

MBAINTERVIEW RUBRIC & PREP

Presented By
Obinna Arizor and
Menlo Coaching

STAR FRAMEV

MBA INTERVIEW

Criteria

Personal Qualities: comment on the candidate's poise, professionalism, enthusiasm, humility, charisma, confidence, self-awareness? How would you describe their lodge, communication skills, attitude, istening skills?

Professional Potential: comment on the candidate's immediate and long-term career goals. Are they realistic? What is their plan B? Do you feel the candidate will be a successful business leader going forward? Comment on the candidate's professional impact to date.

School Fit: Why did the candidate apply to this school? How well researched were they? Do you think this candidate will be an active member of clubs/groups on campus? Would you want this candidate in your class?

English Proficiency: was the candidate's delivery of speech smooth and natural? Was the candidate easily understood and did were their listening comprehension skills strong? Were the candidate's statements grammatically correct and did they use different tenses?

Sample Questions

Tell me about yourself. Tell me about a time when you failed. Tell me about a time when meone changed your perspective. How do you balance being a leader and a do-er?

What are your goals post-MBA? Tell me about your work right now. What is your leadership style and how have you demonstrated it? How have you handled conflict in the workplace?

Why this school, and why now? How will you contribute to this school? What clubs do you plan on participating in and what do you hope to contribute? Where does this school place in your rankings? Do you have any questions for me?

English proficiency will be assessed throughout the interview.

A NOTE FROM OBINNA

As Menlo Coaching's Head of Interview Prep and a Tuck MBA, I've sat on both sides of the MBA interview table, and I know just how nerve-racking the MBA interview process can be.

That said, there's also no greater feeling than walking away from an interview knowing that you've accurately represented your experience, your talents, and the amount of work you've put into preparation.

If you've been invited to interview at an MBA program, firstly: congratulations! I'm pleased to tell you that **your chances of admission could be as high as 50%**—so that acceptance letter is yours to lose.

This guide aims to give you an understanding of the evaluation criteria MBA interview teams have in mind throughout the interview. I suggest you read this guide and practice independently first. Then, ask a friend to interview you, paying close attention to what admissions committees are looking for.

This rubric is grounded in real experience on MBA interview teams at several top programs, but accurate evaluation is a skill. Not everyone can hear the difference between a 6/10 answer and a 9/10 answer—or coach you from one to the other. If you want absolute clarity on where you stand and honest, actionable feedback you can apply immediately, book an MBA mock interview with my team. We'll simulate your target school's format, score you against this rubric, and teach you what to fix, what to keep, and how to show up as your best self.

Best of luck with your interviews!



Olinna Arizot,
Sr. Admissions Consultant &
Head of Interview Prep



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menlocoaching.com/mba-admissions-interview-prep/

QUICK TIPS

ONLINE VS. IN-PERSON

Most MBA programs make it known that your decision on whether to interview in person or online will not impact your odds of admission. For this reason, it's advisable to choose the option that is most practical for you.

That said, **I advise MBA applicants to choose the format they believe will allow them to make the best impression**. If you struggle to develop rapport over a brief video call, then an in-person interview might be worth the additional cost and inconvenience. If the familiarity of your home office will ease your nerves, then an online interview is the safer choice.

Many applicants believe that traveling to the interview location shows commitment to the program. While this may be true, your commitment to attending the program will likely have been demonstrated in your application already and, over the course of the interview, your interest in and knowledge of the program will be self-evident if you are sufficiently prepared.

WHAT TO WEAR

In most situations, it's safest to **err on the side of formality**. While a full suit and tie might not be expected for a virtual interview with an alumnus or current student, I have never seen a candidate dinged for wearing an outfit that showed that they were "too serious" about their interview. This is especially true if you're coming from high finance or consulting, where business formal is the standard.

Applicants should avoid bold colors or patterns that are likely to distract from the interview itself. And ideally, you should choose an outfit that you've worn before and feel both comfortable and confident in wearing.

