

A QUICK GUIDE TO WAT AND PI





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INTRODUCTION

With the announcement of CAT result, IIMs and other top B-schools have started releasing shortlist of candidates for next round of selection procedure. To ensure that you bag a seat at one of the coveted B-School, cracking CAT or other MBA entrance tests is not enough. You have to show your mettle in terms of your soft skills, personality, communication ability and knowledge on current affairs in the Writing Ability Test and Personal Interview rounds. Group Discussion (GD), which used to be an integral part of the selection process is getting replaced by WAT in the majority of the B-schools.

B-schools conduct PI-WAT process, to test the communication, writing and personal skills of the shortlisted candidates. Hence, you need to prepare for all the sections separately and soon after the results as the selection process will start from the month of February.

This E-book by Careers360 provides complete guidance on how to crack the PI-WAT stage of the admission process, topics for WAT, and tips from experts and toppers to let you prepare in a way to take you closer towards success.



WRITING ABILITY TEST (WAT)

The Writing Ability Test or WAT is not just a 100-150 words write up, rather it is a test that measures your critical thinking ability and how well you can communicate your ideas on paper. No need to panic if you are appearing for WAT soon, here are tips from toppers on How they cracked WAT at IIMs or Top B-schools.

WAT or Essay Writing is a comparatively new phenomenon for the MBA admission process. Over a past couple of years, it has been observed that most of the B-schools have scrapped group discussion (GD) from their admissions process and emphasized on WAT. The six new IIMs namely IIM Rohtak, Raipur, Ranchi, Trichy, Udaipur and Kashipur introduced WAT in the Common Admission Process introduced in 2011.

Mr. Ramnath Kanakadandi, CAT course Director for T.I.M.E. explains a few possible reasons why WAT is being preferred over GD, he says, “First may be to give every participant a fair chance to voice out their opinions, which is not always possible in GDs with participants cutting out/ interrupting others, and second, to see how one builds up an argument”.

As WAT measures your analytical and structural skills it also evaluates your thought process introspecting the reasons behind the given critique and argument in a write-up. It is a must that before writing, you first understand the topic, collect information, analyse the issue and communicate the same in the best possible structured way.

Detailing the role of WAT in the admission process at various B-schools, Mr. Ravi Shankar, Programs Officer, IFMR Chennai says, “Writing Ability Test (WAT) helps us check the ability of the applicant to articulate basic ideas in writing. If a candidate does not have the required level of this ability, he/she will find it very difficult participate in case presentations, quizzes and exams. That is why we have been using WAT for the last three years”.

What to focus on

Arks Srinivas, an MBA expert from Career Launcher, explains the Evaluation parameters on which WAT is analysed. He points out the following parameters that WAT is evaluated on:

- Quality of content Facts
- Interpretation or Analysis
- Conclusion/Opinion/Solution
- Quality of Logical arguments
- Support your Conclusion
- Coherence
- Clarity of Language
- Basic Spelling and Grammar

While the mentioned parameters are exhaustive, each B-School decides which of these parameters they should give more weightage to. Careers360 here brings you Tips and Guidance from the toppers from IIM and B-Schools; and experts of various coaching institutes.

Explaining why you need to prepare specifically for WAT, Ashish Shrivastava, an IIM Lucknow 2017–19 batch student says, “Most candidates are not in touch with ‘writing’, so some guidance and



practise is needed to become fluent. Not much strategy is needed, only a few frameworks on how to approach various topics have to be studied and rest all is practice. The newspaper reading for WAT helps in preparation for PI as well.”

Three-step approach to writing the essay

Arks Srinivas suggests three-step approach:

Step 1: For the first five minutes, gather all the thoughts on the topic at hand. Look at the pros and cons and examples that you could think of to support or contradict a position. Decide what stand/position vis a vis the topic that you would take.

Step 2: Plan to write at least three paragraphs. The first one for introducing the topic with a clear stand as to what your position would be when you eventually conclude.

