



PREPMBA

PUT A HARVARD MBA ON YOUR CASE

Keys to a Winning MBA Application Harvard Club of the United Kingdom

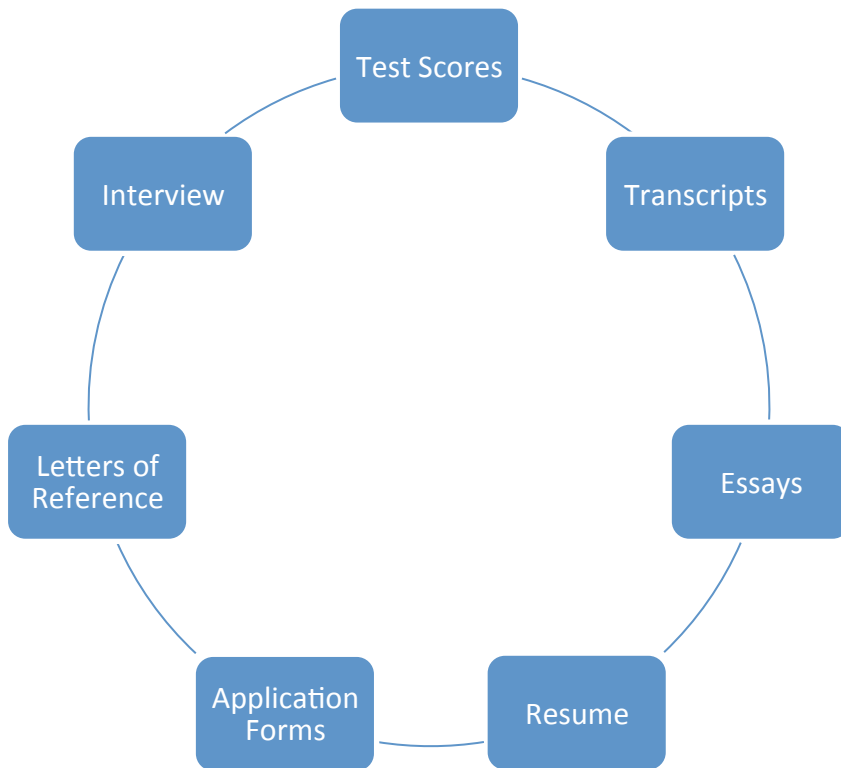
Alex Leventhal

PrepMBA.com

When is the Right Time to Apply?

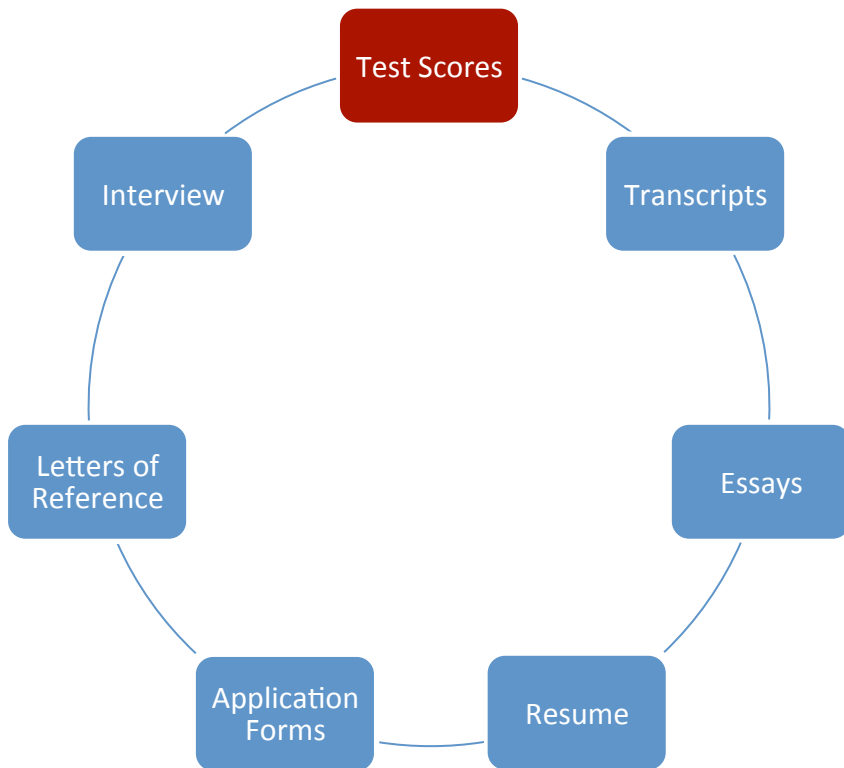
- Average age is 27-28 with majority cluster in 26-29 range
 - Lower end has to prove work and leadership experience are significant
 - Higher end should apply to a broad range of schools and show career clarity
- Apply *when your application is ready* as the bar for reapplication is high
- GMAT average for top programs is 720-730. Taking the GMAT multiple times is fine (total score vs. splits)
- Apply when you have a progression of responsibility (raises and promotions) unless you are in a track program
- You don't have to wait to have managed direct reports
- Apply with plenty of time versus a rush job. Plan on 3-4 weeks per school
- Apply Round 1 if possible:
 - All seats on the bus are open in Round 1
 - Admissions committees tend to segment/profile
 - But don't go Round 1 if you're not ready. Round 2 is real.

