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Introduction

As you gear up to write your application essays, you may have looked at some sample essays only to ask yourself afterward, “Sure, these are great, but what do these essays have to do with me?” This guide will teach you how to create exemplary essays by sharing sample successful application essays with you. Then, you can apply the winning ingredients to your own writing. You will learn how to develop a theme, include the essential elements for the MBA career goals essay, and offer tips on revising and editing for the final polish.

Ready to get started? Great! Let’s learn how to write exceptional essays and submit a winning application.
Why Our Clients Love Us

No matter where you live and no matter where you're applying, our expert admissions consultants are ready to listen, mentor, and guide you as you prepare an outstanding med school application that will get you accepted. You'll love us because you'll see from the first phone call or email that we care about you and support you as you strive to achieve your goals and dreams.

But you don't need to take our word for it. See what our clients say about Accepted...

"I was admitted to Harvard! I definitely would not have been as successful without your help. Thank you for your advice and support – it was a pleasure working with you!"

"I got accepted to Stanford, and Wharton offered me a grant! You didn’t just help me gain admission, but you increased my chances of getting offered a merit-based fellowship – talk about an unexpected ROI!"

“I just got accepted into Columbia University! I am so thankful to Marie Todd for all the help she gave me. I wouldn’t have been able to get into such a great school without her guidance. Because I am an international student, I didn’t know very much about the application process, but Marie was dedicated to making me understand all I needed to succeed with my application. She was always ready to fully answer my questions, giving me the confidence I needed to pursue the challenging process of applying to American universities.”

“I would like to thank Jennifer once again for her wonderful guidance without which my acceptances at Wharton and Booth would not have been possible!”

Read more feedback on why our clients love Accepted.
Identifying the Ingredients of a Winning Essay

Let’s jump right in and get started by looking at two sample essays to see what makes them so effective. The first essay, The Public Health Student, opens with a question:

“What if people lived healthier lives, practiced preventive medicine, and took precautions against illness and disease?”

The “what if?” opening immediately engages the reader and at the same time tells us that the writer’s career aspiration is in the healthcare sector. We do not have to wait to discover the theme of the essay; it’s right there in the first sentence.

[Click Here to Read the Full Essay]

In terms of structure, notice how every sentence in that first paragraph builds on the sentence that precedes it. In the second sentence, the writer begins to present his background in the healthcare field, making his opening question understandable. In the third sentence, additional background about his professional experience gives context for his choice of career path. By the end of the first paragraph, the reader understands the applicant’s motivations for moving from work as a physical therapist to the broader sphere of public health management.

As the essay develops, notice how this applicant continues to build his case for admission by linking his prior work and education to their relevance to the public health field. Specifically, he writes about coursework he has taken in public health, followed immediately by a succinct discussion of his field work experience. When writing about his internship experiences, he doesn’t simply list what he did; he talks about what he learned and how these experiences have solidified his commitment to getting the MPH degree. His conclusion is also very effective because he returns to his opening “what if?” theme. He asks, “What if an aspirin a day could prevent heart attacks?” emphasizing that everything he has learned and done so far keeps him riveted by the challenge of finding answers to significant questions in public health.

While the writing is not especially colorful in this essay, the prose is clear and active. Every sentence offers new or additional information; there is no fluff. This clarity and momentum keeps the essay interesting and the pace moving, effectively building the writer’s profile as a promising and serious MPH applicant.
Now let’s take a look at the Returning to School essay from Accepted’s law school section. This essay opens with a colorful, compelling scene that immediately places the reader in the story:

“Fourteen grumpy doctors stare across an enormous oak conference table at me. It is seven o’clock in the morning, and most of the group is still wearing wrinkled green scrubs indicating they worked through the night. None of the doctors look ready to digest the extremely technical information contained in the eight studies stacked neatly in front of them. My job is to present each study, review all relevant economic data, and answer any questions in such a way that the audience will conclude that the new drug I am selling is better than the one they have been prescribing. One of the physicians gruffly informs me, through a mouthful of Danish, that he is leaving in ten minutes so I had better start my pitch.”

Don’t you already feel for this writer and her formidable challenge? I don’t know about you, but she had me hooked right away, and I was rooting for her to win over this very tough audience.

[Click Here to Read the Full Essay]

This essay, about half of the length of the MPH essay, still contains the same winning elements: specific highlights of career achievements and clear and convincing reasons for a career change. The last sentence refers once again to the “grumpy physicians” we met at the beginning. Both writers brought their essays full circle.