QUICK TIPS

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After your interview, **you should send a thank-you note as a token of gratitude to the person who has spent their time on your application**. For the majority of applicants, it's unlikely that this note will be the factor that determines whether you're admitted or rejected, but it's good form.

Send your note within 24 hours. Often, an interviewer's writeup to the admissions committee is due 24–48 hours after the conversation, so realistically you'll only benefit from sending the note *before* that cut-off point.

Avoid platitudes and generic statements. It's good practice to include 1 or 2 specific tidbits from your actual conversation. "It was very reassuring to hear from you about Tuck's philosophy on ..."; "Thank you for sharing your summer experience at Bain and how the Consulting Club aided your case interview prep ..."

Finally, have a colleague, friend, or your admissions consultant read it before you hit send. Mistakes won't be received favorably. Making one or more could raise the question of whether you would do so during recruiting, and if your thank-you note doesn't illustrate that you can communicate effectively, then you may not be ready for the rigor of the classroom environment—specifically the case method. One of our consultants recalls interviewing a candidate whose candidacy he was fond of based on her interview, but whose thank-you note was so poorly written that it introduced significant doubt.

Finally, what *NOT* to do: write every single day, show up unannounced at the admissions office, leave handwritten notes on the interviewer's car. (Yes, all these things have happened, and no, none of them led to an admission offer.)

WHEN TO BOOK A MOCK SESSION

If your stats match those of your school, you can safely book a mock session early. While some applicants fear "jinxing" their interview invite, I encourage clients to get a call on the calendar sooner rather than later to allow for more scheduling flexibility and better, calmer reps.

Sample Answers for Common Questions

Question: "Tell me about yourself."

Good Answer: "My name is John Smith. I attended Georgetown University, where I studied mathematics. I graduated and started working for Microsoft, where I've been for the past five years now. I've realized that I've loved my time at Microsoft, but I'm looking for something different.

"Specifically, I want to pivot into brand management. I want an MBA so that I can learn more about consumer behavior, learn more about leadership. I think that once I go into brand management, the types of companies that I would like to work for are ones like Unilever or Colgate Palmolive. And that's a little bit about me."

Great Answer: "My name is John Smith. I grew up living in seven different countries before graduating high school, and that experience gave me a deep appreciation for diverse cultures and perspectives.

"I went on to study mathematics and international relations at Georgetown University, where I also took on leadership roles in a professional business fraternity. After graduating, I joined Microsoft. Over the past five years, I've worked across strategy, sales, and product and been selected for the CEO's leadership development program. I also earned an early promotion from Senior Associate to Vice President.

"These experiences have shown me the power of combining analytical thinking with people-centered leadership, and they've inspired me to pursue an MBA as the next step in my journey. I'm particularly excited about transitioning into brand management at global companies like Unilever or Colgate-Palmolive, where I can bring together my international background, leadership experience, and passion for understanding consumers."

See Analysis on the next page ...

Sample Answers for Common Questions

Analysis: In the first answer, John jumps quickly into his MBA ambitions. While he clearly outlines his education, work experience, and career goals, the response feels generic and somewhat transactional. His interviewer walks away knowing *what* he wants to do, but not who he is or what makes him special.

In the second answer, John anchors his response in a unique and personal story: growing up in seven different countries before college. This detail immediately captures attention, distinguishes him from other candidates, and creates a natural throughline to his choice of Georgetown, his international perspective at Microsoft, and ultimately his desire to move into brand management.

He also strengthens the structure of his narrative:

- Past: International upbringing → Georgetown → leadership experience
- Present: Five years at Microsoft with cross-functional experience and recognition through leadership programs and promotions
- Future: An MBA as the bridge to a career in global brand management

This *storytelling approach* connects his goals to his personal background and professional experiences, making the response not only more memorable but also more authentic and compelling.

WHAT IF MY EXPERIENCE ISN'T AS "INTERESTING"?

It's highly likely you haven't lived in seven countries in your life, so what do you do if you don't have something interesting to anchor your answers to?