What are the 7 Application Elements?



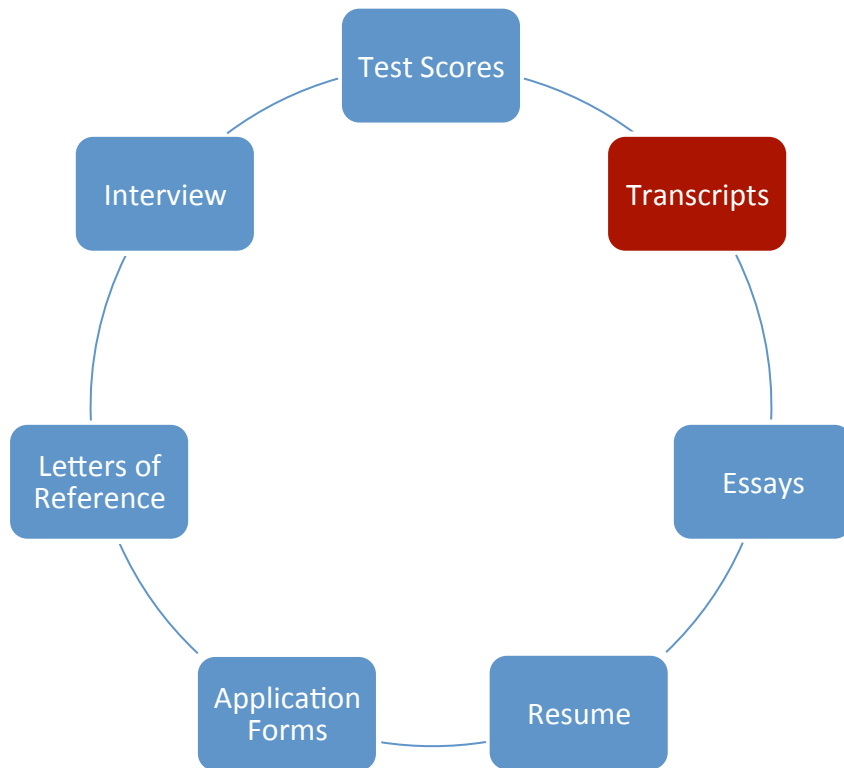
- GMAT (GRE) and GPA are the ante
- Essays and Interviews gain you admission
- Resume is not just about roles and responsibilities
- Application Forms must be perfect
- Letters corroborate claims, rank vs. peers and show wow factor/personal qualities

