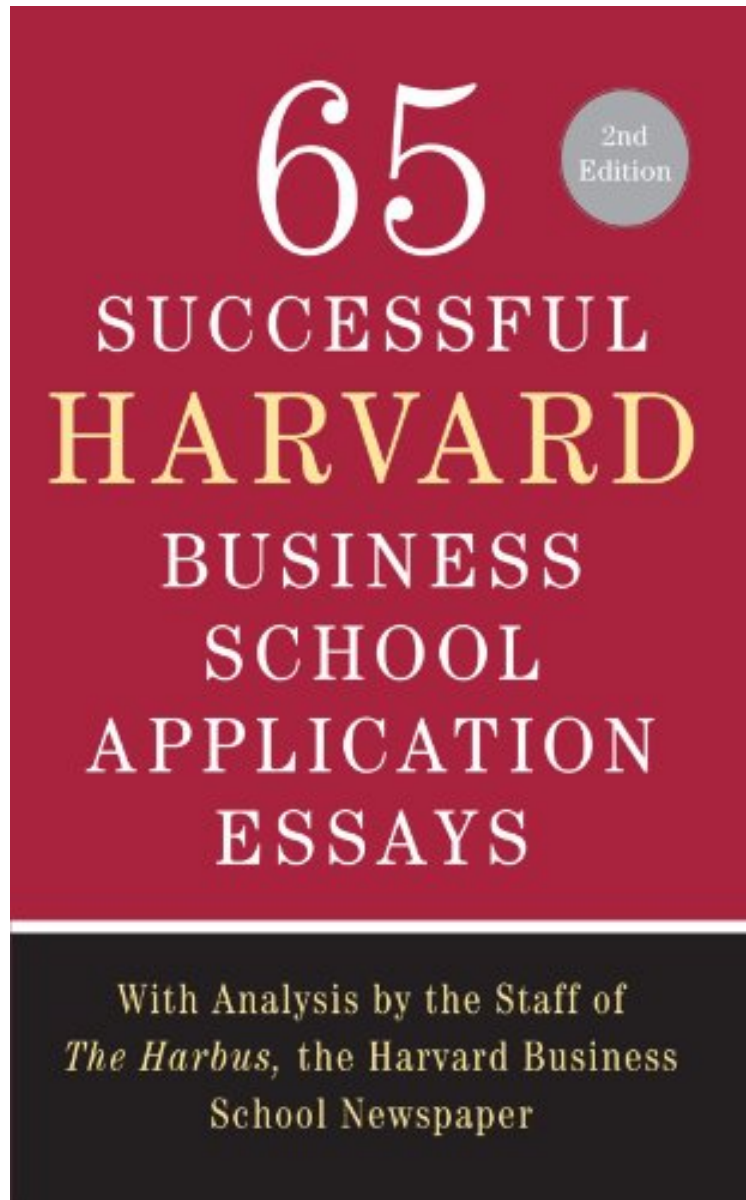


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65 Successful Harvard Business School Application Essays, Second Edition: With Analysis by the Staff of The Harbus, the Harvard Business School Newspaper

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YOUR LIFE . . . IN 300 WORDS OR LESSIt'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.

About the AuthorThe 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.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Career AspirationsWhat 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 SubramanianJames ReinhartGoogle 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 help 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 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 engine...