It may be hard to believe, but every MBA applicant will have several authentic and interesting points to share that will allow them to connect with the interviewer on a personal level. Speak with your friends and family—they know you better than anyone and can help you find the most interesting elements of your story.

This is also something we can help with in our **Mock Interview service**—see more details at the end of the document.

Sample Answers for Common Questions

Question: "Why MBA and why now?"

Good Answer: "I'm seeking an MBA because I want to pivot my career into management consulting. With roughly five years of work experience, this feels like the right time to pursue top-tier strategy consulting roles. I know the best avenue to get there is an MBA from a program like this."

Great Answer: "I'm pursuing an MBA to transition into management consulting, where I can apply structured problem-solving at scale. Over the past five years as an analyst and then associate, I've built strong execution skills, but I'm now running into scope limits that an MBA can address.

"Specifically, I want to deepen my general-management toolkit—accounting, marketing, and corporate strategy—so I can move from analysis to end-to-end recommendation and stakeholder leadership. I'm also seeking a rigorous environment to practice structured communication and client leadership through case-based courses and experiential projects, and to build a network of peers and alumni who are active in consulting.

"As for timing, I've reached an inflection point: I've mastered my current role, but to step into engagements that span multiple functions and industries, I need broader business fluency and accelerated exposure that I won't get on my current trajectory. An MBA provides that acceleration and positions me competitively for MBB recruiting. In return, I'll contribute hands-on experience from analytics-driven projects and mentorship to classmates targeting similar paths."

Sample Answers for Common Questions

Analysis: In the first answer, John's goal clarity is strong—AdComs appreciate candidates who state a concrete post-MBA path without ambiguity. However, two gaps weaken the response:

Skill specificity: He doesn't explain which capabilities he needs (e.g., accounting, marketing, strategy, client leadership) to succeed in consulting.

Why now rationale: Timing is justified mainly by "five years of experience." Years alone aren't persuasive; AdComs look for an inflection point—evidence that the candidate has outgrown the current role and needs broader training and exposure to advance.

The second answer fixes both issues. John connects his current experience (analyst \rightarrow associate) to the gaps that constrain his growth, then names the skills and experiences the MBA will provide (core disciplines, structured communication, experiential learning, recruiting access, and network). He reframes "why now" around readiness and ceiling—he's mastered his lane and needs cross-functional fluency and acceleration to lead engagements—rather than citing tenure.

The result is a more credible, memorable, and admissions-friendly narrative: Clear goal \rightarrow Defined gaps \rightarrow MBA resources that close those gaps \rightarrow Timing tied to an inflection point \rightarrow Contribution to the community

Sample Answers for Common Questions

Question: "Why this school?"

Good Answer: "I'm applying to this program because it has a strong reputation and consistently places graduates into top consulting firms. I'm looking for a rigorous academic environment with a collaborative culture, and from what I've seen, this school offers exactly that. The core curriculum appears comprehensive, and the electives seem well aligned with strategy and leadership—both areas I want to deepen before recruiting.

"I've also been impressed by the alumni network and the professional clubs; several students and alumni told me they felt well supported during recruiting and that the community is tight-knit. Given the program's outcomes, culture, and network—plus its location and access to firms—I'm confident it's the right platform for my pivot into consulting."

Great Answer: "I'm applying here for three specific reasons: consulting preparation and outcomes; early, hands-on projects; and culture and values.

"In conversations with second-year leaders of the Consulting Club, I learned about the school's structured first-year playbook—case prep squads, weekly drills, and alumni-led workshops—that help students earn summer offers and convert them to full time. That systematic approach matches how I learn and the roles I'm targeting.

"The First-Year Project gives students a chance to apply classroom concepts to real clients before recruiting. Alums told me it functions like a 'mini-internship,' sharpening problem framing, client communication, and team dynamics—all capabilities I want to strengthen before my summer.