The second para would be to give reasons and add more perspectives on the topic with examples. The third para basically would be a conclusion with final arguments and examples for the topic/issue at hand.

Step 3: Don't use flowery language. It is better to stick to simple words and language so that the entire paragraph is coherent and easy to understand.

Balancing content with limited time frame

Generally, the duration of WAT ranges from 20 to 30 minutes. Within the limited span, candidates have to face the challenge of analysing the topic, think about the basic content points and structure it accordingly. No matter how tough it may seem

initially, regular practice will help you sail through on the day of your interview.

Guiding on steps to manage time, it is best to divide the total duration into four parts. Jot down thoughts in the first part followed by writing the introduction. In the third stage, give shape to paragraphs and draw the conclusion in the last part.

How is it linked to the PI round?

Along with your CV, your WAT copy also forms an integral part of the PI or Personal Interview round. The panellists are most likely to ask questions about your opinion and the facts and information you have presented to substantiate it. Hence, it is of utmost importance that you form an opinion and stick to your grounds even if they try to confuse you.

While the WAT helps admission panel to judge the candidates for their thinking and writing ability, it also helps interviewers at PI stage to make the final decision about converting the interview call to admission offer. “WAT helps us to see abilities for quick and logical thinking, and for clear and correct articulation. Also, since WAT is conducted and evaluated before the PI, it becomes good input for Personal Interview also,” says Prof Arun Kumar Paul, Associate Professor, XIMB.

Topics to Expect

Some of the WAT topics asked in the top B-schools last year are as follows:

- All decisions in a democracy should be taken through referendums – IIM Lucknow
- Suggest ways to reduce the problem of teacher absenteeism in primary and middle schools – IIM Bangalore



- Is Immigration a boon or a bane – IIT Bombay
- It takes less time to do something right than that to explain why it went wrong – IIM Kozikhode
- Cultural diversity impedes democratic governance – IIM Lucknow
- Demonetisation – IIM Bangalore
- Name should be more important than money – IIM Kozhikode
- Farmer suicides are on a rise. What measures do you suggest to improve this situation? – IIM Calcutta
- Ads don't just sell products but also notions of success. To what extent do you agree? Give Reasons – IIM Indore
- Is it right to allot investor money and profits to CSR activities? – IIM Kozhikode
- The Government of India has announced monetary benefits for improving sanitation in rural areas. Will this be useful and what other measures do you suggest for the same. – IIM Bangalore
- Centralization of Indian Public Sector Oil companies will be a boon – IIM Lucknow
- Net Neutrality – IIM Lucknow

Abstract Topics

- Loose lips sink ships
- Elephant is the best animal
- Honesty is the best policy
- Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn



PERSONAL INTERVIEW

The IIMs and B-schools admit not only students with a high CAT percentile, but students who are a great presenter, have sharp communication techniques, who are the smartest of all. Personal Interview is a crucial stage in the admission process at every top B-School as this stage makes or breaks your chances of admissions. During the personal interview with a candidate, the interview panel evaluates spontaneity in the character; confidence level of a candidate and also his stress management capabilities.

Personal Interview (PI) generally is the last among key components of the selection process at B-schools. While many B-schools have either replaced Group Discussion (GD) with Writing Ability Test (WAT) or added another component like Group Exercise or Case Discussion in the final stages of their selection PERSONAL INTERVIEW (PI) process, Personal Interview has remained intact as the key component of the selection process during MBA admissions. Experts suggest that before appearing for a PI, candidates must know how to tackle witty and twisted questions of the interview panel; and impress them with his answers.

So, what do interviewers look into while interviewing a candidate? Vinayak Kudva, Head – PG India & Mumbai Region, IMS, says, “A personal interview is the last step to get to know the candidate well. Personality traits that cannot be uncovered through Entrance tests, GD or WAT are evaluated here. The selectors try to understand the candidates’ personality, his/her interests, motivation, aspirations etc.