Having reviewed these essays, you will have a better idea of the types of experiences you can pull from your life that can help build a case for your candidacy for grad school. Start thinking about experiences you have had that will create a compelling anecdote that can grab your reader’s attention from the first sentence and not let it go until they have reached the final, satisfying conclusion.

Summary Tips:

- Open with a compelling anecdote or a question to engage the reader’s interest right from the beginning.
- Hold the reader’s interest by building on your story, sentence by sentence, adding new information and avoiding repetition.
- Refer back to your opening when you conclude your essay, bringing your story full circle.
A Theme for Your Statement of Purpose

All effective essays have a distinctive voice and theme. Referring back to the essays we looked at in the first chapter, we might say that our MPH candidate’s theme was his passion for finding answers to significant public health issues. Our law school applicant’s theme was her yearning for greater intellectual challenges while remaining in the healthcare field.

It takes time and introspection to find your voice and your theme. The questions below are designed to stimulate your thought process and help you define your essay’s main message. Your answers will also help you express your goals, values as they relate to your career choice, motivations for pursuing a graduate degree, and your professional dreams. While introspection isn’t as popular an activity as, say, tennis or watching TV, it’s an important part of this process. Give it some time; your essay will be much better for it.

- Why are you passionate about – or at least committed to – your career choice?
- What experiences in your life (personal, educational, professional) have influenced your career goals and passions the most?
- Has any individual played a major role in helping you discover these goals or values?
- What do you hope to achieve in your career?
- What would career success look like in ten years?
- What strengths do you bring to this career?
- What experiences can you write about that will highlight these strengths?

After the admissions committee has read your essays, what three words would you hope they would use to describe you? Would you like them to consider you “driven,” “intelligent,” and “creative?” How about “dedicated,” “a leader,” and “focused?” No matter what image you want to create, think about experiences that will illustrate those qualities.

Some answers may spring to mind immediately, while others may require more thought. Some of these experiences might have enough drama or color to make a compelling essay introduction.
Remember that if you are writing multiple essays, such as for MBA programs, each one must have its own theme. The admissions committee members want to see you as a multi-faceted individual. Do not hammer home the same theme repeatedly when you have the opportunity to display different aspects of yourself, your values, and your personality.

**Summary Tips:**

- Carve out some time for introspection about your career goals, values, and motivation.
- Develop distinct themes for each essay required for an MBA program, or for any program requiring more than one essay.
Writing the MBA Goals Essay

The MBA career goals essay, a close cousin to the graduate school statement of purpose, demands a laser-like focus. Unlike personal statements, which may discuss career goals but also allow for more flexibility in content, the MBA career goals essay has a specific and packed agenda. In fact, most MBA career goals essay questions contain several questions in one, so make sure to address each of them. (For example, some ask “Why is now the right time for you to earn an MBA?” or “What do you hope to gain from the XYZ program?”) Your essay must have a theme, of course, but should also do the following:

1. Highlight specific career achievements. Choose among the experiences you have had, either at work or through a community or extracurricular activity, that will showcase your leadership, creative thinking, and collaborative abilities.

2. Explain why your career goal makes sense in light of your experiences and influences so far.

3. Demonstrate why you are suited to a particular field as a result of your education, experience, abilities, and enthusiasm. Ideally, the material you choose to include will also allow you to demonstrate your knowledge about industry trends, and point to how your particular abilities can help make a contribution to that field.

That is a very tall order.

Let’s see how this was achieved in a sample MBA Goals Essay.

[Click Here to Read the Full Essay]

Based on the last two chapters of this guide, you’ll easily recognize why the opening is attention-getting for all the right reasons. The writer introduces herself as the supremely busy executive she envisions herself becoming in the future. She trades large amounts of stock, then dashes to a teleconference, rushes down stairs, hails a taxi, then catches a plane. With all those busy verbs, we can practically feel her heart pumping as she rushes towards her flight.

She establishes her theme in this opening, and then gives the context for her MBA goal. Notice that in writing about her work as an accountant for a major firm, she provides relevant details, including how many years she has been in this field, her bilingual abilities,
and specialty area as an auditor. This is the springboard from which she explains why she is pursuing the MBA – her role as an accountant is too limited for her to achieve her career goals as a money manager.