Test Scores



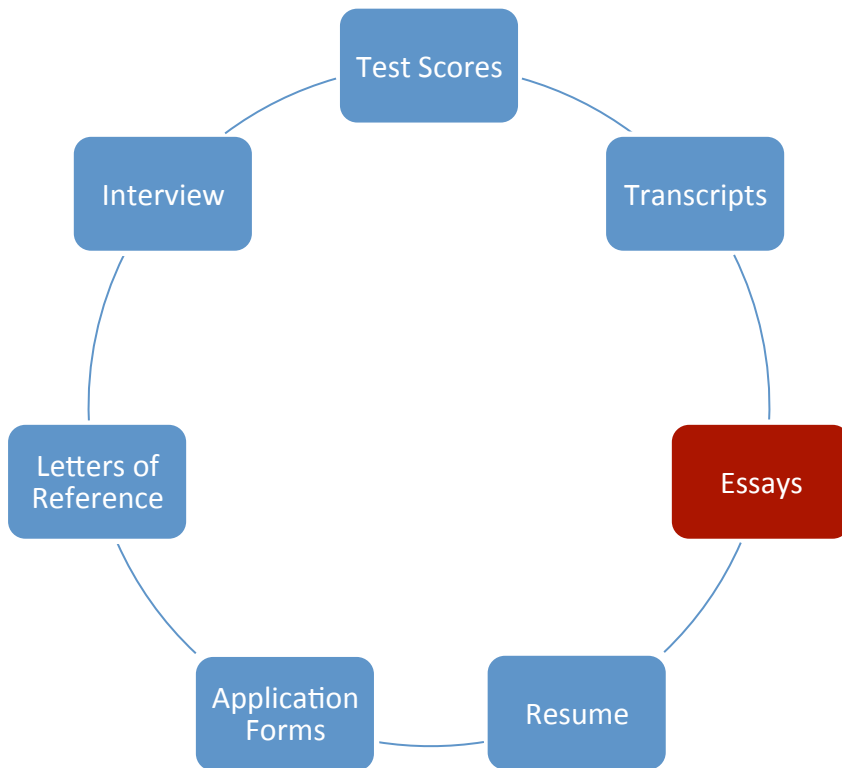
- GMAT is still king
- Top schools average 710-730
- Verbal and quant splits are important
- Strong scores can address a weaker GPA
- You can report unofficial scores
- First year of Integrated Reasoning section but outside of the main score

Transcripts



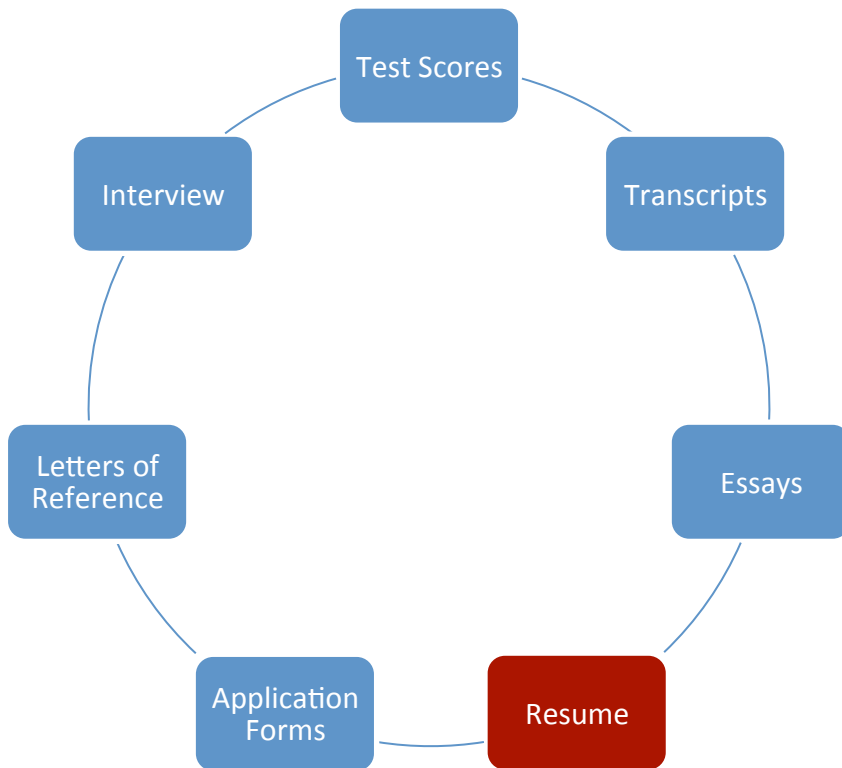
- GPA average at top schools 3.6 to 3.7
- GPA trend is important
- Lower GPA can be offset by GMAT, additional quant courses...
- GPA issues generally best covered in optional essay
- Explain foreign grading scales in optional essay if necessary