How to get started with PI prep?

There is no particular methodology to prepare for PI as the more spontaneous and clear you are, the better would be your performance. Since PI rounds will also include questions on your graduation subjects, work experience, current affairs etc., an overall preparation would be necessary. Kudva mentions, “The selectors try to understand the kind of person the candidate is, what all are his/her interests, motivation, aspirations etc.”

Approach for PI

Get answers to the common questions - To start with, list down the most common questions which are asked in the PI rounds. Introspection is very important for the PI preparation. As Himaghna Banerjee from SP Jain says, “The important part of the preparation for PI involves structuring the answers to the common personality related questions”.

Ask the following questions to yourself as part of the introspection exercise.

- Who are you?
- What do you want from life?
- How far have you come so far?
- What excites you really?
- What depresses you to death?
- What do you like about your country?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What would you really like to become one day?
- How much money do you want to make?
- Did you really study? Prove it.
- Which movies do you like? Why?
- Can you sing/dance? Do it.



“The PI section of any IIM or B-school is structured in a way which can test the candidates on different parameters like, Current affairs, Educational background and Personal Interests, or maybe a general discussion on the GD experience and your goals”, shares Jyotsna Chadha of IIM Rohtak.

Have clarity on your MBA aspirations – The inevitable question in the PI round would be ‘Why MBA’. Prepare the answer carefully so that it does not sound like a mugged up answer. It must be an honest answer to be given with conviction. As Gautam Puri, Career Launcher Expert, mentions, “One needs to be honest with oneself and one needs to think objectively about the basic questions. There is no right or wrong answer in an interview; it depends on how the candidate offers his responses. The interviewers expect honest answers without any bluffing.”

Apart from the ‘Why MBA’ question, also prepare for other pertinent aspects like ‘Where do you want to see yourself 5 or 10 years down the line?’, ‘Why do you want to take admission in this B-School?’ etc. “Also know a bit about what to expect in the B-school and the different specializations offered by the B-school. B-schools desire mature students who are able to think independently and are tolerant of differing views on an issue. You should be able to recognize the pros and cons of any issue,” says Kudva.

What does the PI test?

In the PI rounds, the interviewers get up close and personal with you. You can be asked anything under the sun, but to streamline, you can refer to your CV which includes your education, work

experience (if any) followed by your hobbies, likes, dislikes, opinion on current affairs and last but not the least, your performance in the GD and WAT rounds. The interviewers can very well ask you to justify your views or actions displayed in those rounds. Strategies to crack PI Based on Experts analysis and toppers insights, below are a few strategies to crack the PI rounds of a B-school management admissions.

A. Reflect confidence: During Personal Interview, you should reflect confidence while answering different questions. Interviewers often tend to cross-question you even on your right answers just to check your confidence on your own answers. Amir Khan from IIM Rohtak shares a question being asked in the interview which was to check his positive approach and confidence. “There was a question on estimating the number of 100 rupee notes in all the ATMs of the country. I found this question a bit tough since I was not aware of the method of answering such guesstimate questions at that time but it was fun analysing the same. In the end, I understood that it was not the answer that mattered but the approach I took to arrive to an answer”, he said.

B. Be honest with yourself and interviewers: During PI, you are also tested for integrity of your basic characteristics like honesty. Your honest approach during your interview also makes your responses natural. Experts suggest that you should be fully prepared with arguments to justify whatever you think is right. Toppers also suggest that it is better to skip the question which you are not sure about. An answer which you are not convinced about may invite unnecessary counter



questions which may embarrass you further and hamper your chance in Personal Interview. Jay Mehta of JBIMS says, “A candidate’s honest nature and confidence is the key. There were some ‘I don’t knows’ during the interview, which the panel appreciated as I was honest towards their questions”.