Outstanding career goals essays don’t simply list what the applicants have done and what they want to do; they also convey real enthusiasm for the applicant’s career choice. This writer achieved this in the first paragraph and returned to it at the end where she painted her idealized (if frantically busy) future. She also proved her seriousness by registering for CFA examinations.

Some career goals essays also ask why you have chosen that particular school. If you are faced with such a question, make sure to leave enough room to write knowledgeably and enthusiastically about that specific program. This will be easier if you have made campus visits, attended student recruitment meetings, participated in forums, read school blogs, communicated with current students or recent alumni, and otherwise familiarized yourself with the program and the courses and specializations it offers that are relevant to your goals.

**Summary Tips:**

- Focus on answering each and every question asked in an MBA career goals essay; usually there is more than one.

- Be specific when writing about your experiences so that your achievements and motivations are clear and compelling.

- Do your homework about why the school is a good fit for you so you can write about it with genuine enthusiasm.
Let’s Get Drafted!

Now that you have a clear sense of what makes an essay effective, and have reflected on the questions that have helped you develop your theme, it’s time to start writing.

Before you begin, write an outline, even if it’s only a very informal list of the main points you want to cover. Using the answers to the questions posed in Chapter 2 of this guide, you should have a list of experiences, anecdotes, and ideas that you want to include in your essay.

Now let’s break the job down further to keep the task manageable. First, how long is your essay? Grad school application essays can range from as short as 300 words to more than 1,000. Ironically, it’s much harder to write a very short, very good essay than it is to write a very good, longer one. Writing a super-short essay is like being six feet tall and stuck in a coach airline seat – you’re going to feel cramped even when writing as economically as possible.

Assuming you have more leg room, so to speak, and have 750 words, you still have to estimate how much space you will have, approximately, for your introduction, the main body, and conclusion. Dividing your essay into parts like this will help you gauge how much you can afford to write in each section. You can start out by writing a little extra, maybe up to 25 percent above your essay’s word limit in your early drafts, since you will probably be able to trim the fat later on, creating more space for the meat and potatoes of your story. You may only want to follow this rule, though, if you have an editor ready to help you streamline.

In Chapters 1 and 3 we saw examples of strong introductions. Don’t get hung up on crafting the perfect introduction before moving on to the rest of the essay. If you aren’t confident about your introduction, experiment with different ones, but don’t stay stuck at the beginning. Often, the perfect introduction will come to you when you are well into writing the rest of the essay.

Finally, keep in mind the picture you want to paint of yourself to the admissions committee. As you read your draft, are you getting a sense of that amazing, talented, focused person? Stay focused on how best to paint that picture through your own lively, meaningful examples. Do not just claim to be something without backing it up with evidence.
**Summary Tips:**

- Make an outline, even if it’s informal.
- Estimate how much space you have for each section of your essay to avoid overwriting.
- Keep working on the body of the essay even if you haven’t perfected the introduction. The introduction does not have to come first!
Revise and Polish Your Essays

You’ve got your first draft ready – this is a great milestone! Now it’s time to revise and edit; outstanding essays are not sprung into the world on the first draft. Here’s how to edit and polish until your essay shines:

**Step 1:** First, let your essay sit for a day or two, particularly after an intensive writing session. You’ll return to your document with fresh eyes, and undoubtedly find ways to strengthen it immediately. One of the most common problems plaguing these types of essays is bland, forgettable writing. When you return to your essay, if you spot any writing as generic as in the next sentence, you have work to do:

> “Although I have been responsible for a lot of exciting projects, I want to move into management, which may not happen on my current path.”

What kind of projects? What made them exciting? Why wouldn’t a management path be open to the writer? Let’s resuscitate this prose by adding appropriate details.

> “My role as a product manager for a mid-sized giftware business has allowed me to develop my creativity as well as communication and market research skills. As exciting as it has been to have been involved in the planning and release of our innovative kitchen giftware, whose designs are based on famous Impressionist paintings, I want to move more into management, which seems unlikely at this family-owned and managed company.”

Adding details takes more room, but it makes your essay come alive. It’s also better to write about fewer examples and flesh each out in greater detail than to write a laundry list of either accomplishments or character traits you feel you possess. “Show, don’t tell,” remains a cardinal rule in writing.

**Step 2:** Ditch the passive voice – this will further enliven and tighten your writing.

> “Negotiations over the extent of the website design were carried out by a team of managers and myself, representing the technical team.”