"Across touchpoints—the on-campus visit where I spoke with John Doe and a regional info session with Jane Doe—I consistently heard about a community that prizes teamwork and feedback. That kind of environment is where I've done my best work and where I know I can contribute. (cont. on next page)

Sample Answers for Common Questions

Great Answer (cont.): "Taken together, these are differentiated strengths I haven't seen to the same degree elsewhere, and they align directly with my path into strategy consulting and how I learn."

Analysis: The first answer shows diligence and alignment with consulting, but it leans on rankings and broad claims that could describe many schools. It does not specify what you learned about the program, whom you learned it from, or why those elements make this school a better fit than its peers. We advise you to avoid rankings and focus on concrete takeaways.

The second answer follows that advice. It lists what John has learned about the program—e.g., the Consulting Club's structured first-year framework and the First-Year Project—and explains why those features matter for consulting preparation. It identifies who provided the insights (students at an on-campus visit and a regional information session), demonstrating genuine engagement. Finally, it frames the school as differentiated on culture—collaboration, teamwork, empathy—rather than on quantitative factors.

When you formulate your own response, state exactly what you discovered, from whom, and why each feature you mention is distinctive and relevant to your goals.

Sample Answers for Common Questions

Question: "Tell me about a time when you failed."

Good Answer: "In a challenging client meeting, my team delivered a model and materials that contained significant errors. I was responsible for assembling the analysis and the deck. We had been working long hours without clear guidance, and our engagement leader wasn't closely involved with what we were producing.

"The meeting went poorly, and the client's trust in us took a hit because of the mistakes in the deliverable. Looking back, if my engagement leader had been more in touch with our work and the team had not been stretched so thin, the errors likely wouldn't have happened. It was a tough outcome, and the experience underscored how damaging a flawed deliverable can be for a client relationship."

Great Answer: "We once delivered a major client deck with errors, and the meeting went poorly—my failure. I was managing analysts and associates, and I did not slow the team to ensure quality or escalate risks. Several expectations were lost in translation, and I kept pushing at an unsustainable pace despite signals from my team.

"The result was a loss of client trust. Since then, I've changed how I lead. I schedule regular check-ins with engagement leaders to align on scope and sequencing; I surface roadblocks early and propose trade-offs (timeline, scope, or client expectations) when quality is at risk; and I explicitly track sustainability, asking the team where things might fall through the cracks.

"These controls have helped me prevent similar issues, and they've improved both communication and deliverable quality. The experience taught me to own outcomes, not just effort, and to manage at the right altitude so that speed never overrides accuracy."

Sample Answers for Common Questions

Analysis: The first answer is candid and presents a real failure, which is valuable. However, it leans toward attributing the outcome to external factors —long hours and an uninvolved engagement leader—rather than taking full responsibility. It also stops short of explaining what was learned and what concrete steps were put in place to prevent a recurrence. We advise taking ownership and demonstrating the controls you adopted afterward to demonstrate both accountability *and* the ability to learn from your mistakes.

The revised answer corrects those issues. It assumes *clear ownership* of the poor meeting and *names the specific leadership misses*: allowing pace to outrun quality, failing to escalate risks, and letting expectations get lost in translation. It then *details the measures the interviewee put in place to prevent the same mistakes from happening again—including regular check-ins with the other members of the team, early risk surfacing with proposed trade-offs, and explicit attention to the long term.*

This makes the story credible and *coachable*: a real failure, owned directly, with precise lessons and mechanisms that prevent it from happening again.

INTERVIEW ANSWER FRAMEWORKS

How to Structure Interview Responses

Using interview frameworks give you a clear structure so you can think under pressure, cover what matters, and make your value obvious. The most widely used is **STAR—Situation, Task, Action, Result**—and for good reason: it forces a logical flow, keeps you from rambling, and helps the interviewer follow your story. You open by setting the scene (Situation), define what you owned (Task), walk through what you did (Action), and close with measurable outcomes (Result). STAR works especially well for classic prompts that start with "Tell me about a time...," "Give me an example...," or "Have you ever...," because it maps neatly to a discrete episode with a beginning, middle, and end.

