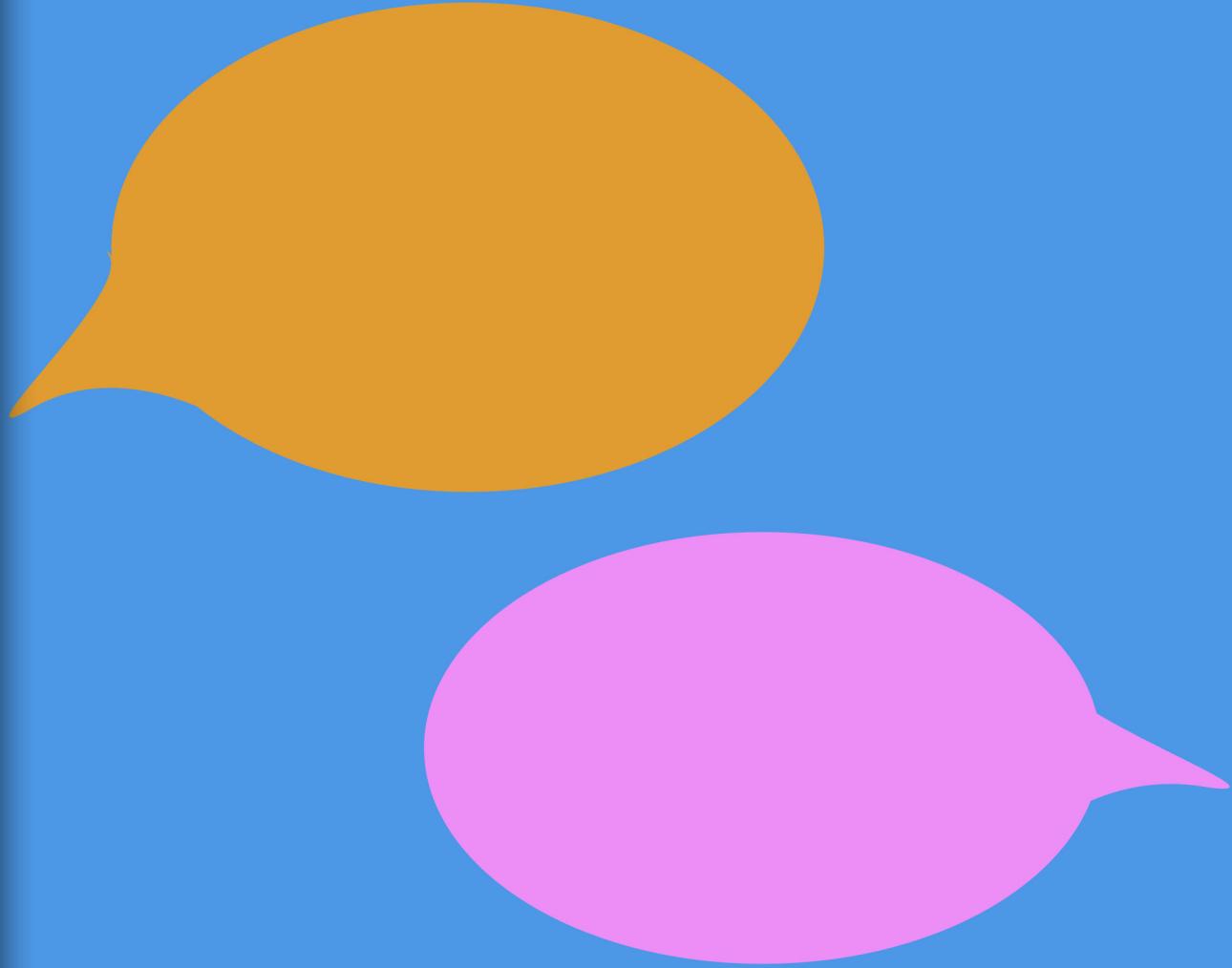
Don't mention weaknesses unless you are definitely asked to do so.

Spend reasonable time in your introduction: it should grasp the readers' attention.

Relate the body of your essays to your endpoints (introduction and conclusion) and use good and transitions between paragraphs.

Guide

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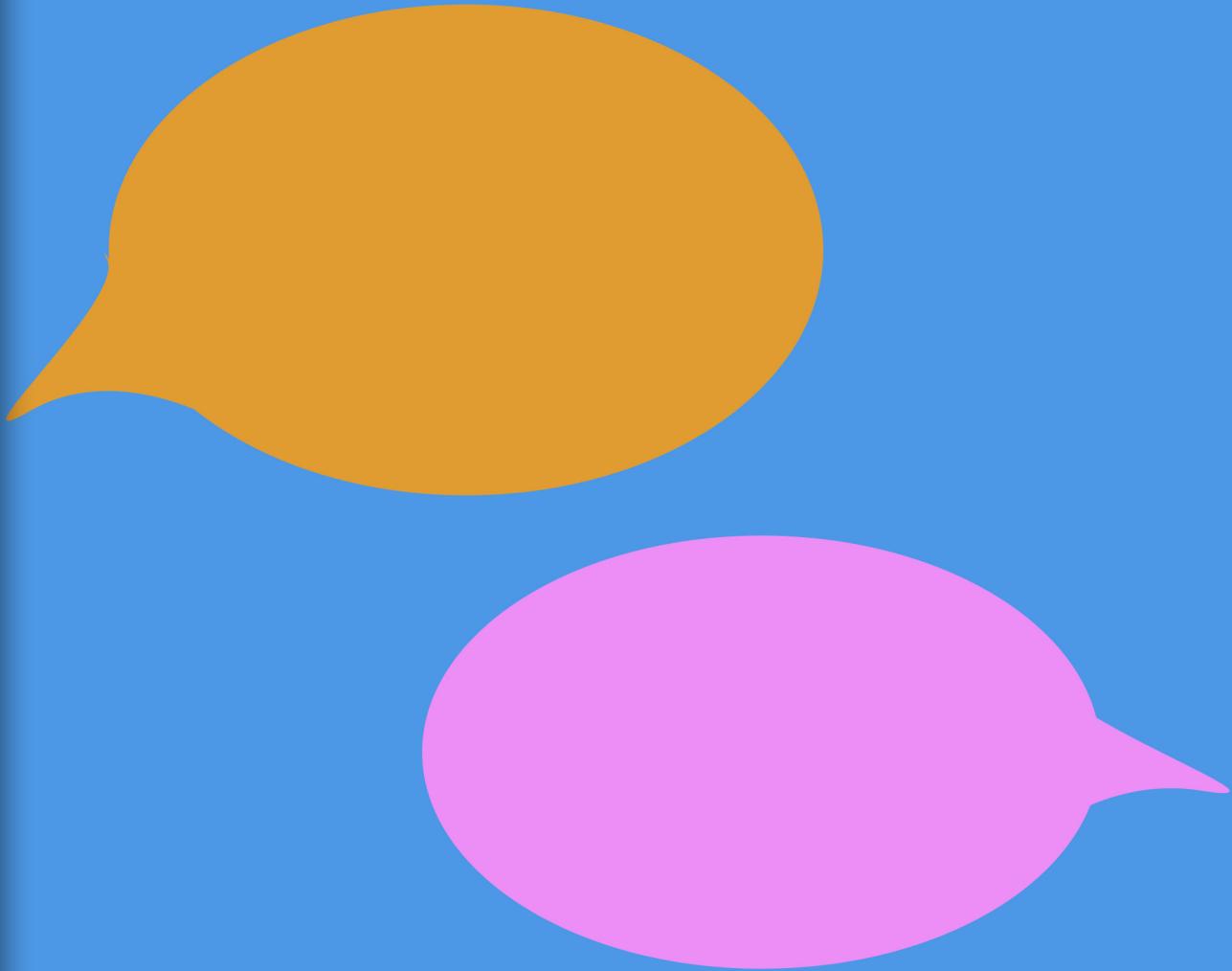
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Guide

Appendix



Appendix

Examples of Essays

Example of a Good Statement of Purpose

To fulfill my purpose in life, I envision myself as an entrepreneur, not only because I come from an entrepreneurial oriented family, but because I have the passion to become one. For me, doing business is also about helping others. As someone with strong values, I wish not only to create a source of profits and jobs, but also to help the community, care for its wellbeing and that of the environment. Doing business is my way of becoming part of the change needed in the world. With that in mind, I do not hesitate when I am asked what I want to pursue after finishing an MBA.

I have several business start-up ideas that I would like to share with fellow entrepreneurs at University X during the MBA. Armed with the proper skills, a sound business plan and a network of contacts gained during the MBA, I plan to develop one of these business ideas, which range from retail E-Business, specifically targeting the Latin American market, to a health-related social networking site. My previous experience in retail within the emerging Mexican market will also provide a grounded approach to these plans.

The obvious challenge for a startup is getting the needed funding. University X is known as a source of entrepreneurial minds and investors are aware of this as they await the next big idea. Aside from this, the business contacts acquired through University X's alumni network will allow me to garner support. Once a good idea is fully analyzed and developed properly, its funding is attainable. Innovation is the key to success, and University X provides the tools for it.

As part of this short-term plan, I also think of not 'falling in love' with any particular business, but keeping options open as I look for new opportunities, including health care, ecology, connectivity, pets, and entertainment, among others. So, my long-term career plan would be to seek the growth of my initial startup, as I continue addressing new opportunities for innovation in different industries and markets.

This vision was formed when I was only 18 during my first summer job in the family business, a renowned construction materials retailer and wholesaler. Spending time mostly with my grandfather, who founded the company, encouraged me to study a business related major and to continue acquiring experience by working my way up. Aside from this, I started my own business by taking a personal hobby to the professional level; I established a home recording studio. By partnering with a local films production and media/branding company I provided all kind of audio services to satisfy the needs of important nationwide companies. I loved my first real entrepreneurial experience, which contributed to the importance of my role within the family business. In 2009, I was appointed Co-CEO by the board of directors.

Interaction with business owners and managers taught me valuable skills and developed my vision to become a professional entrepreneur, but I have much to learn. This is why an MBA from University X is such an important element in my plans. Certainly, the management knowledge I gain and business skills I develop within the University X community will be crucial to my success as an entrepreneur.

University X's thorough emphasis across the entire MBA program on leadership, creativity and innovation will boost my future performance as an entrepreneur. A specific advantage of its MBA is that the whole second year at University X will enable me to focus on my specific career goals through electives such as Financing the Entrepreneurial Venture or business plan competitions. At University X, I can get the most career-compatible experience through its various research centers, such as the Arthur M. Blank Center for Entrepreneurship, where I can develop deep knowledge on the subject while connecting theory with practice. University X's expert faculty will provide me an edge to achieve success faster as I become a global business leader. Through University X's multicultural student groups and associations, I will test my leadership with a competitive and engaging group of peers. The alumni and faculty network will also provide me with valuable business contacts. By being part of the University X MBA experience and cultivating new ideas and skills, I am sure I will be able to turn opportunities into successful entrepreneurial ventures.

Editor Comments:

Line 1: Candidate starts with lifelong dream. Attractive and according to proposed structure.

Line 4: Socially and environmentally friendly ideas as part of dream.

Paragraph 2: Goals and plans set the candidate's focus and direction.

Paragraph 3: Smooth paragraph transition. Candidate points out strengths of the institution.

Paragraph 4: Mention of long-term plans.

Paragraph 5: Initial interest is described.

Paragraph 6: Takeaways are mentioned as part of professional assessment. Academic needs are described.

Paragraph 7: Program highlights and particular academic aspects are mentioned.

Paragraph 8: Closes back to initial ideas in opening paragraph,

Example of a Bad Statement of Purpose

I've always envisioned myself as an entrepreneur. I strongly believe doing that will fulfill my purpose in life, not only because I come from an entrepreneurial oriented family, but because everything in me is wired to become one. Having that in mind, there's no room for hesitation when I'm asked what do I want to pursue after finishing an MBA.