Essays



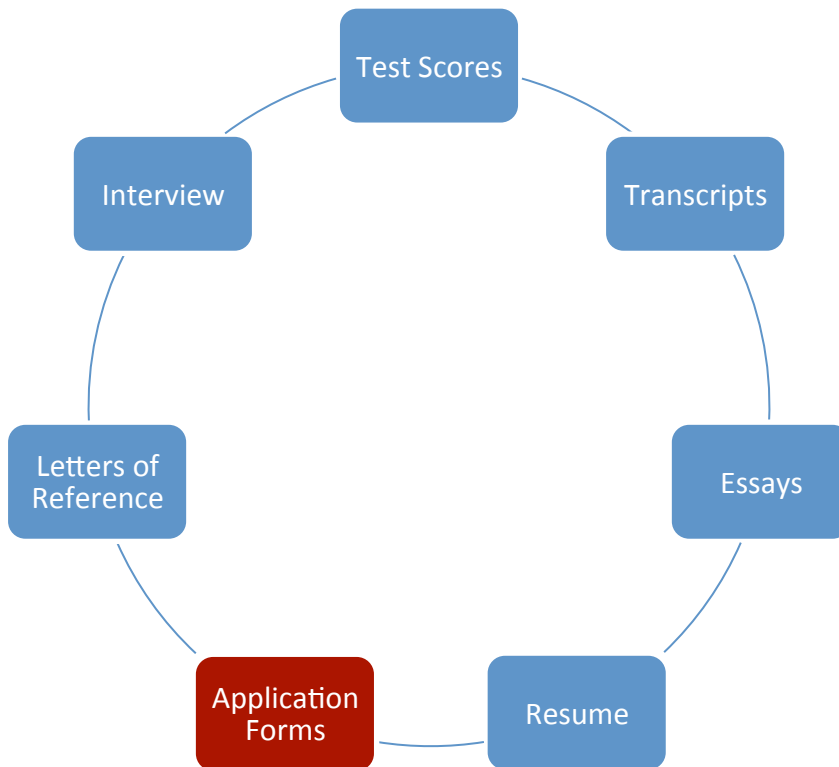
- What most applicants fear most
- Compacting into very tight word limits
- Logical and emotional connection
- Energy, passion, depth, breadth
- Topic selection is critical
- Most are not automatically good at this
- Like the GMAT, you can get better!

MBA Resume



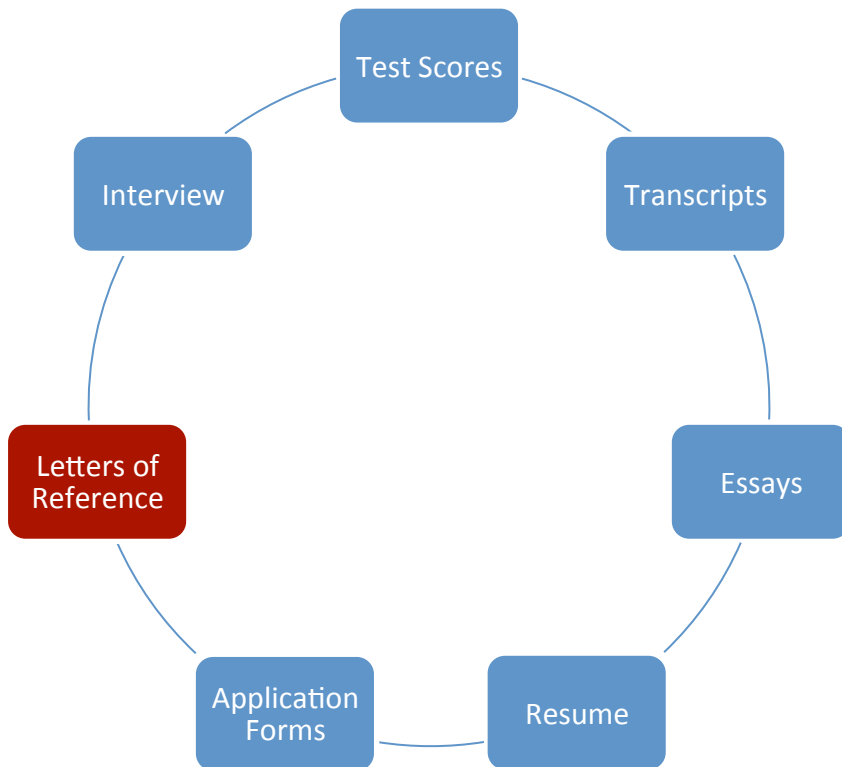
- Highlight how you moved the needle
- Use “lead in” action verbs
- Specific details/metrics and quantified outcomes
- Show progression of scale/scope of projects
- Include key accomplishments from essays
- No need for objective statements or key skills summaries

