

A. Very Important HR Questions to prepare for MBA Interviews:

1) Briefly introduce yourself.

- a) Keep your answer 60-90 seconds long.
- b) It should cover your name, age, place of birth, one line about your parents, schooling, graduation, major achievements, previous workex, and hobbies.
- c) Sell your story confidently.
- d) Turn it into a story - don't be very generic.
- e) Give the interviewers some keywords to take the conversation forward.
- f) Most important question and sets the tone for most interviews - prepare very well.
- g) End with a catchy phrase or line if possible.

Sample Answer

Hello, my name is Vishal Gowda. I was born in Nagpur but moved to Bangalore when I was very young and have lived here all my life.

Coming from a background where both my parents were Professors, I was academically inclined from a young age. I was the institute topper in my board exams and simultaneously cracked competitive exams like NTSE and KVPY. Apart from this, I played volleyball for the institute teams and took part in inter-school competitions. I also headed the fundraising team for my PU college fest.

I am a Computer Science graduate from RV College of Engineering, Bangalore. During my undergraduate, I founded the coding club along with a few friends, where we helped freshers who did not have a background in coding get up to speed and learn the basics. I have also worked on a research project and published a paper in the International Journal of CSE on 'Novel water systems for Smart cities'.

After my undergrad, I worked for a year at GE Healthcare where I got to work on diverse tasks that tested my technical as well as managerial aspects. After this, I have been working at Intel since January 2021 where I had the chance to work on Intel's 12th and 13th generation processors.

Occasionally, I enjoy traveling, especially to beaches and national parks. I have visited nine countries so far and plan to push that number to ten this year. I also love to solve aptitude and mathematics questions and play games based around them such as chess and minesweeper. If I had to describe myself in 3 words, it would be Creative, Curious, and Competitive.

2) Tell us something that is not there in your Resume / Application Form.

- a) Different way of asking you to introduce yourself with a little twist.
- b) Go through the application form before your interview and check what is already covered before framing this answer.
- c) If everything you can answer is already covered in the form, you can ideally speak about something you have taken up recently - such as a new book or a sport or any activity and how it has helped you.
- d) If nothing else comes to your mind, just speak about your journey through CAT and your interview preparation and what all you learnt from them. (This is what I did. Perfectly acceptable answer - One of the main reasons I scored one of the highest interview scores in my IIM Calcutta interview)

3) What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- a) Prepare 3 strengths and 3 weaknesses for the worst case.
- b) Some weaknesses are just not acceptable, avoid them.
- c) Have a story of any situation to back up your claims for every strength and weakness.
- d) Have one or two lines to show what you are doing or have done to overcome your weaknesses.

Sample Answer (for 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses)

I believe perseverance is one of my biggest strengths. I like to tie up all loose ends when doing something even if it means taking up a task no one wants to do or a task that is not absolutely necessary but adds some additional value as I believe the learning that comes from these tasks will be helpful somewhere in the future. For example, while working on a research paper during my undergraduate, we had the software model and the virtual part of it ready but were debating whether to build the hardware as it was for a computer science journal. I decided to take up this task and completed the development in a few days. This enabled us to put forth proof in our paper that the model actually works and add some interesting pictures to our paper. This later helped me land the off-campus job at Intel as my interviewer was impressed with my inter-disciplinary knowledge.

Competitiveness is another one of my strengths. In some instances, this could be a negative thing but over time I have learned how to derive the good aspects from healthy competition and separate it from toxicity. There is a lot that can be learned by comparing ourselves to people around us and I believe if done in a positive manner, everyone would benefit from it. I do not have a specific example for this, but this is something I try to inculcate in my daily life to benchmark my performance and improve myself.

Coming from a background where for most of my childhood I communicated with friends and family in my native language, complex English vocabulary has always been a challenge to grasp. For example, be it my work emails or communication, I feel I have a lot to learn and improve in this regard. Preparing for MBA exams and interviews by reading articles and news has helped me catch up in this area and I would like to continue doing this to further improve myself.

Maintaining a planned schedule and planning tasks for the day-to-day activities is something I struggle with. I faced this problem, especially during the second and third years of my undergrad when I first started living by myself and as a result, my academic scores dropped slightly. Over time especially during my workex, I have learned to overcome this shortcoming and try to maintain a small list of tasks I want to get achieved within a specified period of time.