C. Be Polite: Your politeness during the interview also brings positive impression on your interviewers. In some cases, while you might be correct with your answers, you must not outrightly reject interviewers’ views to your response. Instead, you should listen to them carefully and put forward your response with better argument. Experts suggest that sometimes, interviewers may also be wrong with some information, but you should not directly point it out. Instead, you should try to convince them politely about the correct information.

D. Drive the interview towards your strength: While the questions asked in the interview may vary with each candidate, it is important for you to gradually invite the questions from your areas of strength as the interview progresses. “For PI it is very important to try and guide the personal interview towards your strength. So, it is important to identify your strengths i.e., topics which you are comfortable with and try and guide the discussion towards those topics,” Soham Barman, a B-school student, shares.

E. Be thorough with what you write in your CV: During the interview, interviewers also tend to pick questions based on the information that your CV carries. Interviewers expect you to be fully prepared with minute details on any information that you provide in your CV. Prakriti says, “I think it is extremely important to be thorough with everything that is written on CV. It is alright to not be able to answer some questions with regard to current affairs and academics but the inability to answer questions about oneself is unpardonable. “I believe the most important thing is to be confident when you answer questions during your PI. Prepare well for current affairs. Even if the first few PIs you appear for do not go as well as planned, do not get disheartened, and do not let that affect your performance anywhere else”, suggests Nitish Bagai of MDI Gurgaon about how to tackle and crack the PI rounds of B-school admissions. It is important to be thorough, confident and honest for a positive selection.



IIM PERSONAL INTERVIEW- THE INTERESTING EXPERIENCES

Aspiring management students, who wish to make their way to the coveted Indian Institute of Management (IIM) have to undergo thorough personal interviews after they overcome the herculean task of clearing the Common Admission Test (CAT). Those who are able to get admission to the IIMs, recall their interview as a memorable one, while those who are grilled and fail to make it to an IIM prefer to forget it. IIM Personal Interview Experiences by Careers360 showcase the forgettable and unforgettable experience of the students.

The personal interview round is the key stage of an IIM admission process. It is during this final round that the interview panel, at times, grills the candidate about his academic background, professional qualifications, and his general knowledge. Vinayak Kudva, on why PI is important says, “A personal interview is the last step to get to know the candidate well. Personality traits that cannot be uncovered through Entrance tests, GD or WAT are evaluated here. The selectors try to understand the candidate’s personality, his/her interests, motivation, aspirations etc. If you are starting your preparation with the personal interview (PI) the experiences shared by the successful students of the IIMs will prove to be a boon.

The interesting PI rounds Describing each IIM interview unique, Raghav Sehgal, on Quora, says that the interview process of each IIM varies. He opines, “Each one of my interviews was unique and different. I was asked stuff ranging from railway engines, cold war, and geopolitical issues

resulting in WW3, cricket, cooking, my academics, entrepreneurship, ethics and what not. They want to know how genuine you are and whether you will be a better person with the education you get.”

Sharing an interesting experience of impressing the interviewer by unexpectedly responding to one of his questions, Anirban Mukherjee, IIM Calcutta says that at times what matters is just answering one of the random questions posed by the panel. Recalling the question, which proved to be a turning point and got him an admission in the IIM, Mukherjee says,

“Panel: Name the other Republican candidates.

Me: Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush.

Panel: (delivers a killer burn) Well, you could have supported Bush because sometimes you beat around the bush. Interview over, and IIM Calcutta seat booked.”

Another Quora user, Parth Shah, presently studying at IIM Ahmedabad, talks about the response which turned the table in his favour. He shares,

“Interviewer: So you play chess. Answer these questions as fast as possible. He had a tablet in front of him. He asked me 15 questions on chess from it which included some like, what is FIDE rating, how is it defined, against whom Anand lost recently, Anand’s rating, Carlsen’s rating, my chosen first move, E4-C6 is called what, Fool’s mate, Queen’s gambit... I answered all questions correctly.”