I've known this since I was just a kid, and actually, studying an MBA is just another step on my lifelong plan, an important one.

My first summer job involved spending a lot of time with my grandfather, which founded the family owned business. Since then, I decided I wanted my undergraduate degree to concentrate in business. Afterwards, I had the opportunity to start a business of my own, so I took my personal hobby to a professional level and established a home recording studio. I partnered with a local films production and media/branding company and outsourced all kind of audio services to satisfy the needs of important nationwide companies. This was my first real entrepreneurial experience of my own, and I loved it.

I started working at the age of 18 on the family owned company. It's a renowned retail-wholesale construction material business. As a family member with strong business background and experience, I played an important role inside the company and worked my way up. On 2010 I was appointed by the board of directors as the Co-CEO.

All of these experiences and spending time with people who have businesses of their own have helped me get closer to what I want to become; a professional entrepreneur, but I'm not there yet.

This is where my graduate degree at University X becomes an important landmark on my journey. I'm so confident that the knowledge and skills I'll develop by being part of the University X community will be crucial to my success as an entrepreneur.

I have several business start-up ideas I'm sure I'll get the chance to share them with people who have the same passion for business as I do. Once I've finished my MBA at University X and have the proper skills, my plan is to develop one of these business ideas. They range from retail E-Business targeting specifically the Latin American market to a health-related social networking site.

The obvious challenge as a startup business is the funding needed to make it viable. University X is known for the great entrepreneurial minds that belong to its community. I know for a fact, that there are many investor's eyes set on University X, awaiting the next big idea. And I believe when you have a great idea and you've developed it properly, funding is not a big challenge. Innovation is the key to success.

That is my short-term plan, but I also believe you shouldn't 'fall in love' with any business in particular. As an entrepreneurial thinker, I'm always looking for new ways of doing things or new business opportunities, such as health care, ecology, connectivity, pets, and entertainment, among others. So my long-term career plan is to continue addressing this new business or innovation opportunities on different industries and markets. Finally, I think doing business is also about helping others. I'm a man with strong values and I wish to help the community I belong to. I care for the wellbeing of those who surround me and strongly believe we should be self-aware of the environment. Doing business is my way of becoming part of the change this world need.

Editor Comments:

Line 3: Grammar error "what do I want to pursue".

Paragraph 2: Wording is ambiguous ""studying an MBA is just another step"

Paragraph 3: Choppy transition. Also, it starts with a chronological work history, which is ineffective.

Paragraph 4: Wrong preposition "On 2010..."

Paragraph 5: No "takeaways" to express learned skills or knowledge from the work achievements.

Paragraph 6: Academic needs are not specified.

Paragraph 7: Plans and goals expressed at the end are not effective.

Paragraph 8: Grammar error "investor's eyes..."

Paragraph 9: Long-term plans at the end are ineffective.

Paragraph 10: Grammar error "... change this world need."

Example of a Good Personal Statement

WHAT SPECIFIC TRAITS, VALUES AND EXPERIENCE CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE CLASS OF xxxx IN OUR MBA PROGRAM?

Born in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico, a small though wonderful city located at the border with Calexico, California, even though I am Mexican, I have interacted with Americans my whole life. Moreover, during my study abroad program I was able to work with people from all over the world. During high school, I attended school in the US where I was able to adapt to different environments and to interact with different people. I come from a fantastic middle-class family that has given me the basic resources and opportunities in order to grow, study and prepare myself. They have instilled important life values to me like honesty, respect and love. I have learned from them to always set high standards for myself and to overcome difficult circumstances through self-improvement. They have showed me that life goals can be accomplished if you commit to them with big efforts and strength. My background has shaped me into a realistic, hardworking, motivated, adaptable, honest and strong goal-focused man.

Hence, my cultural experiences will help me provide a distinct point of view during the discussions in class and teamwork assignments at the BLIPBLIP SCHOOL. All this will help me transmit good values to other classmates during team projects and discussions, and it might help me change their perspective about people from third world countries.

My experience in Supply Chain will help me analyze issues and real life cases from a strategic and operative point of view, always focusing in optimal solutions. I have great common sense, but consulting has improved this quality and helped me understand the meaning of obtained analysis results. I have been assigned projects in dissimilar industries such as steel, paint, consumer packaged goods and tile manufacturing, steel distribution, retail and transportation services. From these experiences I comprehend how businesses interact among areas and departments, and how to measure their performance. I have also been involved in locating areas of opportunity for administrative and operational processes and in improving the logical flow of information.

My job has also given me the opportunity to travel and work outside my country, for projects in Venezuela, Colombia, the US and Mexico, allowing me to have different perspectives of situations and to give solution examples from diverse cultures. Therefore, I realized that no one is or works the same way; certain values and priorities vary from country to country, even among companies. The projects that I have participated in have helped me learn how to analyze information, understand what it means, focus on the most significant results and interact with CEOs, this latter being one of my strengths. I have worked in several areas: logistics network optimization (my expertise), inventory design, production planning, order-to-cash processes and customer segmentation.

I have special leadership and communication skills that have proven to be useful during my professional and life experiences. I have used them to lead my colleagues, classmates or even friends. During a project I was responsible for managing and coordinating two junior consultants and two interns. Being in charge of such a young team required much communication with my project supervisors and leadership with my teammates so I could integrate their work, and could prepare and give presentations to the owners and board members of the company. I know that I am willing to work as hard as anyone in a team and also that I am good at entrusting work to other people while always being fair. I know that these skills will help me organize, plan and assign activities and responsibilities in a balanced way.

Thus, I believe that I can bring some variety to the table, with my personal traits, values, skills and experience. I know I can be a good asset to a discussion. I am truly respectful of other points of view and try to understand their origin and meaning before engaging in an argument. I am sure that I can be a fit candidate for an MBA at BLIPBLIP who would enrich the class discussions of true business problems.

Editor Comments:

Line 1: Begins biographically, but well directed.

End of Paragraph 1: Shows how the candidate has come to be.

Paragraph 2: A first link to the program is made,

Paragraph 3: Includes other experience.

Paragraph 4: Multicultural experience is described.

Paragraph 5: Other skills, values and traits exemplified

Paragraph 6: Concludes explaining how the student will contribute (the question is answered).

Example of a Bad Personal Statement

Since I was in college, I have constantly sought to make my community a better place to live, not only in the short term, but also seeking sustainable development. A good example of this occurred while I studied at "SUCH UNIVERSITY" and joined a social assistance program, called "Community Group". This program helps families of convicted men and also provides high school classes for adults. I took this option because it was a great opportunity to help Mexican society in two of its major problems: Poverty and Education. Besides, it was a good chance to contribute to the long term development of the country.

When I began working for the organization, I organized people to collect food and dairy products during the week so that, during the weekend, we could go to the city jail and deliver those products to families of convicted men that could not afford to make a living without that person's support. During this time it was a very enriching experience to see the impact on these families who were happily thanking us and trying to give us gifts for our effort and support towards them.

My next step at "Community Group" was the one I consider the most important. A friend and I gave English classes to adults as part of their high school program during the weekends. We prepared the classes during the week and then it was my job to give the classes. It was a very challenging situation because the people attending had very different backgrounds and ages, but the leveling process gradually came all together and the outcome, after constant effort, was a success. It was very encouraging and satisfactory to see the students graduating from high school and thanking us for all we had done for them.

The time I spent with "Community Group" really made me grow as an individual. I have understood that the amount of time we spend making our community a better place to live in is what truly makes us rich. Besides, I now firmly believe that sharing our knowledge with others who are less privileged is an excellent way to fight social inequalities, while it pays back as a wonderfully deep interacting experience in which all of us who are involved develop into better human beings.

I also believe that at BLAHBLAH MBA I will learn a series of valuable lessons that will allow me to contribute to my society in a sustainable way.

Additionally, I would like to address is my low GPA when I did my masters degree in Finance. During that time, I was performing several tasks at the same time to make ends meet: Besides studying my degree I was waiting tables at a Mexican restaurant, making an internship at Banco Santander's Financial Institutions Group as a Financial Transactions Analyst and doing some research work for XYZXYZ's Energy Vice-presidency.

I used to work on weekday mornings at Banco Santander, then either go to masters classes or wait tables on weekday evenings and, again, wait tables during the weekends (including the first Sunday of every month); at night, I used to do some research for XYZXYZ, so I honestly had very little time left to study. I put a lot of effort in finishing my master degree the best way possible, but in the end my grade was not as good as I wanted.

In the end, although not being proud of this situation, I don't regret it. My goal was always to stay in Spain and the experiences I got in these ventures helped me to get a full-time job and also to succeed at it.

It is my strong belief that Y University will teach me to successfully manage my time when being involved in multiple tasks without underperforming in any of them.

Editor Comments:

Paragraph 1: Overall, the structure is incorrect, the information not enough, the direction not adequate and too much time spent in one sole experience and in a negative aspect that did not need so much explanation. Also, it has some grammar problems."Poverty and Education" should not be capitalized.

Paragraph 3: Talks about the same issue mentioned before; repetitive.

Paragraph 4: This information is good but it is mentioned after too long.

Paragraph 5: The candidate should talk about what he/she will contribute, not learn.

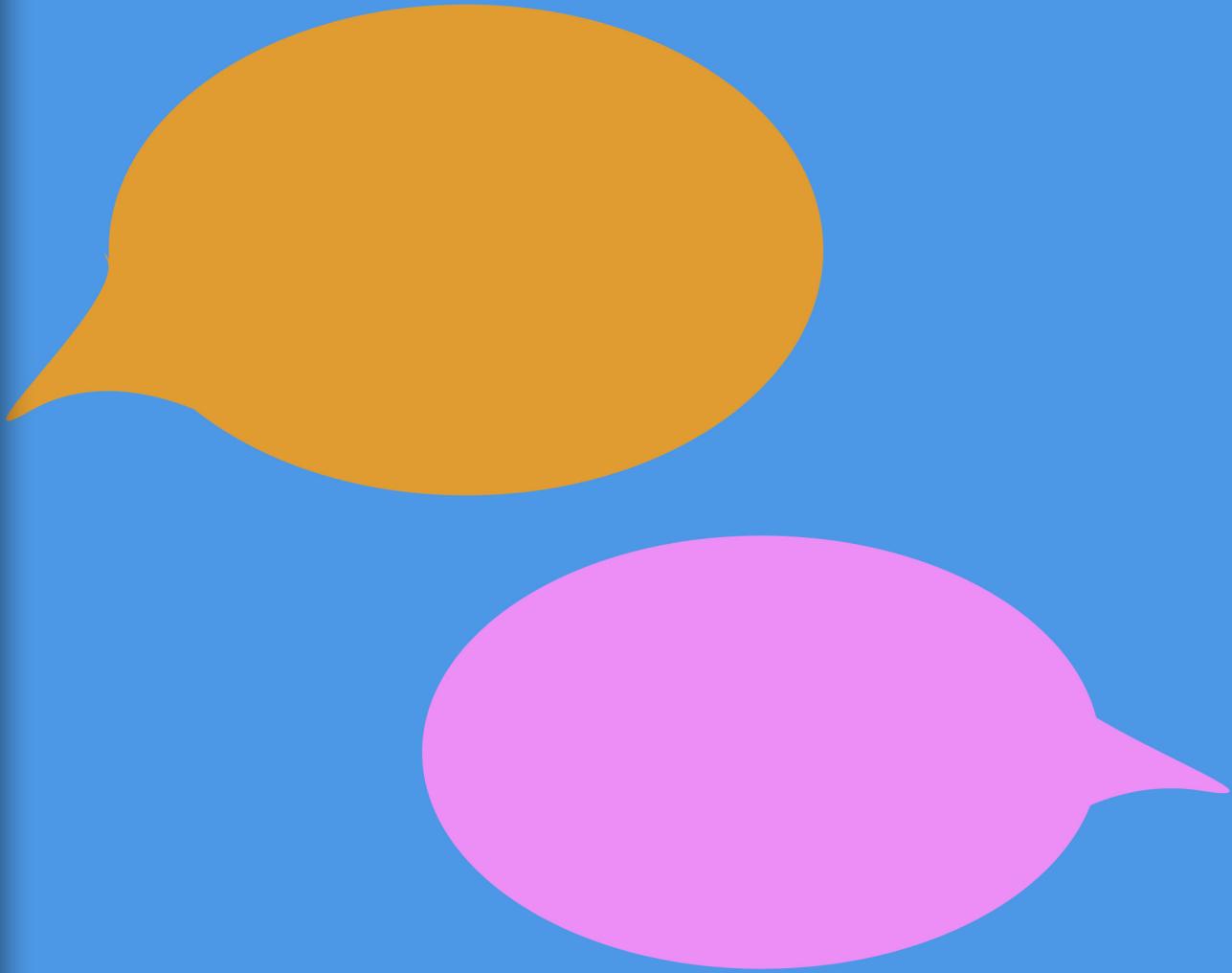
Paragraphs 6 and 7: Though this might be important, it takes too much space and emphasizes a negative situation.