This passive construction is five words longer and drags a bit. Move the “doer” of the action to the head of the sentence for a resulting sentence that makes you sound like a leader:
“I represented the technical team in negations with management over the extent of the website design.”

Step 3: Read your essay aloud. Reading your work silently to yourself is quite different than actually hearing the words out loud. When you listen to your essay, you’ll likely catch small mistakes that you inadvertently missed during the editing process, and hear phrasing that you can strengthen.

Step 4: Make sure your essay achieves the job you set out for it. Do you sound like the irresistibly focused, thoughtful, and energetic individual you want to sound like? Make sure that the voice you created on the page resonates positively.

Summary Tips:

- Wait a day after writing a draft, so you can return to it with a fresh perspective.
- Look for instances of bland writing or passive voice, then replace with writing that is specific and active.
- Read your essay aloud so you can hear the voice you have created. Does it meet your goals? If not, keep revising and enlist an experienced editor to help get you to the finish line.
Conclusion

You’ve taken an important step towards creating a successful application by reading *From Example to Exemplary*. Now it’s time to move from general tips to personalized advice tailored just for you. Here’s how it works:

1. Explore our admissions consulting & editing services and find the option that best suits your needs.
2. You’ll be paired with an admissions expert who will work with you 1-on-1 to help you discover your competitive advantage and use it to get accepted to your dream school.
3. Shoot us an email letting us know when you’ve been accepted. It makes our day!

Need help figuring out which service is best for you? Click here for more guidance.

GET ACCEPTED!
Sample Essays

Below are the three sample essays mentioned in the guide.

**MPH Essay**

What if people lived healthier lives, practiced preventive medicine, and took precautions against illness and disease? My days in the physical therapy department often made me think about the prevention of injuries as well as the injuries themselves. I was already doubting my future career choice as a physical therapist. Although I loved the science of it and helping people, the lack of variety within the field and its limited options for growth bothered me. I needed a career that helped a large number of people, emphasized prevention and primary care rather than tertiary care, and would continually challenge and motivate me to improve. Knowing that I really did not want to pursue physical therapy as I had originally planned, my thoughts wandered to the area of public health, particularly health management.

My first true introduction to the public health arena came in a class offered through the Big U School of Public Health. As I listened to experts speak about contemporary health issues, I was intrigued. The world of "capitation," "rationing of care," and Medicaid fascinated me as I saw the range of problems that public health professionals were trying to solve in innovative ways. This one semester class provided me with a basic but thorough understanding of the issues faced in healthcare today. In the last two years I have continued to learn about public health both through coursework and work in the field.

Because field experience is such a valuable learning tool, I searched for a research assistant position that would allow me to view public health at a different level. I worked on a project at a county health clinic in Englewood, a low-income, minority community. The program attempted to increase treatment compliance rates for adolescents diagnosed with tuberculosis who must complete a six-month medical program. Working for the county exposed me to a different side of healthcare that I had previously seen. Service and organization were not assets of the county and yet its role in the public health "ecosystem" was and is critical. Its job of immunizing thousands and interacting with all members of the community is often forgotten, but is important for keeping an entire community healthy.

My work at the county health clinic as well as my knowledge of some areas of public
health led me to accept an internship in Washington D.C. this past summer. The internship provided me with a greater understanding of a federal public health agency’s operations and allowed me to contribute in a variety of ways to the XYZ Department in which I worked. Most importantly I worked on "policy issues" which involved identifying and summarizing problems that were out of the ordinary as well as documenting resolved issues in order to establish protocols to increase the department’s efficiency. In addition I served on a scientific review panel which was responsible for editing a seventy-page proposed regulation before its submission.

Along with my duties at XYZ, I attended seminars and met with public health leaders at different functions and events. All these activities confirmed my growing interest in preventive medicine, outcomes and effectiveness, and quality of care, particularly within the private/managed care sector. These are my strongest interests because I believe they are fundamental to our nation’s health. We must achieve efficiency and access without sacrificing quality.