FORGETTABLE PIs AT IIMs

Sometimes the interviews to IIMs are a cake walk, while on other occasions, it proves to be a nightmarish experience. Sanath Sunny, who despite being selected in IIM Indore, was on tenterhooks till the final result was out as the interview panel grilled him.

“Me: Opened the door to enter.

Interviewer: Just looked at me saying to come inside in angry faces. Don’t you have any manners to close the door?

Me: Sorry sir. (went and closed the door)

Me: Good evening all, (Time: 4:05pm)

Interviewer: What are you talking? (Shouted again)
Don’t you know even difference b/w afternoon and evening?

Converted the call after an hour-long grilling!”

Syed Naser, 98 percentiler in CAT, states that interviews are at times a roller coaster ride. But one must always stay confident before the interview panel. In one of his interviews, he was asked a number of questions, to which he did not know the answers. He shares, “One of the interviews went off the course at the very beginning and that roller coaster was my worst experience. I was asked how is the President of India elected? What is the difference between a republic, democratic and sovereign country? Discussion revolved around Telangana. I was asked about similarities between Chattisgarh and Telangana. One of the questions, which came out of the blue was the National Anthem of Bangladesh (I was asked this question

as I had said that I love poetry)...I was completely taken aback as I had no clue about the answer to these questions.

Another candidate who shared his ordeal on Quora was Ankur Garg, who during an interview for IIM, Lucknow was asked if he was from an “Upadravi gotr”(‘Upadravi’ means an anarchist). The term was used by Kiran Bedi, when she was competing against Arvind Kejriwal during the 2015 Delhi assembly elections.

P1 (in Hindi): Upadravi gotr ke ho kya? (Translation: Are you from ‘Upadravi gotr’?)

Me: Sorry sir, I didn’t get that.

P2 (while going through my marksheets): Rehne do, isko samajh nahi aayega, 10th mein Hindi mein kam marks hain. (Translation: He won’t understand as he anyways has less marks in Hindi in Class 10th)

Me: Facepalm.

Amit Singh expresses his anguish on Quora on how the interview panel at IIM Lucknow gave him a tough time about his hobby ‘Ophiology.’ Despite answering the questions to his satisfaction level and getting positive acknowledgement from the panellists, Singh was rejected. Though it is a dream for every candidate to make it to the prestigious institute, however, a rejection should not affect his or her confidence. With the passage of time, it is the experience that you acquire while working.



HOW TO TACKLE BASIC QUESTIONS AT B-SCHOOL INTERVIEW

While B-School admission boards often grill candidates during interviews with followup questions on candidate's interest areas and academic background, their focus remains on assessing them on the basis of their personality, attitude, passion and approach towards tackling challenges.

Thus, your approach to deal with basic questions in interviews is the final impression you leave on your interviewers. The basic objective is to assess whether the candidates possess the ability to logically answer basic questions.

So, what could be some of the basic questions that you need to be ready with before your admission interview; and experiences of selected MBA students on how they answered such questions, after being shortlisted on the basis of CAT scores.

Basic questions asked by interview panel

- Q. Tell us something about yourself?
- Q. What do you do in your free time?
- Q. What are your hobbies?
- Q. What is the reason for choosing a particular institute to pursue your MBA?
- Q. Why did you choose a particular course for specialisation?
- Q. Tell us something about your city?
- Q. Which is the most famous cuisine of your city?
- Q. Which is your biggest weakness? Substantiate it with examples?

Experience of candidates who made it to IIM

Key tips while answering personal interview questions for IIMs.

1. On why you want to do MBA?

All of us possess certain inherent managerial skills. In our day to day life, knowingly or unknowingly we are managing our life, from getting up in the morning to going to our workplace. However, in this era of cut-throat competition, we provide you certain tips, which will help you to crack the personal interview for IIMs.

With candidates from diverse backgrounds, such as engineering, humanities and commerce stream and those with a certain degree of work experience also applying for the MBA course, one of the common questions that is asked as to why do you want to pursue an MBA. Candidates must answer the question in a manner that the panel is led to ask him questions from the information that he had given.

