

## THE ATTAIN JOURNAL

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The Attain Journal brings you news, announcements, key dates and tips to help you throughout the college & MBA planning process. To sign up for the newsletter, visit: <http://www.attain-group.com/content/contact.html>

See our new resources page, which features informative links and reading suggestions on admissions, test taking, and scholarships:

<http://www.attain-group.com/content/resources.html>

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### MBA RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Getting the right recommendations can be complicated because they are one of the aspects of your application of which you have the least control. While most recommendations are favorable; don't rest on your laurels, as all recommendations are not created equal. I have heard and witnessed several recommendation horror stories. Some of these horror stories feature those who agreed to write a recommendation and were well meaning, but they simply didn't take the time to do a stellar job for the applicant.

Below are some tips on how to successfully manage the recommendation process.

1. Start putting together an initial list of people who will possibly write a recommendation, and think about how you will approach them. Make this early list a long one – you can prune it later. Plan to ask one person too many in case one person's letter isn't completed in time. Most MBA programs request two or three letters of recommendation or that you have two or three references complete a recommendation form. When you finalize your list, make sure to choose people with whom you have had various types of working experiences so that each can give a different perspective on your candidacy.
2. Plan to ask early. Hopefully you are thinking ahead about applying to school. Be sure to allow enough time for each person to write the letter. Most experts suggest at least

two or three months before your deadline. I recommend that you talk to them as soon as possible – even 6 months to a year before you plan to apply.

3. Make sure to ask people who know you -- and whom you know will give you a strong recommendation. The best choices are people in business. In business, consider asking your current supervisor (if appropriate), a former supervisor, or a current or former co-worker. I want to stress that you should know for certain that this person will give you a strong recommendation. You should ask people who strongly believe in your candidacy. They don't need to have fancy titles, but they should be people who really like you, want to see you do well, and who can directly comment on your leadership potential.

4. Have an initial meeting or phone call with those who may potentially write a recommendation to give them a heads up on your plans and your deadlines. Bring your resume to this meeting. Bring other materials as appropriate, such as drafts of your essays. You should plan to stay in contact with them as the deadlines approach. It's best to provide each person who agrees to write a recommendation a copy of your current resume or CV and a summary of your key skills and accomplishments. Provide them with a personal fact sheet so they have information at their fingertips. Tell them what to stress and/or show them the form and your personal statement. You may also want to supply them with the reasons why you are interested in going back to school for your MBA, and perhaps a copy of your completed application form.

5. Some people who are considering writing a recommendation may ask for a rough draft of a letter of recommendation. Whether you write such a draft is up to you. If you do decide to draft the letter, consider asking a friend or outside source to help you draft and edit it. You want to make sure that the letter is not written in your style or tone. Another option if you don't feel comfortable drafting the letter yourself is to ask the person if the two of you can set up a time to draft the letter together.

Be sure to follow-up about a month before the deadline. And once each has written and sent the recommendation, be sure to send a thank you note expressing your appreciation of their efforts. Including a gift or small token of appreciation is optional. However, most will be pleased to receive a thoughtful thank you – so don't feel as though you have to give a fancy gift. Send a thank you note after they submit your recommendation, but also remember to let them know whether or not you got into school once you receive admit decisions!

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## QUESTIONS FROM THE ATTAIN INBOX

We receive a lot of questions daily in the Attain Inbox. Many of them center around the same theme as there are some common issues that everyone thinks about. Here, we'll answer some of those questions. If you have questions that you would like answered, feel free to send us a note at [info@attain-group.com](mailto:info@attain-group.com):

1. My GMAT score is 610 (or 470 or 590 or 770), where should I apply?

First, remember that the GMAT is only one component that the admissions committee considers when reviewing your application. It's impossible to say where you should apply based solely on a test score. Do some research and view the web sites of several business schools. If your GMAT score falls comfortably within the range of the schools you are interested in, those are realistic target schools. You might also want to choose a "stretch" school and some safeties.

2. I've taken the GMAT twice already. What I'd like to know is whether the Top 30 B-schools care about how many times the applicants take the test? How many times is too much? Also, will they average my scores?

Most schools will look at your highest score, but it varies by school so this is a question for you to ask the admissions office of your target school.

3. Should I apply in third round?

I don't recommend that you target the third round to apply. But remember that people do get admitted via third round applications. Generally, if your application and essays are not ready by second round, it's better to submit your application in the third round if that extra time will help you turn "okay" essays into "wow" essays.



## FIVE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

1. Colleges look at more than just your test scores and your GPA

While you should try to do as well as you can in your courses and on standardized tests, remember that most selective schools look at many factors when determining whether or not to admit you. While many differ in admissions philosophies, most schools weigh several things when reviewing your application: GPA, ACT or SAT score, course selection, class rank, extracurricular activities, essays, letters of recommendation, interviews and the diversity you bring to the class. To find out how the colleges you are interested in weigh all of these factors, talk to an admissions representative from that school.