Paragraph 8: Still emphasizes a negative aspect... at least the end of the story inside the story is not a tragedy.

Paragraph 9: Again, this essay has to include what the applicant offers the university, not vice-versa.

Guide

Notes for the
instructor



Notes for the Instructor

As explained in point 2, "How to Use this Manual", the material presented in the manual can be used as an aid in an interactive workshop. The following teacher notes provide some suggestions for the instructor in his/her implementation of the workshop.

It is recommended that the instructor hold credentials either as an admissions essay editor, admissions advisor, career counselor, MBA or admissions coach, or at least as a lecturer or faculty member of a related field to career development.

The workshop can be implemented in eight 50-minute sessions. It is recommended that the instructor prepare electronic presentations (which could be generated on PowerPoint) with slides including graphics, text animations, outlines and other visual aids. The lecture should be kept light in tone, brisk in rhythm and very conversational in approach. Student participation is not only to be expected, but should be actively encouraged through different questioning techniques, in particular using funnel or leading questions to narrow down responses and inquire about previous knowledge of each topic (Mindtools.com, 2011).

Students should be advised to bring an electronic Internet-enabled device (laptop, iPad or iPhone) and the location should provide them access to a Wi-Fi connection in order to carry out activities, especially pertaining to Unit 3, as they research institutions or programs of their interest.

If the students have access to materials previous to the first session, then it is recommended that sections 1-5 and 7 in the manual be assigned as reading homework before the first meeting. However, if the students are provided the manual at the start of the first session, then the initial electronic presentation should include a summary of important points in these sections, clearly explaining the objectives, format and organization of the workshop.

The following outline contains the suggested activities to be carried out along with their timing. Although all the activities in the manual are designed to be done individually, this document adds some group activities that could enhance the workshop.

Session 1:

Introductory presentation (25 minutes): Begin with a formal presentation of yourself as the lecturer along with your credentials. Transition to the important points covered in point 1, "Introduction". Mention that the manual is a workbook to be written in with notes and encourage students to use it as such. Also mention that their questions and comments should be expressed and that the lecture will be held with a conversational approach. Move on to points 3 through 5, covering all of the objectives, especially the specific learning objectives in point 5. Explain the format of the Workshop by providing an overview of each session, according to this document.

Ask students to answer the questions in point 6. Diagnostic Evaluation, and self-assess their answers with the provided answer key (25 minutes).

Session 2:

Ask students to read the introductory paragraph and do the Initial Activity to Unit 1 (5 minutes). Monitor time and address questions.

Electronic presentation (20 minutes): Include main points in manual sections 1.1 and 1.2 in a 4-5 slide presentation.

Ask students to work on the Final Activity (5 minutes). Monitor time.

Ask students to break up into groups of three (10 minutes). They should discuss their accuracy in answering the Initial Activity versus the Final Activity. Then they can answer and discuss the following questions:

- 1.** When thinking about a formative leadership experience, would you include it in the Statement of Purpose or the Personal Statement and why?
- 2.** Think about a time when you had an impact on an organization.
- 3.** Think about a time when you promoted teamwork to get results that exceeded expectations. Would you include it in the Statement of Purpose or in the Personal Statement? Why?
- 4.** Notice how the context of each of these experiences has an effect of a more professional or personal nature. Some experiences can be included in one essay or the other, but it is their context that really places them in one.

Close the activity by asking two to three group representatives to share their results with the rest of the class. (5 minutes)

Electronic presentation (5 minutes): One final slide summarizing important points covered in Unit 1.

Session 3:

Electronic presentation (5 minutes): One slide to summarize main points from the manual's section 2 introduction.

Ask students to work on Initial Activity 2.1 (5 minutes): Monitor time and answer doubts.

Electronic presentation (30 minutes): 5-6 slide presentation summarizing important points in sections 2.1.1 to 2.1.4

Ask students to answer the questions at the end of 2.1.4 and discuss in their answers in teams of three (5 minutes).

Ask students to answer 2.1 Final Activity (5 minutes). Monitor time and answer questions.

Session 4:

Electronic presentation (15 minutes): Summarize main points from manual sections 2.2 in 4 slides.

Ask students to work on 2.2 Final Activity (5 minutes): Monitor time and address individual doubts.

Close the activity with participation from 1-2 students detailing the specific information they found about their programs of interest. (5 minutes)

Electronic presentation (2 minute): One slide summarizing important points to conclude Unit 2.

Ask students to work on Unit 3 Learning Activity (3 minutes).

Electronic presentation (20 minutes): Summarize main points from manual section 3 in 6 slides.

Session 5:

Electronic presentation (28 minutes): 5-6 slides presenting important points in manual section 4.1

Ask students to work on 4.1 Learning Activity (5 minutes): Monitor time and address doubts.

Electronic presentation (17 minutes): Analyze one example of a good (5 minutes) and a bad (10 minutes) Statement of Purpose. Summarize main points covered in section 4.1 in one slide (2 minutes).

Session 6:

Electronic presentation (28 minutes): 5 slides presenting important points from manual section 4.2.

Ask students to work on 4.2 Learning Activity (5 minutes): Monitor time and address doubts.

Electronic presentation (17 minutes): Analyze one example each of a good (5 minutes) and a bad (10 minutes) Personal Statement. Summarize main points covered in section 4.2 in one slide (2 minutes).

Session 7:

Electronic presentation (45 minutes): 6 slides presenting the main points to Unit 5, including the list of DO's and DON'Ts.

Ask students to work on Unit 5 Learning Activity (5 minutes): Monitor time and address questions.

Session 8:

Ask students to work on 13. Final Evaluation (35 minutes): Monitor time and address doubts.

Close the workshop with a Question and Answer session (10-15 minutes) to address any and all remaining doubts.

References

Mindtools.com (2011). Questioning Techniques: Asking questions effectively, Retrieved on April 25, 2011 from: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_88.htm.



The word "GUIDE" is written vertically on the left side of the page in large, bold, blue letters. To the right of the title, there is a graphic element consisting of three speech bubbles: a large dark grey one at the bottom, an orange one above it, and a pink one further up on the right. A green speech bubble is also partially visible below the orange one.

Interview Essays

Myrna Bazan and Jorge Bazan

Introduction

The process of admission into a graduate school takes time and effort. More often and based on the current economic environment, institutions for graduate studies report increases in demand. Today, highly placed graduate programs attract people from all over the world who rank between 30 and 35 years old, with typically six to seven years of work experience. Different requirements must be met by the applicants, such as submitting GMAT or GRE scores, essays, official documents and others. Among these, one of the most important in the process is the graduate school interview. Though many schools of diverse areas of study include an interview in the process, probably the schools of business are the ones that rely most often on this practice.

There are diverse types of interviews and thus ways of approach, but all are significant. The interview is one of several components to the career record, which is an aggregation of professional and personal history summarized in a series of steps. The career record best represents a total picture of a working professional applying to a graduate degree. Each component of the career record deserves careful attention and no singular part should be treated less important than the next, although admissions officers agree that certain aspects of the career record receive more weight than others in certain schools and/or study areas.

Therefore, interviews should be separately considered to assure a successful process for admission into a graduate school. So, if you wish to apply to a master degree program, you should expect an interview, or if not, request one from the school; most probably, you will not be denied the opportunity. If the institution selected you for an interview, it is most probably interested in your admission. The large volume of applications, especially to some areas, such as business, means that the committee has to be highly selective as to whom it grants interviews. The interview should be looked upon as a two sided issue; it is an opportunity to open dialogue in order to aim for advantages, for both the school and the student.

How to use this manual

Although there are plenty of resources and books that can be consulted on the topic of preparation for interviews, this manual is different, since it presents a systematic and practical step-by-step approach to the process targeted specifically at the academic interview. Through a series of learning activities, covered throughout major topics, the user is guided to acquire the fundamental skills and competencies to successfully face an academic interview.

This manual is to be used as a workbook, to either aid a workshop or to be used independently. Readers are encouraged to write in it, highlight the relevant points, complete the activities and then review and reflect on their answers to questions. Within a workshop, the instructor is meant to complement the use of the manual with live interactive and engaging presentations that both elicit participation as well as encourage individual reflection. The participant should include notes in order for the manual to serve as a customized guide that includes both relevant general information as well as personal assessments that will allow each user to both internalize the learning as well as its application. Once completed, the manual can serve as a personal tool that has recorded the development and learning of participants in the skills needed to prepare for an admissions interview.

Educational Purpose

The aim of this manual is to familiarize you with all aspects of the interview for admission to a graduate program in order to aid your preparation in this step of the admissions process.

Through a practical and interactive approach, the material and activities are meant to help you understand: the purpose of the interview as an admissions criterion, the general types of interview, the necessary preparation before the interview, recommendations for the actual interview, and suggestions for the follow-up process to the interview. This manual also intends to strengthen your abilities to use the interview in an effective and ethical way to represent yourself honestly as a worthy graduate candidate. Among these abilities, the following are considered: critical thinking, self-learning, analysis and synthesis of information, creativity, decision-making and goal-oriented work both individual as well as collaborative. The relevant values and attitudes enhanced throughout the workshop will be: responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and respect.

Manual Objective

There is much material found both on the internet as well as in literature to inform the general public about the admissions interview. Thus, it would be redundant and pretentious to state that this manual provides an exhaustive compendium of tools or a deep analysis of the interview. Rather, it is meant to briefly summarize relevant points and take the reader and workshop participant through a meaningful learning process.

The purpose of this manual is to take you step-by-step through the preparation process for the admissions interview. The sections included in its contents have been produced with a workshop in mind, addressing each of the necessary thought processes and actions to effectively face the interview. By including relevant information and activities to promote research and self-analysis, the manual provides a workbook to serve as a customizable guide. The practical, yet systematic approach underlying this manual's design is meant to both promote meaningful learning as well as enhance skills, abilities and competencies to tackle the admissions interview successfully.

Learning Objectives

The specific learning objectives for this manual and its accompanying workshop are to help students:

- Familiarize themselves with the purpose of the admissions interview and to identify the different types of interview.
- Carry out a self-assessment of their strengths and weaknesses, noting both achievements and learning experiences that have brought about self-awareness.
- Become acquainted with different graduate programs of their interest in depth, in order both to clarify admissions priorities as well as focus on specific personal traits to determine their "fit" with these programs.
- Generate thoughtful questions that will help guide their interview and effectively show their genuine interest in particular programs.
- Analyze generalized questions that make up the friendly interview as well as more challenging, incisive questions that could make up the competitive interview.
- Become aware of the different relevant points to be covered before, during, at the end of the interview.
- Practice and experience the interview process live.
- Consider recommendations for the interview follow-up.