Why MBA? How can MBA help you?

To be able to know how the MBA helps me, I would first have to know what I'll be learning in case I join. That's available in public sources.

Agreed, but I would like to get a more personal opinion, preferably yours, since you teach there.



Well, you'll learn X, Y and Z. Thank you.
From what you've told me, I feel that X will help me achieve A, Y will give me a better understanding of B and Z will be a good foundation for C. Together, they could very well comprise the skill set I consider necessary to achieve my goals. And hence, MBA.

Fair enough. So do you have any questions for us?
Well, how has your day been so far?

If we look at the above answer, we see that the candidate was able to convince the panel with his answer as he clearly cited his objective for pursuing an MBA. Thus, we can say that the panel is looking at clarity of thought and purpose. Candidates must not try to impress the panel by giving an 'out of the blue' kind of answer as it would only go against him or her, if he or she is not able to back it up with a concrete example in case of a follow-up question.

Another candidate, Sharad Singh, who made his way to Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad shared his personal interview experience on Quora. "More often than not the answer would be generic. One doesn't need innovation everywhere. However, I think it's more about wrapping up your answer with credible/witty/honest conversation post the main answer. In my IIM Calcutta interview on why MBA, I said: I want to know what it takes to create and run a company so that I can start-up later.

Interviewer: Oh come on, you will forget everything of start-up once you get the fat salary offer.

I smiled and said: What I said is my truth. Let's

see how IIM moulds me! Interviewers smiled and moved to the next question.

Normally, personal interviews are supposed to be a serious affair and one cannot afford to trivialise it. Normally, the environment is tense and all said and done the candidate is nervous. However, from the above answer given by the candidate, we see that the candidate was able to maintain seriousness of the interview and at the same time maintained his wittiness.

2. How to tackle a question like tell me about yourself?

Though the question looks simple to answer, however, you must remember that you cannot make it monotonous by giving out the same information which is already before the interview panel in the form of your resume. It is about how well you play with words (e.g instead of saying that a person is fat, you can say that he is horizontally challenged). Avoid using jargons or adjectives while answering such questions. In case you decide to use adjectives, you should back them up with solid examples. Ahead of the interview, try to make note of the things that define you and the probable questions that might be asked related to those things.

Self-analysis is the best analysis. Any misinformation could backfire and you might end up on the losing side. Rajat Jain wrote in Quora about his interview where he was asked to tell about himself. P1: - So, Rajat tell me about yourself. (a classical interview question)

Me- I am Rajat Jain, pursuing Civil Engineering., did my schooling from Delhi. I like to read detective fiction and solve sudokus in my free time.



Here, we see that the panellists seemed convinced with Rajat's answer and were in no mood to probe him further. Though it is quite possible that he might have been asked questions related to his liking towards reading detective fiction as well as solving sudokus during the free time. Always remember that while facing the interview board, you need to be humble, calm and have a pleasant smile on your face. Be your natural self, but don't carry a casual body language and at the same time adopt a professional approach. It is quite possible that the candidate's interview was scheduled just before the lunch or towards the fag end of the day, where the panellists were tired and were in the mood to grill the candidate. Sometimes, positive body language and confidence while answering the question, goes in favour of the candidate. In both the above cases, the candidates calmly answered the questions and did not show any kind of anxiety.

Remember that this question is normally asked by the interview panel to strike a chord with the person as people on both sides of the table are strangers. So, despite him having your resume, do not press the panic button.

3. What are your hobbies?

While mentioning your hobby, be very clear and precise about what you say and be thoroughly prepared for it. Anything wayward will go against you and reiterate that once again do not say anything which will take you off guard. Here is an example where the candidate was able to judge that one of the panellists was Bengali from his accent and accordingly she gave the answer. She had mentioned that her hobby was cooking.

