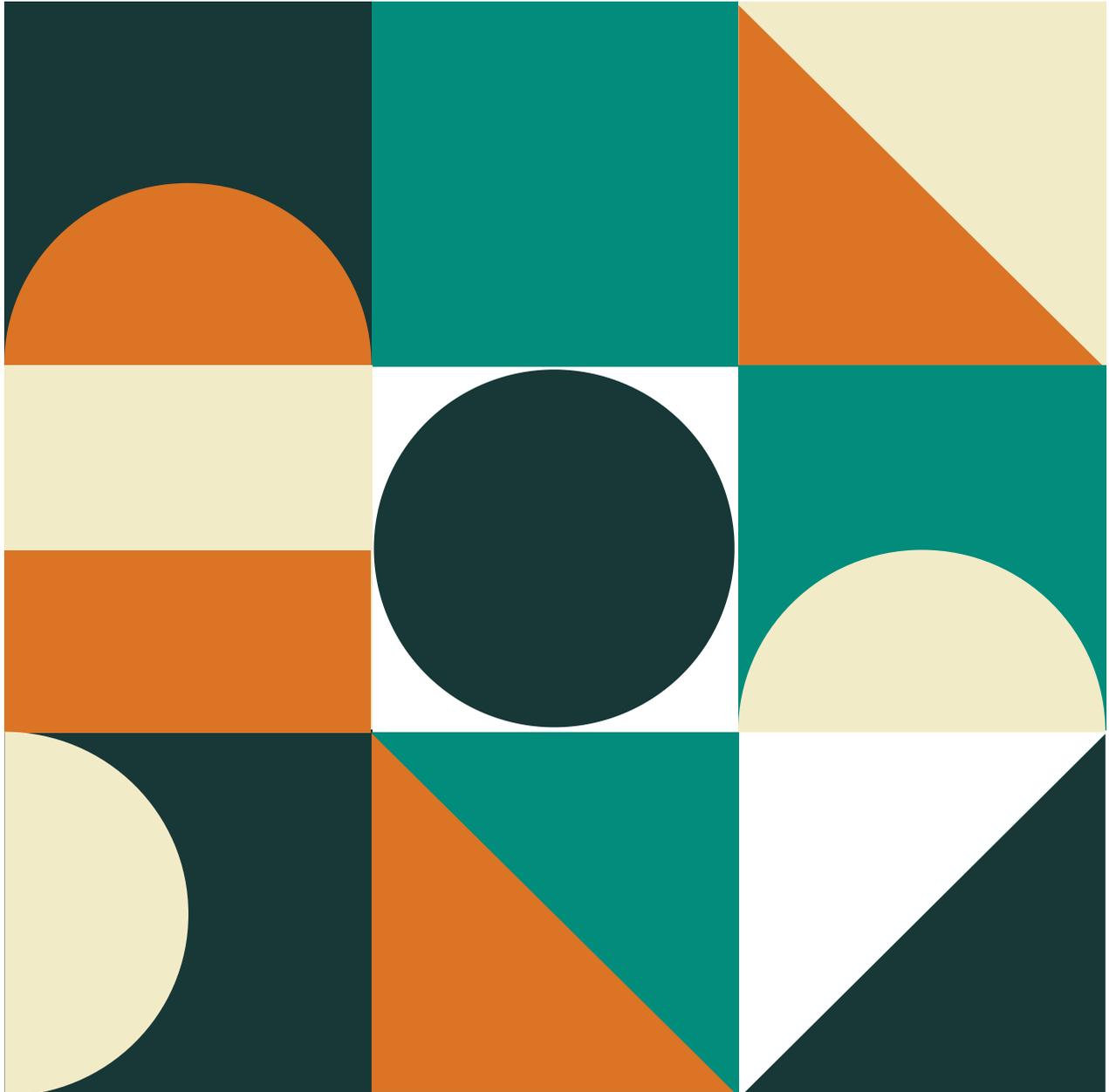


Applying to MBA Programs



CAL POLY
Career Readiness
ORFALEA COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

Information and Resources
prepared by
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Step 1: Identify your why

Applying for MBA programs is expensive and takes a lot of time. It is really important that you know what an MBA is and some reasons you might want to get one. Connecting to your inner motivation will not only be helpful in your applications, but also when you're spending those Friday nights after work studying for the GRE or GMAT!