General information and topics

An interview for graduate school is one of the factors in the application process that can work for or against you in getting into your desired school. Graduate school interviews can be of various forms depending on the program and the school: one-on-one, group, campus/faculty visits, panel interviews, or on-the-spot phone or video conference interviews.

Even though success in these interviews can be strongly supported by experience, education and prior mental preparation are very important. Being admitted could be a matter of luck; you might be interviewed by someone who relates to your interests, background, experience or style. The more informed and prepared you are, the less anxious the experience will be. Interviews are normally of a conversational type, but since the purpose is to get to know you, you should be prepared for anything. Interviews can last anywhere from 20 to 90 minutes. Some schools will have up to four interviews.

Though some institutions require interviews, many only ask students that could be seriously considered for admission. When you are well prepared to face an interview, it becomes a good chance for you to be in control of your destiny and show the decision committee that you are a valuable candidate that the school would want to have and appreciate. You should use this opportunity to make an excellent impression of yourself.

The institution seeks to build a coherent viewpoint and you, a persuasively selling story through all the distinct application elements, the interview an essential one. All these elements should be perfectly connected and matched; they should fall beautifully into place as the pieces of a puzzle do.

Diagnostic Evaluation

Answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge without consulting any additional sources.

- 1.** What are the two main purposes of the academic interview?
- 2.** What is the main difference between a friendly and a competitive interview?
- 3.** When being asked about your main accomplishments, besides mentioning them, what else is implied by the question that you must include in your answer?
- 4.** What kind of information about the school and program should you familiarize yourself with before going to the interview?
- 5.** Aside from visiting the school's webpage, what other resources can you use to learn more about the school or program?
- 6.** What are the two main purposes of asking questions to the interviewer during an interview?
- 7.** In order to break the ice at the beginning of an interview, what can you do as a candidate?
- 8.** On a competitive question, what will the interviewer probably assess?
- 9.** One day before the interview, what suggestions should you consider?
- 10.** After you have completed an interview, what is the most important thing to remember to do?

As you go over the answers, evaluate your previous knowledge objectively.

ANSWER KEY:

- 1.** The two main purposes of an academic interview are: for the school to learn more about yourself and evaluate you as a candidate; and for you to learn more about the program and whether it offers the right "fit" for you. Asking questions during the interview shows your interest in the program and not doing it can be misinterpreted as a lack of interest.
- 2.** A friendly interview is meant to get to know you better as a candidate and is generally a standard part of the school's admissions process. A competitive interview is meant to evaluate your relative strengths and weaknesses versus other candidates, or assess your profile, and is generally done by invitation only, once other criteria in your application package have been met successfully.

- 3.** The WHY and the HOW are essential parts of your answer to an accomplishments question. Although the interviewer does not explicitly ask these, they are implied by the question: "What are your most important accomplishments?" Being able to state why you have chosen your answers and how you managed to complete them is just as important as what you did.
- 4.** Find out as much information about the program and school and as specific to your needs as you can. Most important points to cover are: school values, program specifics, professors, courses, areas of specialization, internships, student groups and community aspects, even including social and cultural environment.
- 5.** Besides visiting the school's webpage you can: attend fairs and presentations if possible, send emails to admissions officers addressing specific doubts, talk to alumni to get their perspective, and make a trip (tour) to visit in person.
- 6.** The two main purposes of asking questions are: to clarify and learn specifics about the program and how it can best fit your needs; and to show your interest in the school, highlighting your particular strengths and contributions to the program.
- 7.** To kick things off, thank the interviewer for the opportunity to learn more about the program and mention your excitement in applying to the school. You can also make a reference to a previous chat with alumni or admissions officer, or mention a specific aspect of the program that has caught your attention.
- 8.** Basic aspects that the interviewer will be looking for will be: your honesty, creativity, self-awareness and your relative strengths.
- 9.** Plan ahead: prepare answers to typical questions, rehearse, formulate three to five intelligent questions to ask, know the location (including parking spaces) and the estimate the time for your trip there. Sleep well and be well rested. Plan to be fully awake, formally dressed, well fed and ready to be alert, yet relaxed.
- 10.** Send an email to thank the interviewer and anyone else you might have met from the school. Following up on the interview, once more, confirms your interest in joining the school.

Guided G

Purpose and types
of interview

1

Unit

1.1 Interview purposes

For clarity's sake, the admissions interview is fairly different from a job interview in several aspects. Although both seek to evaluate candidate's abilities and profile, a job interview is meant to establish a match between what an employer wants (to fill a spot) and what a candidate can offer (credentials). The admissions interview is mainly used to check for "fit", which also includes what the student seeks and wants (in his or her career vision) and what the school offers, therefore, it is also meant to evaluate the passion or desire that a given candidate has for a particular program.

Although the interview is generally not a required element of the admissions process for many schools, it can play a decisive role in some programs, especially depending on their competitiveness. Interviews for graduate school serve four main purposes: as a public relations mechanism, as an opportunity for the school's representative to answer questions for the candidate, as a means to recruit the student and as an instrument to gather data.

Imagine the amount of time you will spend with faculty members for the next couple of years. Consider the resources that a school invests in you as you embark on this academic journey. Just as important as the concept of "fit" is for admissions essays or statements of purpose, so is the concept of "coherence" for the interview. The institution takes the interview as a chance to really get to know you on a personal basis, to find out how "you conduct yourself" matches up to "what you say about yourself". Actions speak louder than words. The interview precisely puts into action what you mention in your essays, or so it is meant to give you that chance.

In general terms, schools train their interviewers to score the interaction on a matrix or rubric, based on your responses, and on how you think and act during the interview. Each program has its own code or "grading" system, and it is practically impossible to know beforehand which terms will be used to evaluate you, or even what the judgment used by the interviewer will be. However, no one is better at being yourself than YOU. This is why honesty and a direct approach will automatically work in your favor. The more coherent you are with what you expressed in your essays, the better off you will be.

1.2 Types of interview

The types of interview, in a general classification, are: friendly and competitive.

1.2.1 Friendly

The friendly type of interview will gather information from you in order to know you better and match or reinforce the information you gave through your application form, curriculum vitae and your essays. Usually, this interview starts with some ice breakers and stays within the conversational style, emphasizing an easygoing, comfortable and overall pleasant moment.

These interviews are regularly protocol or a required part of some graduate application processes.

1.2.2 Competitive

On the other hand, the competitive interview is usually one by invitation only. Having high numbers of student applications makes school admission committees choose some candidates that stand out among the large numbers in order to make more appropriate final choices. These students are invited to attend an interview. The questions included here, even though the interview does also begin with ice breaking talks, request more specific information from the candidates to help define differences among them regarding their skills, abilities, experience, development, ways of action and precise short and long term goals and professional and personal growth. Having a possibility to show yourself as a competitive, desired class member is an outstanding occasion to pour in all you can on your behalf.

In some institutions, the interview is optional upon completing several requirements. If you have the option, request an interview for it means a wonderful opportunity to present and sell yourself in a more thorough way, also making an impact on committee staff members and showing your strong interest in the school and particular program. So, make sure that you do not discard this chance of placing yourself ahead of other applicants, especially if you have some aspects that are not overall magnificent, such as a not so great GPA or test score.

Activity 1

Individually, answer the following questions by researching on the Internet and drawing from your own experience. Take 25 minutes to carry out steps 1-4.

- 1.** List the schools and/or programs that you are interested in.
- 2.** In order of importance, visit the website for each of the programs you listed in 1 in order to find out if the interview is considered as part of their admissions process. If it is, please note if it is required, optional or invitation only. If there are deadlines to this element of the process to sign up, qualify for one, or request one, also note the dates.
- 3.** For each of the listed programs, find the questions for the application or statements of purpose essays in order to lay the foundation for your interview preparation. If the webpage requires you to sign up or create an account, a workaround could be to carry out a search in Google. For example, you could type: "essay questions Kellogg MBA 2010"
- 4.** Based on the information you gathered above, identify whether the interview can be considered mainly friendly, competitive or a fair mix of the two for each of the programs listed.

In a workshop, gather up in teams of three. Take 10 minutes for this part of the activity.

If working individually, answer question 3, then read the conclusions.

1. Select amongst yourselves someone to carry out the “time monitor” role, making sure that everyone gets a chance to speak, a “secretary” to keep track of your collaborative answers, and a “representative” who can share your group’s interactions with the whole class.

2. Summarize your individual findings for your teammates. Ask if they agree on your perception and identification of the type of interview you will likely face.

3. As a group, answer the following questions.

a) Do the majority of the schools use an interview as part of their admissions process?

b) Is the interview required, optional or invitation only?

c) Why is it important to identify the type of interview you will likely face?

d) How do you think the steps you have taken to gather information can help in the approach you will take to prepare yourself for the interviews you might face?

In a workshop, the instructor will select some team representatives to share findings with the class and present conclusions for this section of the workshop.

Conclusions:

- Stick to the rules: invitation only, required or optional.
- If optional, always ask for one.
- Take more time / dedication to prepare for competitive interviews.
- Try to talk to an alumnus who has interviewed for your program.

Guide

Know yourself

Unit

2

2.1 Values and characteristics

You need to be prepared to talk about yourself. You should be able to describe yourself, including your general characteristics or personality traits, your values and interests. You should also be capable of seeing yourself through other people's eyes.

2.2 Interests

Your academic interest should highlight your career progress to date, so mention only the relevant issues. Aside from professional issues you should also take into account extra-curricular and community activities that can round off your profile.

2.3 Most important achievements

Most people think that they have clear enough ideas to discuss these affairs, but when faced with precise questions about these important aspects, they can only speak a few sentences and then repeat themselves. In order to avoid this, think of achievements in terms of: condition, action and results. Organize your thoughts using this model and at the end tag along your TAKEAWAYS, the new knowledge, skills and perspective you acquired by executing these accomplishments.

2.4 Short and long term goals

When listing your short and long term goals, be sure to have a clear immediate vision of what you plan to do after graduating. It is important that these goals be focused, because they will demonstrate professional maturity and direction; no school wants a student who does not know where he or she comes from or is headed towards. Trace a plan that goes from your short to your long term goals that is feasible and well grounded. Finally, relate your goals to how the school and program fits those aims.

2.5 Educational background

Be ready to speak of the major you chose to study and why, explaining how it has affected your professional progress. Any additional certifications, courses and diplomas that are relevant must also be included. Other key points that you need to recognize and develop are those related to valuable traits and skills that you have developed through your education and job backgrounds and experiences, mentioning precise activities or examples that depict these individualities that help you stand out from your peers.

2.6 Professional experience

Two main areas that every candidate must highlight are teamwork and leadership achievements. Make sure you address how you communicate, motivate, lead by example, listen, interact and guide actions within teams.

2.7 How the school / program fits your aims

All of the above topics should guide you to express the reasons for applying to a particular program and/or school and the ways, skills or dexterities that you will share in order to enrich the class or school community.

2.8 Strengths and weaknesses

Have at least one example to back up each of the strengths you plan to highlight.

Most importantly, you should analyze your weaknesses or areas of opportunity, because many times people are not aware of them, or avoid them subconsciously. However, be careful not to go beyond that which is needed. Do not speak about something that compromises your integrity or main values. Try to avoid issues of a personal nature or those that could be interpreted as character flaws. Also, make sure that you address your weaknesses as possible development into strengths in a short to medium term that could involve your attending a particular school. You can include examples of how you are advancing in these areas, knowing that you have room for improvement and that you will conquer these weaknesses with effort and focus.

