

MBA as a career option



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I decided to pen down an article on MBA as this is a question that I have to address in most of the counseling sessions that I address. I would like to start from the basics and discuss the various aspects of a MBA degree and why is it important. Just like CAT is the mother of all examinations, similarly MBA is the father of all degrees. It is imperative to have a MBA degree to march ahead in life. MBA makes a person a true professional which is so essential to survive in today's competitive world.

In our daily life mostly our mom 'manages' the entire household affairs (clothes, food etc.), our dad 'manages' the financial aspect of our upbringing and we, students 'manage' our schedules between study, work & fun. Yet the way of management in the corporate world is different. A MBA degree helps to understand Corporate Management better and the entire approach is that there is a scientific treatment of the "Subject of Management" in this course. A MBA degree helps a person to use his/her knowledge better and also in utilizing the resources more effectively to achieve organizational goals. Besides that, it helps a person to understand consumer needs and in conceptualizing products. It trains a person to understand how to manufacture at the lowest cost and helps the person to develop better skills in communicating product features and benefits. So in a way it helps to acquire a better understanding of overall business.

Now having discussed the importance of MBA let me try to give you an idea on the different aspects of a MBA degree in India. There are currently around 1000 recognised institutes, 5 major entrance examinations and a few more autonomous exams. Out of these for the premier examination, CAT, around 200000 students generally appear every year for CAT and only 7000 are called for GDs and PI's and finally only 1500 get selected. A MBA degree offers specializations on subjects like Finance, HR, Marketing, Operations, Systems etc and hence helps individuals make careers in which they want to specialize and are interested in. It is generally seen that Engineers and Science Graduates specialize in Software, Telecommunications and Production. Commerce Graduates specialize in Finance, HR and Marketing and for Arts Graduate it is Marketing and HR.

Any MBA entrance examination consists of two stages. The first stage is a Written Test and the Second Stage comprises of Group Discussions and Personal Interview.

The Written Examination has the following sections,

- u Reasoning Ability comprising of Logical Reasoning Mathematical Reasoning Analytical Reasoning
- u Verbal Ability which comprises of Vocabulary, Language skills, Usage of Grammar, Reading Comprehension
- u Quantitative Ability which comprises of Arithmetic Algebra Geometry
- u Data Interpretation viz. Graphs Charts Tables
- u General Knowledge

There are certain traits that are required for clearing a written test. It is important to be clear on concepts. Equally important is to know speed techniques for solving the problems as time is limited. MBA entrance examinations are not easy to clear so it may be prudent to take classes from reputed institutes to clear these examinations.

After clearing the written test, it is time for the Group Discussions and the Interview which is the tougher part to clear. Once you reach this stage everyone seems busy biting off fingernails in apprehension and in figuring out appropriate answers to the numerous questions in forms. We need to keep in mind that how these questions are tackled becomes extremely critical as they may come up at the interview stage and require deft handling

There are certain traits that are required to clear a Group Discussion. The primary trait is good communication skills. Besides this you need to be good in expressing yourself, have logical thinking, know your goals, be able to withstand pressure and have clear focus. To clear a Group Discussion, it is important that you do some mock sessions with qualified trainers.

Then comes the interview stage. I would like to highlight the approach to a few questions that you should follow to frame your ideas in a faultless fashion.

An expected question in any form or interview is ‘Why do you want to pursue a management course?’ This question is aimed at knowing how focused you are in terms of your professional and personal goals in life. An appropriate answer should mention your inherent qualities and focus on traits that you would like to acquire during your course at the B-school. It should highlight how an MBA would help you hone your managerial skills and train you to exercise the same in an organizational environment. It is advisable to mention your intended specialisation and how it would help you to realize your dream goals.

Typical self-awareness questions asking you to discuss your strengths and weaknesses are posed to gauge how well you know yourself. An awareness of your own strengths is essential to set your goals, and with your goals set, it becomes all the more essential to know your positive traits to work towards the accomplishment of the same. Knowing your weaknesses will depict that you are well aware of your shortcomings and are open to the concept of self-improvement.

Questions focusing on your performance at the professional front try to extract your ability to relate theory to practice. The key factors to be considered while answering such questions are your job responsibilities and the technical knowledge as well as non-technical soft skills that you have acquired while working. Such characteristics would be greatly strengthened by mentioning a few successful target completions and achievements related to the professional sphere. The answer to a question on 'your most significant achievement' should (obviously) focus on the achievement that you would personally rate as 'the most significant', and your reasons for doing so. An appropriate achievement from the professional, academic, extra curricular or even a personal sphere may be highlighted, keeping in mind your assets, situation handling skills, dedication and confidence that helped you set and achieve a goal.

Apart from the professional front, you might be asked to answer a number of personal questions as well. A question on your value system aims at knowing the ideals that you abide with and how your family and upbringing have shaped your persona till now. Your value system should strike a perfect mean between paragons and practicality exercised while implementing the same.

The educational, professional as well as personal questions posed are directed towards a display of qualities that present you as an optimistic and practical young executive, well equipped with leadership qualities for an organisational environment.

Please feel free to contact me for any thoughts or clarifications.

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