Aparajita Saha, who made her way to IIM Bangalore

had mentioned cooking as her hobby. The panelist who asked "So... your hobby is cooking?" pronounced her name as 'Oporajita.' Immediately, Aparajita was able to gauge that the panellist was a Bengali. She took this as an opportunity to turn it in her favour. Aparajita Saha speaks on Quora about her experience of answering the question on her hobby.

P: So... your hobby is cooking?

A: Yes

P: What do you like to cook the most?

A: Bengali cuisine

P: Cook something for us now.

A: I will make a Bengali style pomphret curry for you today. I was marinating fish, frying them, making curry, garnishing with coriander leaves and serving them to the panel. Everything in the air of imagination. I was so flowing in fish-curry emotions that I could actually see the curry being made from scratch and smelling wonderful and the Bengali judge loving it. I could feel him salivating when I said, "The curry is done."

P: Did you forget something?

A: Hmm...I don't think so.

P: Think. What about salt? Did you add salt?

A: I added salt to the fish marinade. But not in the curry. I'm sorry.

P: No salt in the curry. Your curry will taste bland.

A: I agree. I should have been more careful.

Such instances indicate that you have to be mentally alert. Had she not been able to judge that one of the panellists was a Bengali, it was quite possible that she would have told them something which was her favourite while cooking or may be some south Indian dish. By being able to judge the regional background of the panellist, she was able to keep the interest of the panellist while she was



explaining to them the process of cooking the Bengali cuisine. Thorough and strategic planning is the key to success for personal interview, remember that you need not waste your time in doing extensive research on any topic. The preparation has to be “FOCUSSED”. You are not expected to write a thesis, hence at the heart of your preparation should be reading the right kind of content rather than trying to read each and every everything. Your brain has to be tuned in a manner that it is able to filter the information which it has to take and which it has to delete.



‘KNOWLEDGE WILL BE A KEY DIFFERENTIATOR AT PI/WAT ROUNDS’, SAYS T.I.M.E. EXPERT RAMNATH KANAKADANDI

In this interview, CAT Course Director for T.I.M.E., Ramnath Kanakadandi shares his expert inputs on what does an interview panel looks for in a candidate, the Dos and Don'ts for each round and how one must prepare for each round.

Ramnath states the importance of WAT and advises candidates to be diverse in their reading habits to do well at this stage. To perform well in WAT, Ramnath recommends CODER structure for the students which support them in identifying the topic, organizing ideas and expressing the same in a best-structured way. Further, he recommends the shortlisted candidates to read everything they can lay their hands on as knowledge is going to be the key differentiator in the selection process of the top B-schools.

Read the expert interview below:

Careers360: WAT is being preferred over GD as many B-schools have scrapped GD from their admissions process. What is your take on this?

Ramnath Kanakadandi: According to me the possible reasons why WAT or Essay could be used in place of GD are 1) to give every participant a fair chance to voice out their opinions, which is not always possible in GDs with participants interrupting others 2) to see how one builds up

an argument. That said, while the IIMs have shifted to the Essays, most other B-schools still see merit in retaining GDs in their admission process.

Careers360: What must be the approach, structure, and Dos and Don'ts for WAT?

Ramnath Kanakadandi: We recommend students to use “CODER” structure and approach.



C - Collect ideas O – Organize them D – Develop them E – Express them R – Review

Content – Identify the keywords in the topic, think of the information you have, and what ideas or views you could develop on the basis of this information.

Organise Ideas - Now organize the random thoughts and ideas and group them coherently. You must think of the following questions - What would be the purpose or theme of the essay? What would be the appropriate ideas to start with? What are the further ideas that one could continue with, and what would these ideas lead to? What ideas would be the right ones to end with?

Develop - Explanation and elaboration – You now begin to develop those thoughts. Think of - What sort of information would hold the readers' attention best? What sort of examples would they relate to? What pieces of information, what sort of explanation, and/or what examples, would support the ideas, the theme, and the purpose? How long should the essay be?