In addition, you need to remember to really be yourself and show passion and excitement for your desired area of study, for the specific school and program. Sell yourself in a persuasive way; not overdoing the job, though, but definitely mentioning and enhancing those details that most probably you already talked about in your application essays.

Activity 2

Individually, answer the following questions as honestly and directly as you can. Take 30 minutes for this portion.

1. Think of someone you know whom you really admire professionally. What five characteristics do you most admire of them? Please try to focus on work and professional aspects, rather than on personal issues.
2. Think of someone you know who could really improve professionally. What five areas do you think they could do a better job at?

3. Take a moment to analyze the answers to both questions 1 and 2, thinking about you. How do the positive and "not so positive" traits relate to your own version of these?
4. Think of your five strongest characteristics or skills in the workplace. What are they?
5. What do you consider your five most relevant areas of opportunity?
6. Think of at least one concrete example or event to back up or support your strengths listed in 4. List the situation, your actions and the results.
7. Think about instances or times in which you realized that you had to improve specifically on the issues presented in question 5. List the situation, your actions, the outcome and your learning.
8. Make a list of three things that are really important to you in life.
9. Try to answer WHY each of this is important to you. How do they weigh in on your concept of happiness? Why do they make your life better?
10. What was your major? Why did you choose to study this? Is your job related to this field? How is your job better or worse than what you studied?

Answer the following two questions in five minutes.

1. What have you learned about yourself with these questions that you were not aware of?
2. How has the self-analysis done through the previous questions prepared you to face the admissions interview?

Conclusions:

- The projection exercise in questions 1 and 2 can really help you identify strengths and weaknesses.
- Self-analysis is critical, so spend your time thinking about your achievements, strengths and weaknesses.
- Build a database of achievements based on the CAR (condition, action, results) model to support your strengths or areas of opportunity.
- Always answer WHY and HOW for achievements, strengths, and weaknesses.

Guide

Do your homework

Unit

3

3.1 The school's mission and vision

Your investigation involves visiting the website for each school on your list of choices in order to find the mission, vision and/or values to find their match with your own perspective.

3.2 The program strengths

It is very important to research the program strengths, the style of teaching, the teachers' curricula and areas of research or specialization, along with other academic aspects such as formal study groups.

3.3 The courses

Generally, graduate programs have a list of required core courses and also offer optional or elective classes. Reading through these descriptions and academic requirements for degrees is a must.

3.4 The teachers

It is a good idea to find out about which professors do research in your area of interest, also reading any of their publications in academic journals that might catch your attention.

3.5 Extracurricular activities

Student clubs and organizations at the school will offer you the chance to share your skills and interests with colleagues in order to pursue a more integral education. Be sure to research any academic trips or exchange programs if you are interested in internationalizing your education.

3.6 Internship and job options

Search the career services at the school to find out employment by industry for internships and recent graduates, to see if these match your interests. Most schools will list companies attending their job fairs and actively recruiting from their graduates.

3.7 Community impact

Learning about the surrounding community can help you decide whether you want to live there for the next few years while you study. Consider spouse or partner clubs or groups if you are being joined during your program. Also, watch out for student groups with a social scope, since they offer opportunities to develop soft skills enhancing your resume.

3.8 Unique characteristics

Finally, be aware of any unique characteristics of the institution, program or location, including leisure activities and the weather during each of the seasons, as this might be important to you.

Besides visiting the web, you should contact alumni and ask them for more specific information. You could also communicate with administrative staff as well as with teachers or, if you are visiting the campus, it is a good idea to talk to current students from the program. The more thorough the information you obtained is, the better your performance and your questions during the interview.

Activity 3

Individually, answer the following questions by researching the Internet. Take 25 minutes for this portion.

1. Visit the websites of the programs that interest you and note the answers to each point. Try to stay away from “rankings” and really consider what you need to develop academically. What is the school’s mission and vision or values? Which of those do you share personally and have proof for through your achievements? List the relevant accomplishments.
2. What are the relative strengths of the program you are interested in and which academic areas do they comprise? How do these match up to your needs? How can a specialty, major or accentuation in a specific program help you meet your needs?
3. What is the teaching style used by the school? Case method, lecture or mixture? How does this appeal to your own learning style? Do you have any examples, either academic or from work, that can help illustrate if you are more experiential or analytical?
4. What teachers or classes interest you and why? How would these help you acquire knowledge or skills directly applicable for your immediate and long term plans after graduation?

5. Which student groups/ trips/ extracurricular activities would you be interested in joining? How do they line up with your strengths? What would you learn by participating in these activities and how could this help you in your plans after graduation?

6. What internships opportunities are available at the school? With which companies? How would this type of work experience during the summer help you achieve your professional goals?

7. How does the school define its community, taking into account both academic as well as location aspects? How does that fit your personal needs or desires?

8. Is there any unique characteristic about the school that you find particularly appealing? How would that help you face challenges according to your plans?

Making contact with alumni from the programs of your interest is very important. Their perspective will help to clarify your fit with the school. Take the next 10 minutes to cover the two following points.

1. If you have friends or acquaintances who are alumni of the programs, list down their names and important contact information such as their phone number or email. If you do not know any alumni then seek the contact information for the admissions office listed on the website.

2. Write a first draft of an email either requesting an interview or the contact information from one of the alumni in your city, country or region. Include a short introduction stating your interest and plans.

Conclusions:

- To gather information about the school:
- Visit the website and formulate questions.
- Go to fairs and presentations if possible.
- Send emails asking specific doubts.
- Talk to alumni, the more the merrier.
- Make a trip (tour) to visit if you can and make appointments.

Guide

Proactive questions

Unit

4

Unit 4: Proactive questions

4.1 Ask: the interview a two way street

Since the interview is a two sided tool, you should be proactive and ask intelligent questions. Of course, if you researched on the school and program thoroughly, it will be easier for you to ask appropriate and creative questions. Not only does research on the school and program render you valuable information, but also it prevents you from asking questions that are out of scope and will leave a bad image of yourself, because it is intelligent to ask questions to the interviewer, but some questions will make you look very good and some will not help you, and sometimes even harm you. So, don't be caught off-guard; be prepared to answer and question.

4.2 Make intelligent questions

Two very important reasons to ask good questions are that you have to gather all the information needed to choose the right program, and that good questions make a good impression on the admissions committees. Anyway, whatever you personally do, don't be quiet receptors. Many schools interpret a lack of questions as disinterest.

Don't be afraid to ask. Even during the questions you are being asked, if you feel that you need clarification you should ask for it. Sometimes you could even ask questions before you come for your interview; you might ask about parking areas, a proper attire or a campus map. During the interview, your questions are also sending the message that you are a good listener and someone who knows about the subject.

4.3 Avoid questions that you should not ask

Each program is different though, so, you might want to work on formulating your own questions according to your research. A question that is appropriate for a particular program or school might be inappropriate for another. Therefore, please think before you speak. You wouldn't want to ruin the whole opportunity. Remember the old proverb, which states: "It is better to be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."

Activity 4

1. In 10 minutes, create a list of 5 questions you could ask the interviewer of a particular school in order to make a good impression on him. Also, write at least 3 questions that you should not ask during the interview.

- 2.** In a workshop, for 15 minutes, discuss the questions from point 1 with your team and deduce the reasons that these questions could be good or bad. Choose a team captain to share the questions with the group and discuss.

Conclusions:

Specific points to address:

- 1.** Discuss special interests and ask how the school may help you to pursue them. For example, one representative particularly enjoyed talking to a young lady about her interest in fund-raising management.
- 2.** Ask about faculty research and interests, especially in areas that concern you.
- 3.** Review with representatives your work background, highlighting the benefits you received from the experiences.
- 4.** Know something about the MBA degree and what it can do for you. Explore the possibilities of the degree as it relates to what you are seeking.
- 5.** Inquire about the school's philosophy, approach, and direction. Since management education is young, many schools are still defining and redefining themselves in regard to what they do and how they do it.
- 6.** Inquire about facilities (library, computer equipment), housing, and campus life. A recent graduate chose a school based on its tremendous computer laboratory.
- 7.** If financial aid is critical to you, ask about aid sources, its availability, and the name of the person responsible for administering the program.
- 8.** Describe to the representatives who you are: your strengths, assets, traits needing development.
- 9.** Discuss your college work, making special reference to those courses/projects that were valuable, exciting, worthwhile, and important to your future.
- 10.** Be frank about problems — real or perceived — without rationalizing, apologizing, blaming, or excusing. Common problems may include grades, test scores, an inconsistent record, or minimal work experience.

Specific Sample Questions:

- 1.** What do you consider the greatest strength of this program? Of this profession?
- 2.** What makes a student successful in your program?
- 3.** What future changes do you see in this career area?
- 4.** This is what I know about your program....could you tell me more?
- 5.** Where do graduates of your program typically work?
- 6.** How many students will be in my entering class?
- 7.** Who selects the thesis/dissertation committee?
- 8.** Which could be some problems I could face in the campus?

Guide to G

Facing the friendly
interview

Unit

5

Unit 5: Facing the friendly interview

5.1 General information

When schools interview as a standard part of their process, they are giving you a unique chance to present yourself to them. Generally, the questions asked during these interviews are intended to gather as much information about you as possible. The school wants to get to know you; especially what motivates you, why you have decided to pursue a graduate degree and why particularly at that school. Ultimately, the “fit” between you and the school is the goal, both for the interviewer as well as for you. Although the interviewer could either be an admissions officer or an alumnus, if the latter is running the interview, most probably it is of this kind. The questions expected during the session will paraphrase or repeat the concepts asked in the essay questions. Coherence is vital in this respect.

The general scope of the questions is meant both to put you at ease as well as open up a space for you to share in detail who you are and what you have done. In these cases, preparation is vital, as specific instances exemplifying a trait, value or quality could back up your statements. In thinking of past experiences, it is suggested to organize a summary of their accounts by briefly outlining three stages: explaining the situation, stating your actions to address it, and assessing your results. This last point should sometimes underline both the results obtained for a company or organization as well as the personal benefits often acquired through self-assessment.

5.2 Breaking the ice

In order to break the ice, when you start an interview you can:

- Thank the Interviewer for this opportunity.
- Mention your excitement to be applying to the school / program.
- Make a reference to any conversation with alumni or school representative to set a precedent.

Be ready to answer any of the following ice-breaking questions:

1. Have you visited us before?
2. How was your trip over here?
3. Do you like our campus? Have you been around it yet?
4. How did you get to know us?
5. Do you like reading?

- 6.** What is the last book you read? What did you think of it?
- 7.** Do you practice sports or some kind of art?
- 8.** What is your favorite sport? What aspect of it appeals to you'?
- 9.** Describe a typical day for you.
- 10.** What do you do to relieve stress?
- 11.** What do you do during the summer?
- 12.** What are your hobbies?

5.3 Most common questions

The following is a list of common getting-to-know you questions:

- 1.** Why did you choose this major as your area of study?
- 2.** Which courses were you best at? Why?
- 3.** What overall grades did you get? Did you get honors?
- 4.** How do you rank among other students in your major at your school?
- 5.** What did you like most about this part of your education?
- 6.** What did you least like about this part of your education?
- 7.** What extra-curricular activities did you participate in? Why and what was your contribution?
- 8.** How did you pay for your education?
- 9.** How has this education prepared you?
- 10.** Did you participate in any special projects in college?
- 11.** Please describe yourself
- 12.** How would your peers describe you? Would your boss describe you differently? Why?
- 13.** Which are your most characteristic strengths?
- 14.** What are your weaknesses or opportunity areas?
- 15.** Describe your career progress to date.
- 16.** Which are the responsibilities and key challenges in your current job?
- 17.** How has your work experience prepared you for graduate study in our program?
- 18.** Why are you pursuing a Master Degree and why is now the right time for you?