A closely related option is **CARL: Context, Action, Results, Learning**. CARL includes an *explicit reflection step*. Used well, CARL elevates a competent story into evidence of growth: You show the system you built, the guardrails you added, or the mindset you shifted as a result.

Whichever you use, balance your time across the parts. Some candidates spend 60 seconds explaining the Situation or Context and only 10 seconds on Action and Results. Aim for a quick setup and emphasis on what you did and what happened as a result. Quantify your outcomes with results, stakeholder reactions, or lasting impact, and then—if using CARL—add one clear lesson and how you've applied it since.

Choose the framework that best suits the question. If the prompt asks for a concrete example with outcomes, STAR is a clean fit. If the prompt invites you to demonstrate growth, self-awareness, or recovery from failure, CARL's Learning step will likely deliver a stronger close. You can also blend them: Use STAR to structure the narrative and add a brief Learning coda.

On the following pages, we've included STAR and CARL worksheets to help you draft your answers. Use bullet points to help structure your stories.

STAR FRAMEWORK WORKSHEET

Story	Interview Question	Situation (~15s)	Task (~10s)	Action (45–60s)	Result (~15s)
Story 1					
Story 2					
Story 3					
Story 4 15					

CARL FRAMEWORK WORKSHEET

G				
Learning (~15s)				
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(80)				
Result (20–30s)				
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Action (~45–60s)				
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Acti				
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Context (~15s)				
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view				
Interview Question				
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Story	Story 1	Story 2	Story 3	Story 4

HOW TO USE THE RUBRIC

By the time you've read through this document, you should be well prepared for a mock interview with a friend, colleague, partner, or a member of your family. You've studied the difference between a strong answer and an excellent answer, you've practiced using the STAR and CARL frameworks, and all that's left to do is a dry run.

My team and I developed this rubric based on our experiences interviewing at various top MBA programs. While the specifics change slightly from school to school, what most MBA programs are evaluating can be distilled into the same four criteria:

- **Personal Qualities**—how do you hold and conduct yourself? Are you likeable and charismatic?
- **Professional Potential**—what are your career goals and are you primed to achieve them? How will an MBA help?
- **School Fit**—have you done sufficient research? Do you seem enthusiastic?
- English Proficiency / Communication Skills—can you present your points in a clear, articulate way?

To use this rubric, make sure your friend is primed on the difference between a good and a great answer, and tell them to pay attention to how well you structure your answers. Print the next page, and have them write very brief comments in the rightmost column, assigning a score out of 10 based on the answers you gave. It's important to choose someone you trust to be impartial, as those closest to us can be inclined to provide encouragement and hope over constructive criticism. Ask them to give you one piece of feedback to improve upon per criterion, then spend time working to improve on a maximum of four points, question by question, before attempting another mock interview. Your second mock interview can be with the same person or with another person you trust to offer honest, actionable feedback.

Remember: this rubric is grounded in real work on top-program interview teams, but accurate scoring is a skill. If you want absolute clarity and a prioritized drill plan, book an MBA mock interview with my team. We'll simulate the format of your target school, score you fairly, and coach the jump from "good" to "clear admit."

MBA INTERVIEW RUBRIC

Comments and Score (Out of 10)				
Sample Questions	Tell me about yourself. Tell me about a time when you failed. Tell me about a time when someone changed your perspective. How do you balance being a leader and a doer?	What are your goals post-MBA? Tell me about your work right now. What is your leadership style, and how have you demonstrated it? How have you handled conflict in the workplace?	Why this school, and why now? How will you contribute to this school? What clubs do you plan on participating in, and what do you hope to contribute? Where does this school place in your rankings? Do you have any questions for me?	English proficiency will be assessed throughout the interview rather than by specific questions.
Criteria	Personal Qualities: Comment on the candidate's poise, professionalism, enthusiasm, humility, charisma, confidence, self-awareness. How would you describe their body language, communication skills, attitude, listening skills?	Professional Potential: Comment on the candidate's immediate and long-term career goals. Are they realistic? What is their plan B? Do you feel the candidate will be a successful business leader going forward? Comment on the candidate's professional impact to date.	School Fit: Why did the candidate apply to this school? How thorough was their research? Do you think this candidate will be an active member of clubs/groups on campus? Would you want this candidate in your class?	English Proficiency: Was the candidate's delivery of speech smooth and natural? Could you easily understand the candidate, and were their listening comprehension skills strong? Were the candidate's statements grammatically correct, and did they use different tenses?