Express - Structure of an essay – Now the actual part. A typical essay would start with an introduction, using statements and information of general nature that provide some background to the topic and point to the nature of the specific ideas that follow. The body of the essay would contain the specific ideas, presented in a clear and coherent manner. Each broad idea or set of ideas would form a paragraph. The flow or sequence of paragraphs would lead to the conclusion which would sum up the purpose of the presentation.

Review - You must devote the last few minutes to

reading through the essay to satisfy yourself that there are logical flow and coherence and that the language is error-free. Correction, replacement or repositioning, if any, should be carried out in a manner that ensures that the flow remains or is improved.

It would be advisable to keep a track of time and not get lost in the ideation stage so much that you do not leave any time for writing the essay. The reviewing stage is often ignored, and this may end up in students presenting essays which are riddled with typos. So, remember to allocate at least 10% of your time for reviewing.

Careers360: Is there any Time Management strategy to be followed by the students?

Ramnath Kanakadandi: Time management is crucial, as there will be a limited time given to complete this assignment. I suggest that you devote about 30 percent of the allotted time to steps C O and D, about 60 percent to the actual writing, i.e. E, and about 10 percent to R. It is important to allocate time to review the essay, to avoid submitting an essay riddled with typos.

Careers360: Any expert advice for the candidates who'd be appearing in the WAT soon?

Ramnath Kanakadandi: Improving your knowledge levels should be an ongoing activity, the more time and effort you put into this, the better off you will be. It is essential to practice writing a few mock essays and getting them reviewed by experts. This will help in plugging any gaps that may come in your way of writing a good essay.

Careers360: How difficult and important is PI for students? What does a panel look for in a candidate?

Ramnath Kanakadandi: The interview process is designed to evaluate how you react to various situations.



An interview provides an opportunity to the interviewer to probe you and understand your thought process and gauge your attitude. There could be anywhere between 2-5 interviewers in a panel.

Careers360: What must be the criteria for a candidate to tackle PI stage?

Ramnath Kanakadandi: First up, the candidate must be well prepared in the following topics - academics, about self (strengths, weaknesses, hobbies, inspirations, role models etc.), career plans and work experience. In addition to this, the interviewers may pose tasks such as speaking extempore on a topic, puzzle etc. It is important to stay calm and composed under pressure and answer to the best of one's ability. While the interviewers do not expect the candidates to answer each and every question, how one reacts when a difficult question is posed is very important.

Careers360: What are the key/influential factors for the selection at PI?

Ramnath Kanakadandi: Some of the key qualities that you, as a B-School aspirant are expected to possess are: Good level of knowledge and clear understanding of core concepts of various issues (current affairs, historic events etc.), Clarity of thought, Communication skills, Personality, attitude, and the way you react to situations, and thought process in terms of career planning.

Careers360: What are the Dos and Don'ts of this stage?

Ramnath Kanakadandi: Dress code: As Interview is a formal occasion; you are expected to be dressed for the

occasion. Entry into the Interview room: You may be asked by one of the panel members or one of their assistants to enter the room. At the door, ask for permission to enter, "May I come in, Sir / Madam?"

Sitting posture: Sit comfortably in the chair. You may cross your legs if you wish to. Your arms may rest on the arm-rest of the chair or on your lap. The folder that contains your certificates and other documents should be kept on your lap, and not on the table.

Body language: While a lot has been written and documented in body language, it will suffice and will actually help you if you can be your natural self.

Language to be used: Use formal language and speak English only.

Conduct inside the Interview room: Listen carefully and attentively to the questions asked. If you are unable to comprehend the meaning / hear the question, request the panel member to clarify/ repeat the question.

Recce - It is important to be on time, better still would be to be on time, so that your mind is in a calm state. It is advised you do a recce to the interview location, make a note of the time it would take to reach the place from your home and ensure you give a good buffer time to account for an unexpected delay en route.