- 19.** What do you know about our school and program?
- 20.** Why did you choose to apply to our program? What opportunities attract you most?
- 21.** Tell me about your experience in this field. What was challenging? What was your contribution?
- 22.** What are your career goals in the short and long term? How will this program help you achieve your goals?
- 23.** Why should you be a good candidate for our program?
- 24.** What makes you believe that you will be successful in the program?
- 25.** What do you believe your greatest challenge will be if you are accepted into this program?
- 26.** If you are accepted to more than one school, how will you decide which to attend?
- 27.** If you're not accepted into graduate school, what are your plans?
- 28.** How do you intend to finance your education?
- 29.** What extracurricular activities might you want to get involved at our institution? Why?
- 30.** Describe any significant experience abroad. What did you learn from this?
- 31.** What is your philosophy regarding this profession?
- 32.** Tell me about yourself outside your professional life – what are you passionate about?

Activity 5 (In a workshop)

- 1.** Working in teams of 3, assign each team member 1 ice-breaker question and 3 questions from the “Getting to know you” list to answer individually. Give yourselves 7 minutes preparation time to organize answers to the questions.
- 2.** The next 20 minutes, taking turns, each member should play interviewer asking each of the other members 2 of the 4 questions selected for him/her. Make sure to include a couple of ice-breakers among the team members too. Take notes on the answers.

3. Take 3 minutes to compare your answers to the information prepared (in points #8 and #9 of Activities 2 and 3 – “Know Yourself”, “Do your Homework”). Share your comments among team members.

Conclusions:

- Always be yourself and keep your cool;
- For job description try to avoid: “My responsibilities include...”
- Be positive; do not complain about your job or undergraduate school.
- Think of accomplishments in terms of: condition, action, results and then learning.
- Have fun, but do not joke.
- Do not try to impress, be fair in describing your achievements and traits.

Guide to Job Interviews

**Facing the
competitive
interview**

Unit

6

Unit 6: Facing the competitive interview

6.1 General information

In the movie, "Adaptation", Susan Orlean (played by Meryl Streep) is interviewed by Donald Kaufman (Nicholas Cage). He asks her, "If you could have dinner with one historical personage, living or dead, who would it be?" She answers kind of startled and annoyed, "I'd have to say... Einstein or Jesus."

In the next scene, in assessing her answer he tells his brother, "She's lying... She said all the right things. Too right... People who answer questions too right are liars. And everybody says Jesus and Einstein. That's a prepackaged answer."

If you have been requested to schedule an interview in an "invitation only" format, then you are one step closer to being accepted into the program. Some might even say that you now have a 50 – 50 chance of getting in. This type of interview is usually the final evaluation stage in the graduate school admissions process. Thus, it can have a mixture of both general questions as well as a set of more challenging ones. By gauging your responses, the interviewer will record and assess your honesty, self-awareness and creativity. This is your chance to distinguish yourself from the other applicants and show the interviewer what makes you a better candidate; why should you be accepted.

Although interviews might start out with a friendly tone, they could include a mixture of competitive questions in them. This is typically what differentiates the two types of interviews. Competitive questions could ask about how you responded to a certain situation, what your self-assessment of your performance has been under certain constraints, or how you would approach a certain problem. The information gathered would define your profile and assess you versus other candidates.

6.2 Competitive type questions

The following is a list of common competitive questions:

- 1.** What can you offer this program that other applicants cannot?
- 2.** How will you be able to make a contribution to this field?
- 3.** What skills do you bring to the program? How will you help your mentor in his or her research?

- 4.** How do you define success?
- 5.** Describe your greatest accomplishments.
- 6.** Which is your greatest disappointment?
- 7.** Have you worked in a team environment? What were your contributions to the effort or your role?
- 8.** Describe a situation in which you have been in the position of leading a group.
- 9.** Tell me about a situation in which you took initiative.
- 10.** Describe a situation where you brought an idea forward, and it failed. What did you learn?
- 11.** Explain a situation in which you had a conflict and how you resolved it. What did you learn? What would you do differently? Why?
- 12.** What could you do to be an even more effective member of your organization?
- 13.** What specifically have you done to help your company change?
- 14.** What have you done to develop those people under your responsibility?
- 15.** How does your performance compare with that of your peers at a similar level?
- 16.** Can you adapt easily to new situations?
- 17.** Do you set priorities and deal with competing academic demands?
- 18.** Are you used to working under pressure? How do you react?
- 19.** How can you define a balanced successful life?
- 20.** Have you ever thought about a change or shift in your career while attending graduate study?

6.3 Hypothetic and creative questions

The following is a list of hypothetic and creative competitive questions:

- 1.** Do you organize your time and use it efficiently?
- 2.** How will you manage your time if you are accepted into the program?
- 3.** Describe an ethical dilemma that you faced. How did you resolve it?
- 4.** How do you cope with frustrating situations?
- 5.** What problems do you expect to face while attending graduate school? How will you handle these?
- 6.** What would you do if a team member wasn't pulling his own weight?
- 7.** Describe your relationship with your boss. What is good and bad about it?
- 8.** Who are your heroes? Why?
- 9.** If you were a tree or an animal, which would you be and why?
- 10.** If you chose be a movie character, which would you choose and why?
- 11.** Would you describe your house and detail what I could find in your refrigerator?
- 12.** How would you explain a database to your 8 year old nephew or son?
- 13.** If you had the opportunity to solve a world problem, which would it be and why?
- 14.** Can you describe yourself in 3 words?
- 15.** What kind of people or behaviors do you dislike?
- 16.** If you won 20 million dollars today, what would you do with the money? Why?
- 17.** How do people react towards you when you enter a party?
- 18.** If you could trade places with any other person for a week, famous or not famous, living or dead, real or fictional. With whom would it be?

19. If you could be a superhero, what would you want your superpowers to be and why?

20. If you had only 6 months left to live, what would you do with the time?

Activity 6 (In a workshop)

1. Working in teams, assign each team member 2 questions from the list of common competitive questions and 2 from the hypothetic and creative list to answer individually. Give yourselves 7 minutes preparation time to organize answers to the questions.

2. The next 20 minutes, taking turns, each member should play interviewer asking each of the other members 2 of the 4 questions selected for him/her. Analyze and take notes on the answers. Try to evaluate how well each of you answered the question completely.

3. Take 3 minutes to compare your answers and impressions on them.

Conclusions:

- If the interview turns competitive and you notice it:
- Still, KEEP YOUR COOL
- Remember: No one is better at being you than YOU.
- Carefully LISTEN to the WHOLE question in order to answer it.
- Be direct and concise, do not ramble.
- Highlight your uniqueness but stay grounded.

Guided G

The interview:
beginning to end

Unit

7

Unit 7: The interview: beginning to end

Activity 7

1. Individually, take 5 minutes to reflect on the different things you believe that you should prepare before you face the graduate school interview. Make a list of these.
2. In a workshop, divide up into teams to discuss these issues during 10 minutes. Share your ideas with the rest of the group and conclude.

7.1 Be ready for your interview

Plan ahead of time, making sure you have reviewed the points covered in Units 2-4: know yourself, do your homework and build your questions. Also, ask someone to help you rehearse an interview. Practice answering and asking questions.

Make sure you know where the interview will be held, how to get there, where to park and the time it will take to travel there. Sleep well and be well rested to be alert and relaxed.

7.2 While in your interview

Graduate school interviews many times take place on a Friday or a Monday. Even though you already submitted your documents, it is wise that you bring extra copies of your test scores, transcripts, and purpose statement and/or essays. Treat everyone with respect (secretaries and assistants too), be thoughtful, and show assuredness and poise. Dress appropriately; select a comfortable outfit (women not very short skirts). Then, be on time; in order to do this, ask for directions in advance and arrange your schedule to handle unexpected possibilities. If, for some reason, you are unable to make the interview don't just not show up. Be courteous; it leaves a lasting impression.

An interview affects each one differently, but commonly people feel nervous. Palms sweat, feet tap, butterflies move in your stomach, etc. There is a simple technique that you can use to help you combat nervousness. It involves controlling your muscles and breathing in a little exercise that will relax you physically and mentally. First, take a slow, deep breath, while in any position (standing, sitting, lying down). Then contract your stomach muscles as though you are doing a sit-up. While keeping your muscles contracted, breathe out slowly. Repeat this process until the nervousness has passed. The muscle contractions will help prevent the introduction of chemical imbalances into your body and the deep slow breathing will help disperse any chemicals that have built up. This technique not only helps your body physically, but also focuses your mind on the task at hand, on the interview, and your ultimate success.

When you are introduced to your interviewer, use a solid handshake; a limp one is a sign of a person who lacks confidence. Maintain good eye contact when speaking to the interviewer and be aware of your body language (much communication comes from non-verbal clues). Your eyes should not wander around the room while you are talking. People could interpret that you are not telling the truth. Don't appear defensive if tough questions are asked, but remain open and friendly. Be aware of your facial expressions. Raised eyebrows, flared nostrils, trembling muscles or an open mouth could cause an interviewer to wonder what is wrong and get distracted. Other distractions might be excessive hand gestures or a bad posture. You do not wish to be perceived aggressive or, if your posture is slouch, lazy or weak. Finally, keep a few feet between yourself and the interviewer. Let them feel enough space to remain comfortable; 3 feet is a minimum distance to stay apart during an interview.

Try not to make excuses or disparaging comments if you are asked about your academic record; you may explain personal or extenuating circumstances. Accept responsibility for your actions and your past, but make sure that negative situations do not remain the focus. Turn negatives into positives. Show how you have learned from those experiences and have moved on, overcoming them. The expression "GIGO – Garbage in, Garbage out", translates into focusing on optimistic thoughts and deleting those that bother you. Each of us becomes what we think about, so focus on thoughts of confidence and you will become confident. Attitude is the most important thing. You want your interviewer to perceive that you have the right attitude for the school. The attitude you display is fundamental to his/her perception of your future success.

People will judge you based upon their own behavior and experience. The more you appear to be like them, the more comfortable they will be around you. Therefore, do everything possible and within reason to look, act, talk, and behave like them. In other words, you should mirror them by interpreting their actions. Be careful though; don't go so far as to be obvious. Also, maintain control over your involuntary nervous habits, such as tapping feet, drumming fingertips, crossing and uncrossing your legs or arms, or fidgeting around your seat. Stay calm and collected: you're a professional!

Interviewers will also judge you by the words that you use and your conversational patterns, so choose your words carefully. It is okay to use intellectual words in your interview, but make sure that you use them properly; just use effectively good English and avoid colloquial terms (gonna, kinda...) or filler words or expressions (ummm, uh huh, okay...). In addition, everyone has certain words that he/she uses that are questionable. You are accustomed to your own speech patterns so you may not be able to identify your own danger words. Have someone else listen to you in order to identify these words or phrases.

Since a good interviewer is looking for depth, do not answer superficially. Be yourself, allowing your personality to shine, selling yourself as an excellent candidate. The interview is an opportunity to show your stuff and convince the admissions committee that you belong in the program at the institution. Find a way to convey some unique quality about yourself; emphasize your passion for your area of study. Give full responses in a straight forward, honest and friendly manner; be spontaneous, avoiding stereotyped or over-prepared answers.

But, don't overdo thorough responses: do not give answers to unasked questions and do not dominate the conversations. Take cues from the interviewer for the mood of the meeting, as well as timing of introductions and conclusions of interviews. Never try to cut off or extend the interview. However, feel free to ask for clarification if you did not fully understand a question. Also, clarification serves a double function. If a question is asked that you do not have an immediate answer for, but you might have a good answer and need a time to think, clarification buys some time. Ask how the question relates to the school or position. Then while clarification is being provided, you will have that needed time to think up your answer. Moreover, asking a clarifying question gives insight into the interviewer's internal biases and thinking processes. Since the interview form doesn't include "clarification", the interviewer will have to make up this information on his own, often revealing subtle clues about what he wants to hear from your answer. Customize your response to show how each of the main points or answers that you were given fits perfectly with your capabilities and experience. Use all the information that the interviewer has provided in order to depict how you are made for this program.