Application Forms



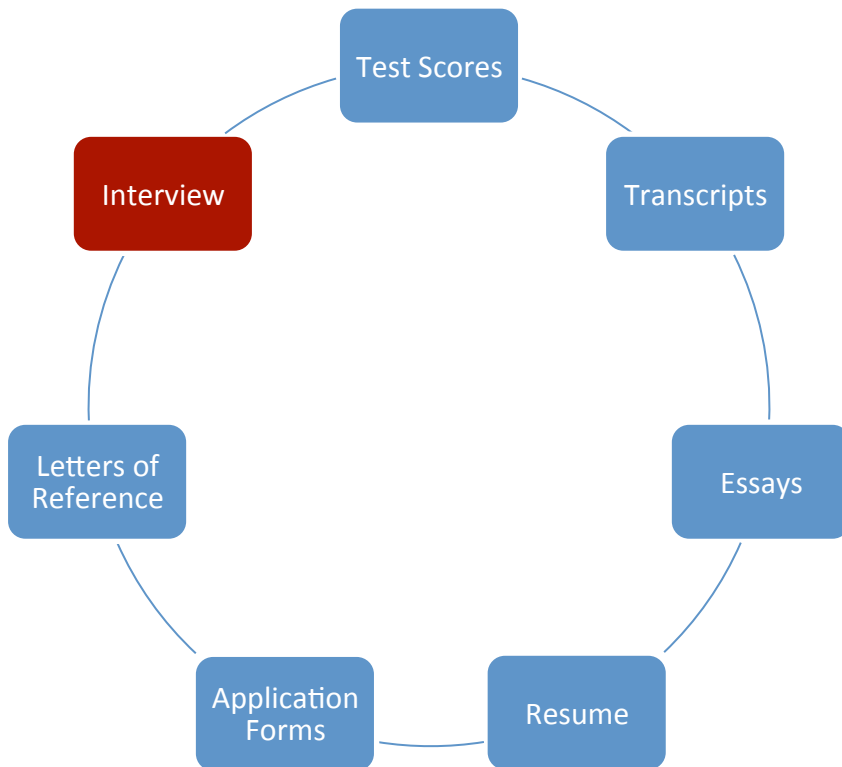
- You are still selling so add specifics, metrics, outcomes and energy
- Sloppy mistakes can get you dinged
- Be accurate and honest
- Don't leave until the final hour given small essay questions

Letters of Reference



- Most schools require 2-3
- Direct supervisor is anchor reference
- Not using direct boss should be explained in optional essay
- Most senior sponsor not always best
- Good to use a non work reference as a balance if you have a major extra curricular
- Should be people with constant and prolonged contact with your work
- Prepare your references to control the output
- Alumni “side references” can be helpful outside of the application process

Interview



- By invitation though some schools interview all
- Where you seal the deal
- 30 to 45 minutes
- Blind interviews are more common so know your resume and reasons for transitions
- You can and should practice
- Not like case interviews:
 - why an MBA?
 - why an MBA now?
 - why our school?
 - your career goals?
 - situational behavior questions
 - odd questions (last great book you read)
- This is a sales call. Don't soft sell.