Three Main Reasons to Get an MBA

1. Learn Foundational Business Skills: If you majored in something other than business, getting an MBA is a great way to learn more about different business functions.
2. Career Transition: Use can use an MBA to pivot into a different role or specialize in a more specific area.
3. Accelerate your Career: An MBA can allow you to accelerate your career into a leadership role.

Identifying the Right Time to Pursue an MBA

This decision is entirely personal. It is helpful to talk with a number of people who have completed their MBA to gain insight into your own career path. It is always recommended to gain work experience before enrolling in an MBA program. Average candidates have between 5-6 years experience, but 3-5 years experience is an ideal time to start.

Helpful Links

[What is an MBA and why do people get their MBA?](#)

[How much work experience and what type of careers do people have pre-MBA?](#)

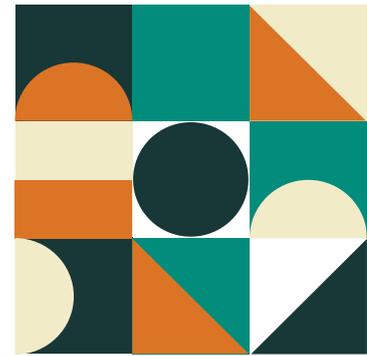
[What do you want to have on your resume when you apply for MBA programs?](#)

Top Tips

Consider applying for Deferred Acceptance to MBA programs: A limited number of schools offer deferred acceptance to an MBA program. You would apply as an undergrad, and then spend 2-3 years in the workforce before returning to school

- [How to secure deferred MBA admission](#)
- [Top Deferred Enrollment MBA Programs](#)

Step 2: Do your research



It is important to be knowledgeable about the different types of MBA programs & what will help make you the strongest candidate. Consider your "why", your targeted career path and geographical location all as factors in deciding where to apply.

Exploring MBA Programs

Online research is a great way to get a feel for different MBA programs. Here are some of the most helpful websites:

[What are the top grad schools?](#)

[MBA Rankings](#)

[MBA Schooled](#) [Book published by MBA Schooled: MBA Insider]

[Poets & Quants](#)

[Fortuna Admissions](#)

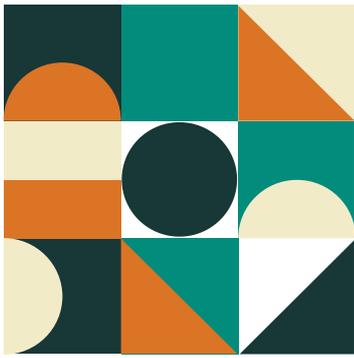
Talking to alumni can be another great way to learn more about a program from their perspective. Here are some ways to find alumni to do an informational interview with:

- Look for MBA grads in the Cal Poly alumni network
- Look up people at your company who have an MBA
- Attend MBA fairs
 - [The MBA Tour](#)
 - [Forte Forum](#)
 - Many others
- Visit schools when you are near their campus
- Visit schools in your local area to get a sense for what MBA programs are
- Participate in online webinars
- Look for special events (e.g. Michigan's Women's Leadership Conference)

Top Tips

Use the same email when you register for webinars so that the school can easily track all of your interactions with their program

- Start a Google Drive file and keep a collection of all of the information that you gather from schools & take notes on your perceptions of the program/alumni.
- Schools expect you to describe why their program is the right program for you so start collecting examples to reference (e.g. XYZ club or XYZ lab) in your application.



Step 3: Get familiar with the application process

Application Process

- GMAT or GRE Scores [See Step 5 for more information on preparing for these exams]
- Several essays or question responses
- Letters of Recommendation
- Interview with an alumni or admissions officer, either in person or remote

Takeaway: This is a tough process. If you're serious about getting into a good school, it will require your full commitment.

Start Where You Are

Review your resume and think about what experiences or exposure you need to strengthen your future application.

[Self-Reflection Guide for MBA Applicants](#)

[Things to Ponder Before Applying to Business School](#)

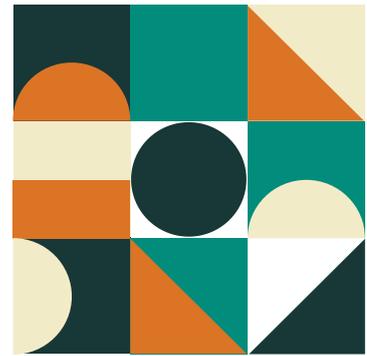
Differentiate Yourself

- [Free Branding Guide](#) from Stacy Blackman Consulting (one of many MBA consulting firms)
- Pursue interests outside of work
- Maintain strong connections with your supervisor(s) and past faculty so that your letters of recommendation are really strong

Top Tips

- If you're able to, take on less intensive work projects so that you can focus on the application process.
- Use a fake email to login to a university's application system to get a preview of what their application consists of.

