



65 Successful Harvard Business School Application Essays, Second Edition: With Analysis by the Staff of The Harbus, the Harvard Business School Newspaper

By Lauren Sullivan, The Staff of The Harbus

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YOUR LIFE . . . IN 300 WORDS OR LESS

It's a daunting task. Even the most seasoned professionals find business school application essays to be among the hardest pieces they ever write. With a diverse pool of talented people applying to the nation's top schools from the most successful companies and prestigious undergraduate programs in the world, a simple biography detailing accomplishments and goals isn't enough. Applicants need clear and compelling arguments that grab admissions officers and absolutely refuse to let go.

To help them write the essays that get them accepted into Harvard or any of the country's other top programs, the staff of *The Harbus*---HBS's student newspaper---have updated and revised their collection of sixty-five actual application essays as well as their detailed analysis of them so that applicants will be able to:

- * Avoid common pitfalls
- * Play to their strengths
- * Get their message across

Wherever they are applying, the advice and tested strategies in *65 Successful Harvard Business School Application Essays* give business professionals and undergraduates the insider's knowledge to market themselves most effectively and truly own the process.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

The Harbus is the official student newspaper of the Harvard Business School, the number-one business school in the country. This weekly has been providing the news to students, faculty, and alumni since 1937.

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Career Aspirations

What is your career vision and why is this choice meaningful to you?

So you have spent the last five years trolling the seas in a British Naval submarine, have been trading on the floor of the stock exchange, or have just recently graduated from college. Moreover, you have just spent several essays talking about your scintillating experiences of the last decade. Now it is time for you to answer what is arguably the most important question of the application: What do you want to be when you grow up? More precisely: what is your career vision and why do you need a Harvard MBA to achieve it? A well-structured response to this question will address four critical points.

First, what are your short-term and long-term career plans? Second, why is this your chosen path? Before you start writing your response, carefully consider both parts of the question. Do not only state a goal. Provide enough context so that the audience understands your decision-making process. This is especially important for applicants with traditional business school backgrounds who intend to return to their current fields. While it is nice that you still hope to find yourself at a prestigious consulting firm in ten years, ensure that you can articulate what about the job, specifically, really satisfies you. Above all, your career vision must be sincere and credible. If you want to be Chairman of the International Red Cross, fine, but ensure that you lay out a reasonable plan to get there.

After you have addressed what you want to do, explain why you need Harvard Business School to achieve your goals. It is important to note that the specificity with which the career question mentions HBS varies from year to year. However, just keep your audience in mind when crafting your response. Harvard's mission, after all, is "to educate leaders who make a difference in the world." But beyond the mission, keep in mind that the school has been working to differentiate itself from other business schools in a number of more subtle ways in recent years, launching among other things its Global Research Centers and its Healthcare Initiative.

Understanding your audience is useful advice when applying to any business school: make sure you understand the differences between the programs and tailor the response to your school of choice.

The final element that makes a career essay truly exceptional is a sentence or two in which the candidate thoughtfully highlights what he or she would bring to the HBS classroom. When incorporated, this touch proves that the applicant understands that HBS is a collaborative environment, in which the exchange of ideas by people of widely diverse backgrounds is what truly enables learning.

- Uma Subramanian

James Reinhart

Google went from college dorm project to search engine hegemon in twenty months. It took Steve Jobs only a short while to figure the stickiness of the iPod. Netflix is adding 80,000 subscribers a month. In the private sector innovation and adoption happen rapidly. A great idea, capable management, and the unwavering belief that you've either tapped an untapped market or you're creating a new one, inspire constant devotion to pushing the boundaries of what's possible.

Public education is the antithesis of this. We've been doing the same thing, albeit worse now than ever before, for more than a century. The US now ranks 21st out of the OECD's twenty-nine industrial nations in eighth grade math. More than a *million* kids dropped out of high school last year – twice the total population of the city of Boston; worse than that, of those who did graduate high school and enroll in college, roughly 40% will need remediation. This bankrupt system is ripe for some creative destruction. And in a small corner of California, in “middle class America”, that's what I plan to do.

I imagine an America where our schools can do better. Where public-private partnerships, dotcom inspiration and savvy edupreneurs can revolutionize “the business of education” in America. It's already starting to happen in some areas – KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), Aspire, Achievement First, Uncommon Schools – but their theory of change is all wrong. Their “no excuses” approach gives most districts lots of excuses as to why it's not scalable.