PERSONALIZED MBA INTERVIEW COACHING FOR THE M7 AND BEYOND

Our MBA interview prep covers every major format, from classic one-on-one interviews to the unique styles used by Harvard Business School and Wharton.

GENERAL MBA MOCK INTERVIEWS

ONE MOCK SESSIONS

\$650

1 hour total

TWO MOCK SESSIONS

\$1,300

2 hours total

MOST POPULAR

COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING

\$1,000

2 hours total

ONE MOCK
SESSION +
COMMUNICATIONS
TRAINING

\$1,650

3 hours total

Ace your MBA interviews with targeted prep that turns classic questions into compelling, well-structured stories, trains you for curveballs with actionable feedback and recordings, and offers one or two mock sessions plus optional communications training with Fearless Communicators—our public speaking coaching partners.

HBS AND WHARTON MOCK INTERVIEWS

Harvard and Wharton don't run "typical" MBA interviews. Our realistic mock sessions prepare you for both—sharpening quick, clear thinking, calm delivery, and team dynamics—so you walk in confident and ready. Learn more on the next page.



PERSONALIZED MBA **INTERVIEW COACHING** FOR THE M7 AND BEYOND

HBS MOCK INTERVIEWS

HBS's interview makes you the case—with fast, probing follow-ups on your application—so our mock session trains you to think on your feet, analyze and defend decisions, discuss strengths and weaknesses calmly, and stay organized under fire. You leave with targeted feedback to refine every answer.

> **ONE MOCK HBS INTERVIEW**

> > \$975

1 hour total

TWO MOCK HBS **INTERVIEWS**

\$1,950

2 hours total

MOST COMPREHENSIVE

ONE MOCK HBS INTERVIEW + COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING

\$1,975

3 hours total

WHARTON MOCK TBD

Wharton's Team-Based Discussion (TBD) tests how you collaborate while still standing out. Our realistic mock sessions prepare you for both—sharpening quick, clear thinking, calm delivery, and team dynamics—so you walk in confident and ready.



COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING

\$1,000

2 hours total



WHARTON MOCK

TBD SESSION

BEFORE YOU GO

You've just worked through a lot: quick tips, sample answers, frameworks, and the rubric I use to evaluate candidates. My advice now is simple: Practice on your own first, then have a friend interview you and score your answers against the rubric. Notice where you ramble, where your logic is fuzzy, and where your examples don't quite land—and tighten those gaps.

If you already have an interview invite, well done. That means the door is open. If you're still waiting, keep preparing; strong fundamentals pay off the minute you're called.

When you want a precise read on how you're performing—and coaching that you can apply immediately—book a mock interview with my team. We'll simulate your target school's format (including HBS and Wharton's TBD), press you with realistic follow-ups, score you against the rubric above, and show you exactly how to move an answer from "good" to "admit-ready."

Two easy next steps:

- 1. Ready to schedule? Go to <u>menlocoaching.com/mba-admissions-interview-prep</u> to build your interview prep package—mock(s) and, if helpful, communications training—and reserve your sessions.
- 2. Lingering questions? Email <u>info@menlocoaching.com</u> with your target school(s) and interview window, and we'll be happy to guide you.

I know the nervousness that comes with MBA interviewing—and the feeling of walking out knowing you showed yourself at your best. That's what we hope for you in your MBA interview.



Wishing you the best of luck,

Obinna Orizon

Head of Interview Prep, Menlo Coaching