Step 4: Build & maintain your network



Find a Mentor

Think about mentors and relationships you have today that can support you in your career progression. Make a concerted effort to keep in touch and work on projects outside of your full-time job. These mentors will help you in many ways, but you may also want to ask them for a letter of reference when you apply to business school and you don't want to ask someone who hasn't worked with you in 3 years because their perspective will be out of date.

Stay in Touch with Your Faculty

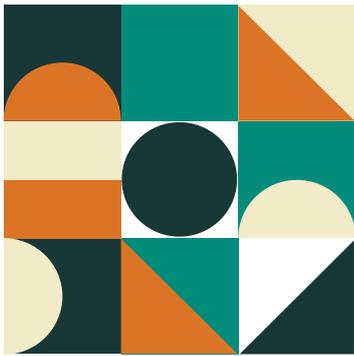
Keep in touch with professors and help them with their classes and research projects e.g. offer to come speak in a class about your job and the skills you developed in undergrad that you utilize on a daily basis.

Pursue Passion Projects

Keep working with non-profits or on other volunteer projects with leaders/organizations that you are passionate about.

Give Back

Keep in touch with clubs that you were heavily involved with and see if you can help out in an alumni capacity (e.g. organize an event in San Francisco with CPAC and accounting alumni).



Step 5: Take the GMAT or GRE

Decide which test you are going to take

- [GMAT vs. GRE: Which Exam is Best for You](#)
- [Admissions Exams Decoded: Should I take the GMAT, GRE or EA?](#)
- Take a free practice test for each to get a feel for the test and determine which one will be better for you.
- Review your results from your practice test and set a target score
- If you aren't sure which test to take, the GRE is more versatile for different degree programs.
- Your GMAT or GRE scores are valid for 5 years.

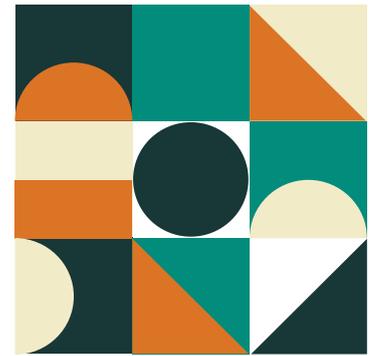
Study, study, study

Your GMAT or GRE score is a very important part of your application so consider looking at the score ranges for schools you are interested in applying to. Once you've decided on a test, plan to dedicate 3-6 months to studying and taking the test (you'll likely have to take it at least twice). Consider hiring a GMAT/GRE tutor or taking an online prep class. [Manhattan Prep](#) is a popular company for test prep but there are many other companies available. Look for discounts because these courses are expensive.

Top Tips

- Develop a study schedule and stick to it - you have to approach studying for the GMAT/GRE with the same rigor that you would a class at school.
- Consider eliminating certain distractions and reward yourself for adhering to your schedule (e.g. order takeout lunch from your favorite restaurant when you're studying on weekends).
- Regular studying is much more effective than infrequent, long bursts (cramming) so build 1-2 hour study sessions in 5-6 days/week.
- Study materials, courses and exams are expensive so add up your expected costs up front so that you know what to expect and use that as motivation; note: fee waivers are available for qualified students so be sure to look into that.

Step 6: Let's talk money



MBA programs are very expensive, but luckily there are a number of scholarship opportunities to explore. Consider possible ways you can start saving now by reducing lifestyle expenses like housing costs.

Research the cost of MBA programs and build a budget and savings plan. Take into account expenses outside of tuition, including test prep courses and/or tutoring, GRE & GMAT tests, application costs, possible relocation, etc.

There are many scholarships available for students from underrepresented backgrounds (first generation college students, first generation students pursuing a professional degree, etc.)

- [The Consortium](#)
- [MLT](#)
- [Forte](#)



5 things you can do to prepare now

1. Start networking and learning about MBA programs
2. Make an Early Career Plan & outline tangible goals to get there.
3. Cultivate mentorships and don't drop them after you get a job or graduate.
4. Build a budget & take actions to start saving (save money on rent, work for a company that has programs to fund you).
5. Start studying for GMAT and GRE Spring Quarter (this is a difficult test, take this test sooner than later).