At the Beacon Education Network we're going to take the same dollars and demonstrate how district schools can increase efficiency, become more accountable for results, recruit and retain higher quality teachers, and deliver an improved student experience. It's not just about money. It's about rearranging the allocation of resources to increase productivity and paying attention to the prevailing research (there are just as many inconvenient truths about education as there are about global warming). It's also about reimagining what's possible.

The same way Google, Apple, and Netflix are shining a light on what's possible in the private sector, we need a similar Beacon for improving the management of public education. And that's my dream – first with Beacon, then to the Gates Foundation, maybe to New Schools Venture Fund and eventually to Capitol Hill. I can't envision a more fulfilling or high-impact career than infusing competition into public education, improving school efficiency, reducing the anti-meritocratic influence of teachers unions, and improving the quality and pay of great teachers.

Analysis

James crafts a very effective essay, marked by passionate intensity and unbending logic. He successfully solves the problem encountered by many non-traditional applicants who must explain why a business career makes sense for them.

In this case, James implicitly parallels the needs of the American education system to those of a well-run business. He achieves this by opening with a general statement on how ideas can turn into thriving businesses. He follows with facts about the U.S. education system with the direct implication that it is in dire need of new ideas. The introduction sets the stage for his vision of an improved public education system in the U.S. Furthermore, James writes compellingly about his views and provides specific actions he believes should be taken, thereby delivering a hopeful yet realistic vision. Moreover, James' passion for education is clear, making the reader want to him realize his vision as it sets the premises for a better future for many. Indeed, James speaks as an impassioned leader who is likely to gather many followers and have a significant impact on communities in which he will live. In doing so, James successfully positions himself as one of the leaders Harvard Business School seeks to educate: leaders who make a difference in the world.

The only critique of this essay is that James spends the entire first paragraph setting the scene for his vision. In an essay limited to a 400 words, every sentence is valuable. James could have benefited from spending a sentence or two describing his background and why an MBA will help him achieve his goals.

ETHICAL ISSUES

In your career, you will have to deal with many ethical issues. What are likely to be the most challenging and what is your plan for developing the competencies you will need to handle these issues effectively?

This topic represents a slight twist on traditional ethics questions that focus on a dilemma applicants have experienced firsthand: It is forward-looking, asking applicants to anticipate challenges they may encounter in the future as business leaders. Applicants may wish to use this opportunity to expand on their career goals or to address ethical issues that are specific to their chosen industry or job function. Despite the forward-looking nature of the question, students may wish to draw on past experiences handling difficult ethical dilemmas and demonstrate how this has shaped their principles as well as their plans for handling such issues in the future.

As with the other essay topics, simply relating a story is insufficient. Successful applicants also describe clearly what makes the anticipated issues so challenging. Successful applicants will also clearly answer the question's second component: What is your plan for developing the competencies you will need to handle these issues effectively? Applicants may wish to consider short-term and long-term plans, who will be involved, and why this plan will effectively prepare them for the specific challenges presented in the first half of the essay.

For many applicants, ethics may be extremely personal, and this topic provides a unique chance to share their personal views on ethics in a business context. While instinct is naturally a critical guide to action, it is important to note that people's instincts often differ and that few people have the ability to automatically

identify all of the ethical issues involved in complex business contexts. While instincts and underlying principles should not be ignored, it is important to demonstrate your ability to identify, analyze, and resolve challenging ethical issues in a robust, structured fashion.

- Will Boland

Paul Yeh

The automotive industry is under duress. Company executives are cutting healthcare benefits, freezing pensions, and laying off workers. While corporations have responsibilities toward their stakeholders, how does an executive balance between his employees and shareholders? As I continue my career in the automotive business, I will undoubtedly face the ethical issues of balancing between profits and people.

During the Explorer launch, I experienced one such issue. On the chassis assembly line, Ted, an operator, complained that his hands were becoming numb from trying to insert a part. The engineer's solution was to revise the attachment, but it would cost \$70,000 to retool the part. Typically, the finance department would reject such issue because the measured insertion effort was within the UAW contract. But contract or no, it seemed wrong to cause an employee to damage himself. So, I tried Ted's job for 30 minutes. I picked up the part, walked six-feet toward the assembly line, and pushed the part into the frame. The first dozen were effortless. However, I noticed that the repetitive motion strained the wrist. I wanted to fix the issue, but approving an expensive change when Ford is not liable is a hard-sell to management. Rather than approving or rejecting the costly solution outright, I brainstormed with the engineer and explored alternatives. Two days later, we came up with a cost-efficient way of lubricating the attachment for easier insertion. The material costs less than \$20,000, and I convinced the finance management to accept. Ted was extremely appreciative: he gave me a bear hug.