The University of ____ would help me achieve my goals of furthering my public health education through the specialized coursework offered as part of its health administration program. [The client provides specifics here about the program’s specific appeal and strengths]

Since rejecting physical therapy as a career possibility my interest in public health has only grown. I welcome the challenge of serving a large community and participating in such a dynamic and challenging field. What if an aspirin a day could prevent heart attacks? What if abandoning unnecessary procedures saved thousands of dollars, which then allowed a hospital to treat other patients needing care? What if every person was guaranteed care and that care was good? I would like to find answers for these questions during my career as a public health graduate student and professional.
Returning to School

Fourteen grumpy doctors stare across an enormous oak conference table at me. It is seven o'clock in the morning, and most of the group are still wearing wrinkled green scrubs indicating they worked through the night. None of the doctors looks ready to digest the extremely technical information contained in the eight studies stacked neatly in front of them. My job is to present each study, review all relevant economic data, and answer any questions in such a way that the audience will conclude the new drug I am selling is better than the one they have been prescribing. One of the physicians gruffly informs me, through a mouthful of Danish, that he is leaving in ten minutes so I had better start my pitch.

During my two years as a representative for ABC Pharmaceuticals, I have found myself in this unenviable position hundreds of times. To overcome the often negative attitudes of my audience, I learned to clearly state my position and support it with persuasive evidence, usually gathered from extensive research in the scientific literature. I also learned to ask probing questions and analyze the answers on the spot. Although I was one of the only inexperienced representatives ABC ever hired, I was named their Rookie of the Year, the highest possible award for a first-year employee.

I originally took this position because I thought it would be intellectually stimulating and take advantage of my scientific and business background. For the first year, I was right—it did. However, in an industry where new products are developed infrequently, I soon exhausted the issues to debate with my physicians. My job became less challenging as I had to repeatedly remind the doctors of what I had already discussed with them. Now that I have become one of the industry's top representatives, I am looking for a new, more-lasting intellectual challenge.

My goal currently is a career in medical law. I feel that my successful work experience and rigorous scientific training will allow me to debate with the best attorneys. Since medical technology and the law in this area are developing rapidly, I am also confident that this field will be constantly challenging. Although I will miss my grumpy physicians, I look forward to the time when, groggy from a late night at the law library, I will stare at my professor across a crowded lecture hall.
MBA Goals Essay

8:00 AM. July 1, 2030. The 23rd floor of the Bank of China Tower in Hong Kong. A woman sitting behind the mahogany desk calls a Shanghai trader to buy 200,000 shares of Alibaba stock. Moments later, she dashes into a video conference with Tokyo analysts. When the conference finally concludes two hours later, the woman rushes down the stairs, hails a taxi to the Hong Kong International Airport, catches a flight to Thailand, and ends her day with a meeting with the CFO of Asus Computers.

I look forward to maintaining this busy schedule as a portfolio manager of an international equity fund about ten years after obtaining my MBA. The Top School academic experience can build on my public accounting training and my multi-cultural and multi-lingual background to prepare me for work first as an equity analyst in the mutual fund industry and ultimately as a portfolio manager specializing in Asian Pacific equities.

As a CPA and staff accountant with Big 4 for the past two and a half years, I have developed a solid foundation in teamwork, analytical, and problem-solving skills. As a bilingual associate of the Asia-Pacific Business Group, I specialize in auditing the financial statements of in-bound Asian businesses. However, while Big 4 provides expansive career opportunities in public accounting, I have reached a plateau in developing the analytical and management skills necessary to achieve my ultimate career goal of money management. In public accounting, we measure and examine financial transactions of the past. In contrast, money managers examine the current attributes of securities and attempt to predict their future performance to maximize return for investors. I crave that forward focus and challenge.

Furthermore, an effective manager in the 21st century must be well-versed in international business transactions. Although I have utilized my Chinese language skills in servicing our Asian clients and engaged in comparative technical analysis of U.S. GAAP and French, Taiwanese, and Japanese financial reporting requirements, my exposure to and knowledge of broader transactional issues such as international transfer pricing has been limited. Finally, as our audits focus mainly on the clients' compliance with U.S. GAAP and foreign accounting and reporting requirements, they provide deep dives and narrow windows; I want to learn about the "big picture" of international business.
A background in financial reporting and servicing Asia-Pacific business clients. The ability to converse fluently in Chinese. An understanding of Chinese, Japanese, and American cultures. I will bring these qualities to the Top School program and ultimately to my career in international investment management. As a first step toward achieving my career goals, I have registered to take level one of the CFA examination in June 201X and plan to complete the entire examination series upon graduation from Top Ten. Armed with the CFA certification and Top School’s international bent, strength in finance and management training, I will be ready to place that call to the trader in China, conduct the videoconference with Tokyo, and visit the CFO in Thailand.

For information on how Accepted can help you, please see our MBA admissions consulting and application services.