2. Money should not be a factor in college decisions.

As you are considering schools, do not rule out a college because you think it is too expensive. The best schools have great financial aid packages that will enable you to attend should you be admitted. You may have to take out loans or work while in school. If you are in need of financial aid, you will most likely be given a combination of loans, work study, grants and scholarships. As long as you manage credit wisely, work hard in school and plan accordingly, you will be able to go to the college of your choice

regardless of how much money you have. Rich kids are not the only kids that go to “rich” colleges!

### 3. Show interest in the colleges you desire to attend

As college admissions become more and more competitive, showing strong interest in a college can be a competitive advantage. Colleges and universities want to admit students who really want to go to their school! How do you show interest? Learn all you can about the school. Make a trip to see the school. See if you can visit some classes. Comb through their website. Talk to the admissions counselors and ask them questions. Read the school’s literature. Talk to alumni and current students. Overall, if it’s your dream school, make sure that school knows it!

### 4. Start thinking about college now!

The earlier you begin planning for college, the better. Start thinking about it in junior high or even middle school. Plan how you will use all four years of high school to help you get into a great college. If you didn’t start thinking about college early, it’s never too late! Start thinking about your high school course selections, where you want to go to school, test preparation, extracurricular activities and financial aid as soon as possible. If you did begin thinking about college late, don’t rule out community college. Many people start out at community college and make a successful transition to a selective four-year institution.

### 5. If you need to, take the ACT or SAT a second time

The ACT and the SAT can be taken more than once. You should study thoroughly before taking either exam. However, if you find that you are not happy with your score, take it again. Before you retake the SAT or ACT, talk to a counselor or consider taking a test preparation course if you have not already taken one. Consider taking the standard review courses, but know that there are many lower cost options for test preparation. Many local colleges and universities offer relatively inexpensive test prep classes. Attain also knows of several, lower cost, less well-known options for test prep. Contact us at [info@attain-group.com](mailto:info@attain-group.com) to learn more!



## APPLICATION TIPS FOR ALL

Some of these tips will seem as though they should be “common sense.” However, as a friend of mine sometimes says, “Common sense ain’t so common.” I get countless questions (all of which are good questions) on the different parts that make up the college or MBA application. I often do final reviews and checks of my client’s applications (also known as a “sanity check”) and the following guidelines address many of the problems I see. If you have issues specific to your application or if you are interested in having

Attain review your application and offer experienced, objective insight and advice, send us a note at [info@attain-group.com](mailto:info@attain-group.com)

Here are a few tips to keep in mind as we look forward to the next application season:

1. Read the directions thoroughly and follow the instructions to the letter.
2. Before the application crunch season begins, familiarize yourself with the essay questions and do not underestimate the time it will take you to draft a thoughtful response. Many schools post their essay questions well ahead of time (sometimes in the summer). As soon as your target schools post their questions, start becoming familiar with the questions and start thinking about how you might respond. Better yet, start drafting responses early.
3. The application will ask for your name. Use that same name throughout the application.
4. Many college applications will ask for information about your parents and siblings. If your parents did not attend college, it is important for your colleges to know that. You may be identified as a first generation college student, and that is a factor that admissions committees will consider. Likewise, be sure to note if your siblings or parents attended that college.
5. Make sure all important numbers on your application are correct: Phone numbers, school CEEB numbers (for college applicants), addresses, email addresses, etc.
6. Applications will ask information about your race and ethnicity. This is both for statistical and reporting purposes as well as for the institution's goal of building a diverse student body. Regardless of your race, there is no need to feel anxiety about this portion of the application. Whether you are or are not a member of a minority group, don't think you are at an advantage or disadvantage. Simply check the appropriate box, or write in what is appropriate. After that, focus on doing your best on your essays. Do not lie or stretch the truth about your race (or any other aspect of the application). Some schools actually verify what students say on their applications.

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#### HELPFUL LINKS:

#### COLLEGE LINKS

America's Best Colleges 2005

<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/cohome.htm>

U.S. Department of Education FREE Application for Federal Student Aid Web Site

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

National Christian College Fairs  
<http://www.gospelcom.net/naccap>

National College Fairs  
<http://www.nacac.com/fairs.html>

The College Board – SAT Registration  
<http://www.collegeboard.com/>

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#### MBA LINKS

The MBA Tour  
<http://www.thembatour.com/index.shtml>

GMAT  
<http://www.gmac.com/gmac>

The MBA  
<http://www.mba.com/mba>

Management Leadership for Tomorrow  
<http://www.ml4t.org/>

The Forté Foundation: Inspiring Women Business Leaders  
<http://www.fortefoundation.org/>

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#### ABOUT US.

Attain provides essay editing services and admissions counseling to prospective business school and college students. Contact us to learn more about how we can help you gain admission to a selective school by providing objective feedback on your essays and candidacy.

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