To continue developing my competencies, I will observe how Rick Wagoner, Lee Iacocca, and other executives balance profitability with employees. I will then discuss their rationales with renowned professors such as Malcolm Salter who has done extensive research in the automotive industry. Harvard professors will help me understand each situation's intricacies and in turn cultivate my decision-making process.

Additionally, I will continue to interact with Detroit Executive Service Corps volunteers, most of whom are retired automotive executives. Similar to Harvard's Leadership and Values Initiative Speaker Series, I will learn from these leaders' experiences and see what competencies have been practiced, and which have worked and which have not.

Finally, I will continue to go to the front-line so I can assess each issue effectively. Then, armed with the academic training and practices from courses such as *The Moral Leader*, I am confident that I will be able to approach and resolve challenging ethical issues.

Analysis

Much of Paul's success lies in his ability to clearly address each component of the question presented. He clearly describes the challenges he anticipates, offers a compelling ethical dilemma that helped shape this view, and spends roughly one-third of his essay describing his development plan. Throughout the essay,

Paul keeps his discussion grounded in specifics related to his prior experiences and future goals rather than offering generic philosophies. Furthermore, by weaving in personal anecdotes such as jumping onto the line and receiving a bear hug from the line worker, Paul adds life to the page, engenders credibility, and reveals new elements of his personality such as his determination, persistence, and empathy.

This essay also provides an example of someone clearly capable of identifying, analyzing, and resolving an ethical issue in the face of significant political obstacles. Paul not only identifies an ethical dilemma but also considers thoroughly the implications and consequences of different plans of action. Given the limited liability and cost containment pressures facing his employer, Paul knows that a simple argument of the principles and an expensive retooling effort are not likely to be successful. Recognizing this obstacle, Paul engages his colleagues to devise a more pragmatic solution that was able to survive a bureaucratic review due to its lower cost. By developing a clear understanding of the problem, brainstorming various solutions, and analyzing likely consequences, Paul dramatically improves his chances of achieving his goals. Altogether, Paul's essay paints a picture of a likeable, dynamic, and pragmatic leader with significant initiative and leadership ability. Moreover, Paul demonstrates that a specific, in-depth example can powerfully convey an applicant's leadership style and personal ethical framework for approaching controversial issues.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bradley Simpson:

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Ann Cason:

People live in this new day time of lifestyle always try and and must have the spare time or they will get lots of stress from both way of life and work. So , when we ask do people have time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not just a robot. Then we ask again, what kind of activity have you got when the spare time coming to a person of course your answer will certainly unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading ebooks. It can be your alternative with spending your spare time, the particular book you have read is 65 Successful Harvard Business School Application Essays, Second Edition: With Analysis by the Staff of The Harbus, the Harvard Business School Newspaper.

Adam Hay:

Reading can be called mind hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book particularly book entitled 65 Successful Harvard Business School Application Essays, Second Edition: With Analysis by the Staff of The Harbus, the Harvard Business School Newspaper your mind will drift away through every dimension, wandering in most aspects that maybe not known for but surely can become your mind friends. Imaging each and every word written in a book then become one web form conclusion and explanation that will maybe you never get prior to. The 65 Successful Harvard Business School Application Essays, Second Edition: With Analysis by the Staff of The Harbus, the Harvard Business School Newspaper giving you a different experience more than blown away your mind but also giving you useful information for your better life on this era. So now let us demonstrate the relaxing pattern this is your body and mind will probably be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a casino game. Do you want to try this extraordinary investing spare time activity?

Andre Barrett:

Your reading sixth sense will not betray you actually, why because this 65 Successful Harvard Business School Application Essays, Second Edition: With Analysis by the Staff of The Harbus, the Harvard Business School Newspaper publication written by well-known writer who knows well how to make book that could be understood by anyone who else read the book. Written within good manner for you, still dripping with every idea and creating skill only for eliminate your own hunger then you still hesitation 65 Successful Harvard Business School Application Essays, Second Edition: With Analysis by the Staff of The Harbus, the Harvard Business School Newspaper as good book not only by the cover but also by the content. This is one guide that can break don't determine book by its protect, so do you still needing one more sixth sense to pick this!? Oh come on your reading through sixth sense already alerted you so why you have to listening to another sixth sense.

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