4) Why MBA / Statement of Purpose?

- a) Another very important question asked in many interviews. Ideally answer should be 90-120 seconds long. Practice the delivery well.
- b) Important to sound very convincing and confident even if the content is average.
- c) Be ready for all possible follow up questions.
- d) I personally like to follow this format - Due to my past experience with X, I am interested to do Y and an MBA would give me Z.
- e) An MBA should be a connect between where you are now and where you would like to be. It should not be your end goal.
- f) Be very specific about what you are expecting to gain through an MBA and how it will further your goals.

Sample Answer

I spent a year working at GE Healthcare, first as an intern and then as an application developer in the digital technology team as a technical counterpart of the Manufacturing team. During this time, I worked on solving customers functional and technical business issues for the offered products. I spent significant time on the shop floor of GE's manufacturing unit in Bangalore. I understood the application of the products from a user's perspective, the challenges they were facing while using the products, and what could make their jobs easier. I got to work on a few product management projects to improve user experience with added functionalities such as better design, more custom features, integration of functions, etc., and developing user stories for these improvements. I was awarded the GE Quarterly recognition award twice for my work. I also had the opportunity to interact with many talented product managers and pitch the ideas that I came up with to them.

This, along with similar experiences at Intel, where I have been working since then, has ignited my curiosity to pursue a career in Product Management as it best aligns with my skills and interests. I would have the chance to work with diverse people, from marketing, engineering, and design to upper management and customers. This would broaden my overall knowledge of how various verticals function independently and with each other in a company. I believe that to be successful in this journey and build practical, efficient, and innovative products, one needs to be proactive and understand future market needs and customer expectations. This requires excellent foresight, customer/market research skills, budgeting, and thought leadership, which an MBA provides through various means. The product case competitions I would participate in, a case-based curriculum that would give proven examples and stories of successful products, and the chance to join the product management club and interact and learn from like-minded people would significantly boost my knowledge. An MBA would also enhance some of the skills I already possess to excel in the field, such as basic analytics, problem-solving ability, analytical thinking, and an understanding of essential tools and techniques used to manage product development activities. Companies are looking for the best candidates to fill these roles, and the chance to network with and learn from the alums of the college who are already working in such positions would open many doors to better opportunities.

5) What are your long-term and short-term goals?

- a) Be very specific and short. Answer should not exceed 45-60 seconds.
- b) Short-term goal should contain what domain you want to work in, what skills you wish to gain from an MBA, and a line about exploring opportunities during MBA if possible.
- c) Long-Term goals should include where you see yourself in the long run, be it a CXO or VP in an organization, or starting your own company, etc. I also like to add a line about how you plan to contribute to society - creating job opportunities, social initiatives, etc.
- d) Show you are passionate and excited to look forward to the future while answering.

Sample Answer

My short-term career goal is to gain the above skills (mentioned in Why MBA answer) and experiences in multiple industries. So far, my exposure has been limited to software products. I want to utilize my time during and after an MBA to get more diverse experience and understand the other types of products.

My long-term career goal would be to discover a niche industry of interest and work towards perfecting my technical skills. Eventually, I would also aim to progress up the ladder and contribute my best to the company I work for by making high-impact decisions that create jobs and generate revenue, thereby contributing to society.

6) What is your greatest success and biggest failure

- a) Give a genuine answer for this one.
- b) Show how that failure changed you for the better.
- c) Don't overdo the success story, keep it humble and highlight you recognize that many factors contributed to your success.

Sample Answer (2 successes and 1 failure)

I would say my biggest success till now is scoring in the top 0.08 percentile in CAT. I had to get back into the mindset of a competitive examination almost 6 years after I had an unsuccessful attempt at JEE. This would not have been possible without personal growth finding my passion during these 6 years putting in the right amount of effort and dedicating time to my preparation while working a full-time job simultaneously.

During my time at Intel, I got a customer issue from Dell that there was a technical issue on one of the Dell Horizon laptop versions that were affecting their deadlines. I was informed on a Friday that the deadline would cross the next Wednesday. So, I had to root cause the issue and develop a fix in 5 days for an extremely complicated issue that involved a lot of domains I had no expertise on. I consider this a huge success in my professional career because along with my technical skills, it was also a testament to my managerial and communication skills as I had to pull in a lot of people working around the world on the weekend, balance a lot of opinions from more experienced engineers and finally take a call based on my intuition. I was able to make the right decision and had a firmware fix for the customer by Monday in just 3 days that involved no extra hardware cost.