7.3 Closing the interview

When the interview ends, immediately thank the interviewer. You can ask him/her what the next step is and ask him for his contact information. Before you take leave, make your point that you are very interested in the school and or program.

Later, you should follow-up by sending thank-you emails. You could also ask for information to make contact with additional alumni to chat.

Guide

Mock interview and
feedback

Unit

8

Unit 8. Mock interview and feedback

It is time to face the interview. In a workshop, the instructor can guide you through a mock interview. If rehearsing on your own, ask someone to help you out. The intention of this exercise is to gain awareness of the process through complete disclosure in feedback.

Activity 8

You will be given 5 minutes to mentally prepare for this task by reviewing the exercises done throughout this workshop. Make sure you cover the basics:

- 1.** Your interest and motivations in the school and program.
- 2.** Your short and long term plans after graduation.
- 3.** A brief summary of your accomplishments with an assessment of your current preparation needs.
- 4.** A list of your strengths with examples to backup each of them in the format: situation, action, results
- 5.** A list of your areas of opportunity with examples to support your self-assessment.
- 6.** How your academic background has contributed to your status and how it can support your plans.
- 7.** What you have learned about particular programs.
- 8.** Prepare some questions to ask the interviewer.

The instructor will now select one of you to volunteer for the exercise. The rest of you need to do the following:

- 1.** Keep track of the questions and catalogue them as friendly or competitive. Rate the student's response on the basis of how thoroughly the student answered the question: 5 – Completely / 4 – Mostly / 3 – Fairly / 2 – Partially / 1 – Barely / 0 – Poorly
- 2.** Take notes if necessary to refer back to them.
- 3.** At the end of the interview answer the following questions based on your perception, as if you were an admissions interviewer:

Yes / No / Unsure:

- Do you think the candidate has well-developed reasons for pursuing a graduate degree?
- Do you think the candidate is a good match with The School?
- Do you think the candidate demonstrated a strong interest in The School?
- Does the candidate have a good understanding of The School's Graduate Program?
- Does this candidate have strong communication and presentation skills?

4. Rate the interviewee according to the following scale:

Overall Impression:

Superstar / Solid / Neutral / Generally Negative / Extremely Negative (all with ± if needed)

5. Answer the following:

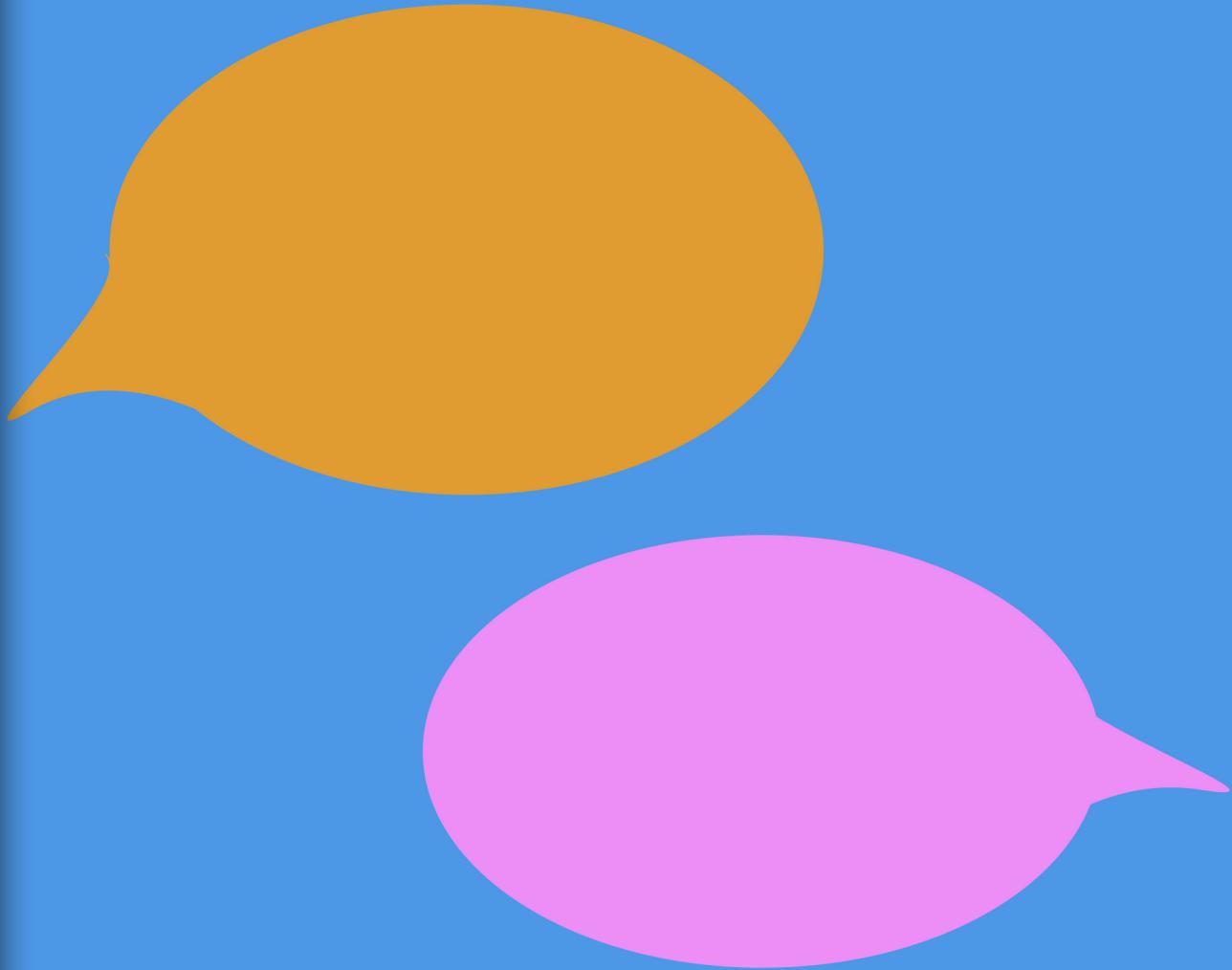
What do you consider the candidate's greatest strengths during the interview?

What do you consider the candidate's main area of opportunity?

How do you suggest the candidate address this issue to improve on it?

Guide

Final Evaluation



Final Evaluation

Use the following checklist to make sure you have completed all of the elements in order to be ready to face an interview.

Item	Check	Feedback
1. I can state the purposes of an admissions interview		Excellent! Make sure you include it being a conversation with two directions.
2. I have reflected on my own strengths, weaknesses and experiences in order to highlight the best of me during the interview.		Good. This means that you will focus on mentioning the most possible positive points about yourself.
3. I have thoroughly researched the institution and program involved.		Excellent job. Make sure you note down specific aspects that interest you about the program
4. I have written at least three questions to ask during the interview.		Now you are prepared to interact with your interviewer.
5. I have thoroughly gone through a check list of elements that I have to know, revise and do before, during and after the interview takes place.		Having covered all the important aspects about yourself, the school and the situation of the interview itself, will render you success in giving a good picture of yourself to the admissions committee.
6. I revised both friendly and competitive questions to approach each accordingly.		The questions included in each type of essay establish the guidelines to first build your possible answers and later examine them to edit them in a decisive way.
7. I did research on the questions that I am not supposed to make during the interview.		Excellent! You can now be sure that you will not commit errors that you could have avoided.
8. I have practiced and received feedback on mock interviews.		So, you will be ready to do your best and reduce the possibility of errors.

Final Words and Follow Up

Right when you finish your interview, it is important to write down your initial perceptions of the school. This will help you to compare fairly all of the schools that have interviewed you. If you do not receive an offer at the end of your interview or visit, do follow-up. Send e-mail messages to the contacts with which you have networked thanking them. You should be patient to wait for an answer. Nevertheless, call the admissions office if you do not hear from the school by the date originally given to you, in order to ask about the status of your application. Keep your relationships cordial and open at all times. The following is a list of dos and don'ts.

DO:

- Stay optimistic and calm
- Remember to send a thank-you note/letter or email after the interview.
- Use each interview experience to prepare for future interviews.
- Prepare yourself
- Rehearse and get someone to listen to you.
- Be honest and friendly.
- Make intelligent questions
- Dress and act accordingly
- Bring up your experience, skills and strengths
- Show confidence and assuredness

DO NOT:

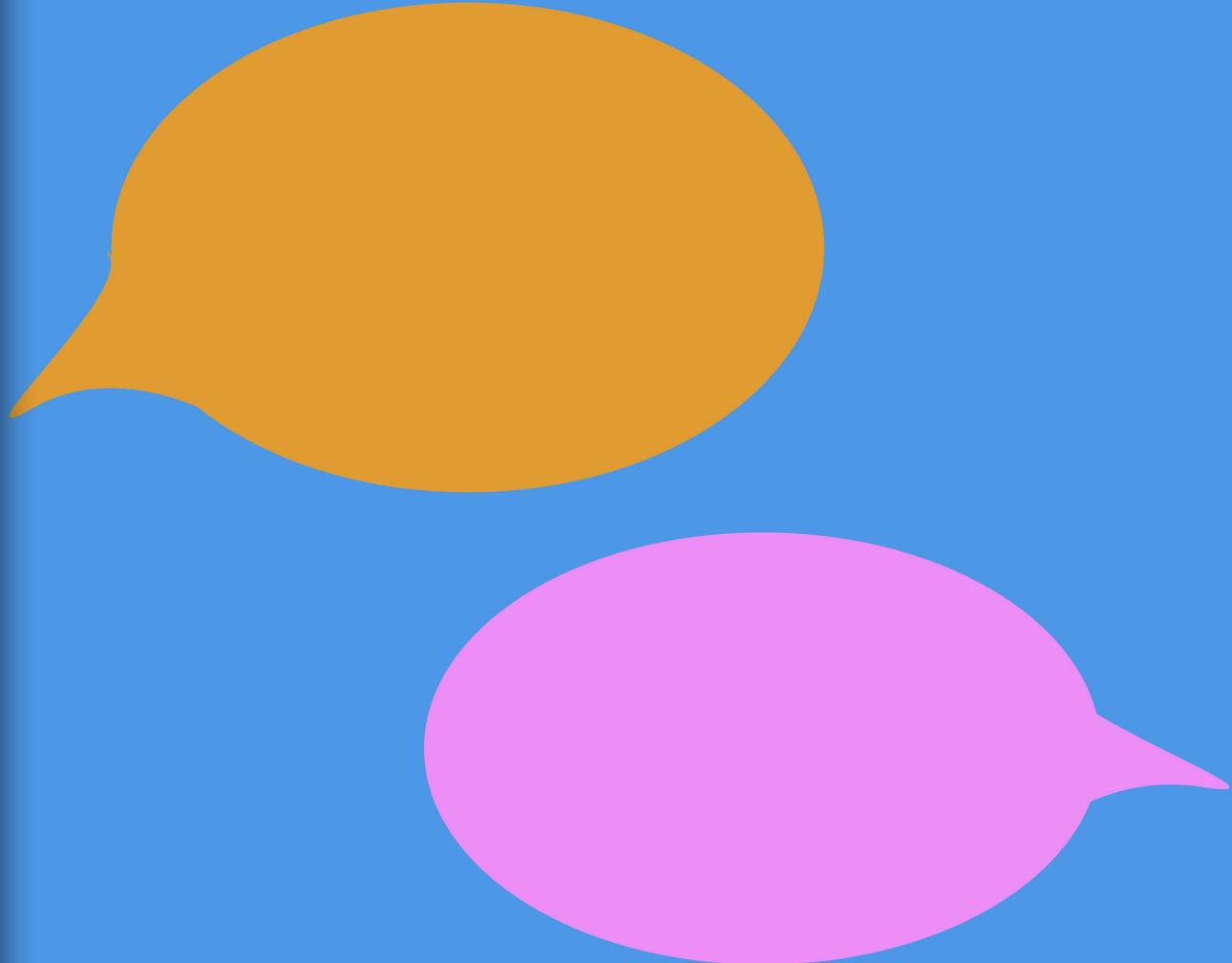
- Forget to do your research on the school, program and faculty.
- Forget to prepare and rehearse answers.
- Reschedule the interview unless if it is extremely necessary.