What Must You Prove?

- You have leadership capabilities
 - Leading By Example, Leading by Mentoring, Leading by Managing Up, Leading through Teamwork, Leading Through Formal Communication...
- You have analytical acumen
- You have significant professional achievements that can be measured
- You will enrich their community based on your past involvements
- You understand their school through specifics (blogs, clubs, publications...)
- You have a career purpose or aim larger than yourself or \$.
 - Application *super glue*



Career Purpose Example: Rich

- **Current Job:** works for Sony in their music division and has seen the industry suffer massively due to piracy
- **Career Purpose:** wants to be a leader in protecting intellectual property through technology
- **Post MBA Targeted Job:** work in the media practice of a major consulting firm to gain experience in multiple entertainment segments
- **Long Term Job:** start a consulting firm that advises companies on protecting their content and capturing value through pricing models
- **MBA Focus:** Media/Entertainment Club, Courses in Corporate Strategy, Targeting Digital Media Professors



Career Purpose Example: Katie

- **Current Job:** Works in private equity. Has enjoyed work but wants to more directly impact others in her job. Has volunteered for 4 years at a mental health hotline. Has seen that organization struggle financially.
- **Career Purpose:** Katie wants to use her financial background to help stand-alone health clinics and healthcare non profits to run effectively and grow.
- **Post MBA Targeted Job:** Work in the healthcare practice of a major management consulting firm like LEK.
- **Long Term Job:** Start a non profit that assists new health clinics get off the ground and run effectively via best practices.
- **MBA Focus:** Healthcare Club, Social Enterprise Club, Courses in Non Profit Management



Essay Question Tips

- Brainstorm your achievements and stories before writing
- Ideally include non work achievements and leadership experiences (70% work versus 30% outside of work)
- Don't use too much material from college and earlier
- Show success harnessing the energy and intellect of others versus only individual achievements
- Sell forcefully but with a degree of humility and perspective (The Megalomaniac)
- Top Schools are looking for high self awareness and emotional intelligence versus pure quant jocks (weaknesses, setbacks, influences)
- Situate your reader into an essay versus relying on your resume
- Classic Essay Structure:
 - Introduce your essays with specifics and stakes
 - Explain what you did and how you overcame material obstacles and challenges
 - Close with quantified outcomes, what you learned, tie to new situations

Classic Essay Structure: “Tell us about a time you overcame the status quo?”

Senior Year Varsity Soccer at Haverford

Set Up: Average Team of Walk-Ons

- The recruited stars had all graduated
- Three years of underperformance
- Coach was not constructive and hurt spirit (mild antagonist)

Build: We Decided to Play for Ourselves

- Seniors (myself and others) countered Coach’s negativity
- Extra unofficial practices
- Formal feedback loop to younger players

Pay Off: Middle Atlantic Conference Champions

- We won Division 3 conference championship
- We made school history. We created our own “meaning”.
- We created a bond that has lasted for decades

Essay Question Red Flags

- Not answering the specific question
- Straying off topic shows logic issues
- Providing generalities instead of specifics. Reader learns little about you
- Repeating stories indicates you don't have much depth
- Overly high opinion of yourself and grandiose claims
- Using stories that come off as minor versus the competition
 - Organized small office food drive
- No humor, no imagination, no creativity, no risks, no passion!

Closing Thoughts

- Highly competitive so don't do rush jobs. Reapplication requires material advancements
- We all have blind spots in our writing so get help from a sibling, peer or an admissions consultant
- Don't apply to just top 3 schools, particularly if at older end of range
- Deal with red flags proactively
- Play detective for your schools and prove you know exactly how you will learn and how you will enrich their community
- Make sure your references provide that wow factor
- A compelling career purpose is a huge plus
- Take a chance. Safe will not get you in to the top schools. Humans are reading your application not an MBA robot.
- Interviewing can be practiced
- "You get out what you put in". Make it fun. Make it a learning process.