My biggest failure was failing to utilize all the opportunities that my undergraduate program provided to the maximum potential. I missed a lot of potential internships, research, and exchange programs due to a lack of a clear vision of what I wanted to do after I graduated. If given the opportunity, this is something I would like to change about my past and having understood the importance of such opportunities, I will not repeat the same while pursuing my higher education.

7) What do you exactly do at work? / Describe a typical day at work.

- a) Start with your organization name, vertical name, team description, designation and your manager's designation.
- b) Highlight all your roles, responsibilities, and achievements in a structured manner.
- c) Mention what your team does as a whole and your role within the team.
- d) Briefly explain the technology and tools that you use at work.
- e) Don't beat around the bush, keep it to the point. Expect cross-questions from various angles and be prepared to answer them.
- f) Your answer should ideally be 90-120 seconds long.
- g) Make sure you do not say anything that contradicts what you have written in your application form.

8) Who is your role model in life?

- a) Come up with someone that fits your profile specifically instead of someone very generic and well-known.
- b) Personally I would try to avoid role models like father, mother, and other family members and friends as it discourages further conversation and brings out a more emotional angle. (Could work if planned well)
- c) Turn the answer into a story and list out some of the key learnings from the person.
- d) Begin with how you came across them and what exactly inspired you about them. The answer should be less than 60 seconds long.

Sample Answer

I don't follow any single person religiously and rather am inspired by some incidents and achievements of people. For example, while I may not agree with some of his views, I am inspired by the achievements and vision of Elon Musk. If I had to pick a single role model, I would choose Morris Chang. I came across his story when I started working at Intel as it is associated with an interesting lesson here. He was an MIT and Harvard graduate who founded TSMC after working for 25 years at TI. He saw the need for mass manufacture when everyone else was focused on innovation and research and considered just manufacturing processors as menial work. Due to his foresight and early start, TSMC today controls a quarter of the Semiconductor supply of the world and 90% of advanced semiconductors manufacture. This goes to show the importance of humility and not to consider any type of work as something that is menial and requires less skill.

B. Other questions you should prepare for if time permits or at least have a rough framework in mind.

- 1) What does success mean to you?
- 2) What is an incident that influenced you the most?
- 3) When was the last time you lied?
- 4) How would people describe you?
- 5) Why should we select you? / What do you bring to the table?
- 6) Why should we not select you? Give any one reason why we should reject you.
- 7) Why did you do your undergrad in X when you were not sure? / Did you not end up wasting another candidate's seat?
- 8) Why would you be a good manager?
- 9) Which specialization would you like to opt for in an MBA?
- 10) Why MBA after an undergrad in X? Why not pursue higher studies in that same X?
- 11) Why are your 10th or 12th or Grad CGPA scores low?
- 12) What is your favorite company to work for?
- 13) What is the difference between a leader and manager according to you?
- 14) Explain one incident where you demonstrated X (any quality or skill)?

To answer these type of questions, follow the following points:

- a) *Pick out 5-6 different types of incidents from your life - can be during your school, undergrad, some examination's preparation, work or personal events. Write a detailed story using STAR framework (Situation, Tasks, Actions, Results) for all of them and practice the delivery in 45-60 seconds.*

- b) Whatever situational type question comes at you in any interview, try to spin one of these 5-6 incidents as an answer with slight on-spot modifications. Take 15-20 seconds before you start your answer for these type of questions, makes it look more genuine.*
- c) The way you deliver the answers matters a lot, so practice a lot.*

C. Some important points to keep in mind.

- 1) HRQs are extremely important and the most vague and hardest part of the interview preparation. So, the earlier you start, the better.*
- 2) Take breaks in between writing answers. It keeps you more creative and helps you brainstorm.*
- 3) Get your answers reviewed by mentors (whether you have opted for a paid course or are reaching out to seniors on LinkedIn) multiple times and use their suggestions to reframe your answers.*
- 4) Don't be very truthful or blatantly lie while writing your answers. The ideal way is to highlight your failures and successes both in the best way possible to the interviewers.*
- 5) Your end goal is to come up with an interesting answer that would impress the interviewers and leave an impression.*
- 6) Well written stories are much more powerful than any of us realize in convincing people. They are better than generic answers any day.*