- Be late.
- Come unprepared.
- Be nervous or worry. Remember to relax.
- Talk too much or too little.
- Interrupt the interviewer.
- Ever argue with the interviewer.
- Lie or exaggerate about your accomplishments.
- Discuss negative information.
- Make excuses for weaknesses.
- Criticize yourself or other individuals.
- Try to be funny.
- Speak in slang or curse.
- Take things personally.
- Become emotional.
- Act immature.
- Talk about controversial or ethical issues (unless asked to).
- Take your cell phone to the interview (or make sure it's turned off)
- Use "smart-aleck" replies or clever-flip demeanor (effort to be cute, snappy alert or falsely witty).
- Ask about your standing or your performance during the interview.
- Make phone calls to your interviewer.
- Forget to send a thank you note or letter to everyone you met.
- Forget to gather information from contacts

- Forget the interviewer's name.
- Forget to smile.

Guide

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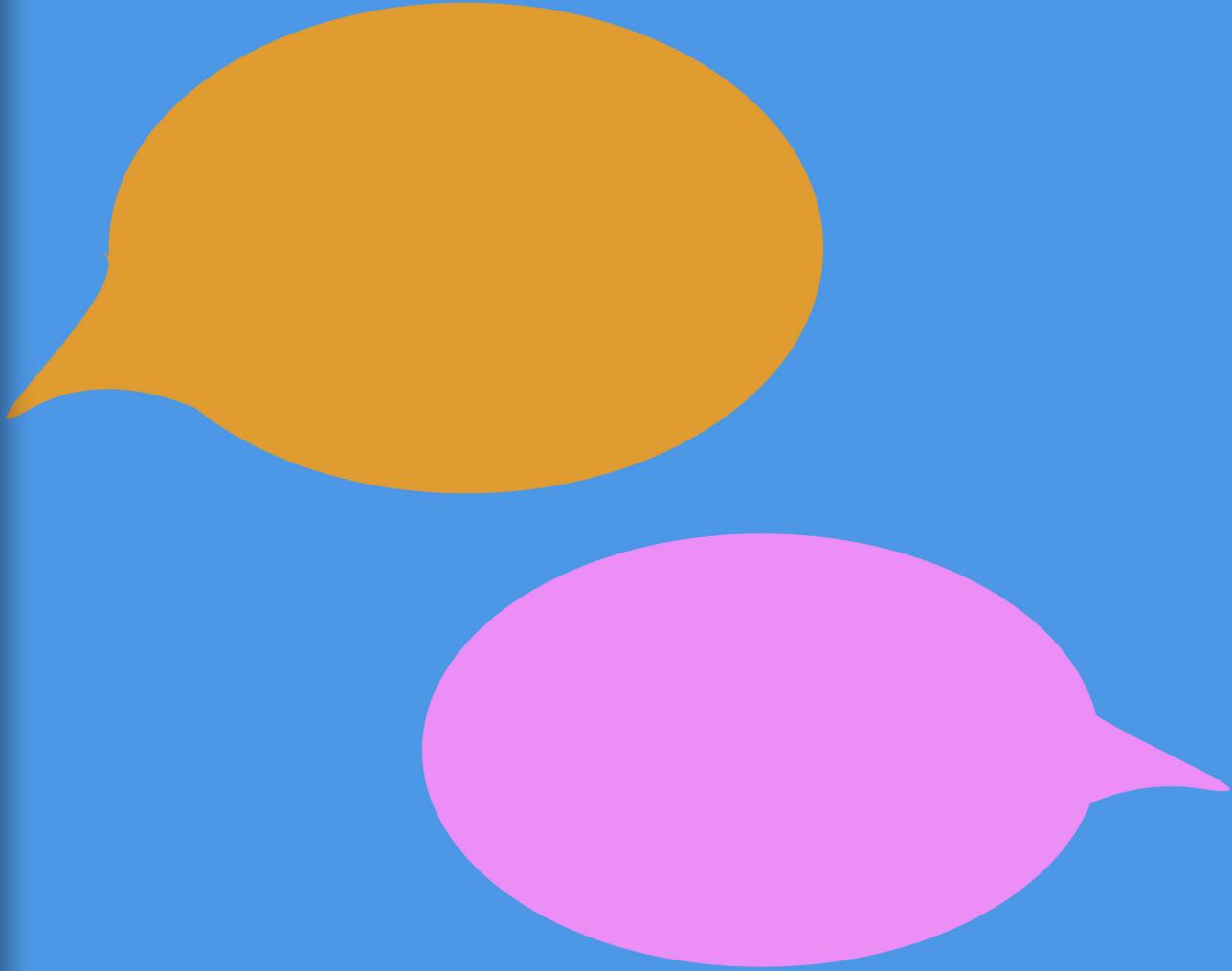
Interview Essays

Interview Questions. http://www.gradschooltips.com/interview_questions.htm

Mind and body control. http://www.gradschooltips.com/body_control.htm

Guide

Notes for the
instructor



Notes for the Instructor

As explained in point 2. How to Use this Manual, the material presented in the manual can be used as an aid in an interactive workshop. The following teacher notes provide some suggestions for the instructor in his/her implementation of the workshop.

It is recommended that the instructor hold credentials either as an HR manager, headhunter, admissions advisor, career counselor, MBA or admissions coach, or at least as a lecturer or faculty member of a related field to that of corporate training or career development.

The workshop can be implemented in ten 50-minute sessions. It is recommended that the instructor prepare electronic presentations (which could be generated on PowerPoint) with slides including graphics, text animations, outlines and other visual aids. The lecture should be kept light in tone, brisk in rhythm and very conversational in approach. Student participation is not only to be expected, but should be actively encouraged through different questioning techniques, in particular using funnel or leading questions to narrow down responses and inquire about previous knowledge of each topic (Mindtools.com, 2011).

Students should be advised to bring an electronic Internet-enabled device (laptop, iPad or iPhone) and the location should provide them access to a Wi-Fi connection in order to carry out the activities.

If the students have access to materials previous to the first session, then it is recommended that sections 1-7 in the manual be assigned as homework before the first meeting. However, if the students are provided the manual at the start of the first session, then the initial electronic presentation should include a summary of important points in these sections, clearly explaining the objectives, format and organization of the workshop they are about to begin.

The following outline contains the suggested activities to be carried out along with their timing.

Session 1:

Introductory presentation (25 minutes): Begin with a formal presentation of yourself as the lecturer along with your credentials. Transition into the important points covered in point 1, "Introduction". Mention that the manual is a workbook to be written in with notes and encourage students to use it as such. Also mention that their questions and comments should be expressed and that the lecture will be held with a conversational approach. Move on to points 3 through 5, covering all of the objectives, especially the specific learning objectives in point 5. Explain the format of the Workshop by providing an overview of each session. Each of the units in 6, "General Information and Topics" will be for a separate 50-minute session, leaving session 10 to close with a presentation including tips and your final recommendations.

II

Interview Essays

Ask students to answer the questions in point 7, "Diagnostic Evaluation", and self-assess their answers with the provided answer key (25 minutes).

Session 2:

Electronic presentation (10 minutes): Include main points in 1.1, "Interview purposes", and 1.2, "Types of interview" in a 3-slide presentation.

Ask students to work on Activity 1 (35 minutes): Refer to the activity for suggested times. Keep yourself available to answer individual or team questions as students break up into groups. Monitor the time for the first and second stages of the activity.

Close the activity by asking two to three group representatives to share their results with the rest of the class. (3 minutes)

Electronic presentation (2 minutes): One final slide summarizing important points answering questions from the second part of the activity (look at Conclusions section in Unit 1)

Session 3:

Electronic presentation (10 minutes): Summarize main points from manual sections 2.1 to 2.8 in the manual in a 4-5 slide presentation.

Ask students to work on Activity 2 (35 minutes): Once more, refer to the manual, walk around and make yourself available to answer questions individually.

Close the activity with individual participation from a couple of students asking for their answers to the two final questions. (3 minutes)

Electronic presentation (2 minutes): One slide summarizing important points from this unit included in its conclusions section.

Session 4:

Electronic presentation (10 minutes): Summarize main points from manual sections 3.1 to 3.8 in 4 slides.

Ask students to work on Activity 3 (35 minutes): Monitor time and address individual doubts.

Close the activity with participation from 1-2 students detailing the specific information they found about their programs of interest. (3 minutes)

Electronic presentation (2 minutes): One slide summarizing important additional sources of information included in its conclusions section.

Session 5:

Electronic presentation (2 minutes): One slide presenting important points to remember before generating questions (manual section 4.1)

Ask students to work on Activity 4 (30 minutes): Monitor time and address doubts.

Electronic presentation (15 minutes): Summarize main points covered in sections 4.2 and 4.3 and give examples of good and bad questions. 4-5 slides

To close the session, ask three students to share the questions they generated with the rest of the class and help them assess if they are intelligent proactive questions.

Session 6:

Electronic presentation (10 minutes): 2-3 slides presenting important points from manual section 5.1 and a selection of questions from sections 5.2 and 5.3.

Ask students to work on Activity 5 (30 minutes): Monitor time and address doubts.

To close the activity, ask three students to share their findings with the rest of the class in terms of why someone in their team answered completely or incompletely. (8 minutes)

Electronic presentation (2 minutes): Summarize main points covered in the conclusions section of Unit 5 in one slide.

Session 7:

Electronic presentation (10 minutes): 2-slides to present important points introducing the example from the manual and the important points to identify a competitive question.

Ask students to work on Activity 6 (30 minutes): Monitor time and address doubts.

Close the activity by asking three students to share their findings and note the difference in their performance when answering these questions versus the friendly questions of Activity 5. (8 minutes)

Electronic presentation (2 minutes): One slide to summarize conclusions for Unit 6.

Session 8:

Ask students to work on Activity 7 (15 minutes): Monitor time and address doubts.

Electronic presentation (35 minutes): 5-6 slide presentation to present important points covered in sections 7.1 to 7.3 in the manual (before, during and when closing the interview). Please keep the tone conversational and interactive. Try to also advance at the right pace, since this is a long presentation.

Session 9:

Ask students to work on Activity 8 (5-10 minutes): Monitor time and address doubts.

Mock interview (30 minutes): Select a volunteer to hold a mock interview in front of the class. As the instructor, you must prepare and structure an interview with questions that first break the ice, then are friendly in tone and then turn competitive. Make sure to select at least 2 in each type and give the student enough time to thoroughly answer and explain each question. Ask if the student has questions to give him/her a chance to ask the proactive questions he/she generated at the end.

Close the activity by asking two students to evaluate the interviewee by answering questions 3-5 in the activity evaluation form. (10 minutes)

Session 10:

Ask students to answer the checklist in the Final Evaluation and fairly assess themselves. (5- 10 minutes)

Electronic presentation (25 minutes): 5-6 slides covering important tips, final words, DOs and DON'Ts from the list given in the manual.

Close the workshop with a Question and Answer session (10-15 minutes) to address all remaining doubts.

References

Mindtools.com (2011). Questioning Techniques: Asking questions effectively, Retrieved on April 25, 2011 from: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_88.htm.

