



# **MBA WRITING PROGRAM FACT SHEET**

## **MBA WRITING PROGRAM**

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**UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
BUSINESS SCHOOL  
Ann Arbor, Michigan**

# MBA WRITING PROGRAM FACT SHEET

## UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN BUSINESS SCHOOL

### **What is the MBA Writing Program?**

The MBA Writing Program is designed to offer students feedback and training on their managerial writing skills. **This program is a requirement for the MBA degree.** The program consists of a Writing Assessment and several communication courses.

### **How Can I Satisfy My Writing Program Requirement?**

You can satisfy your writing program requirement in any of the following ways:

1. Take the Writing Assessment and receive a passing score.
2. Take two 7-week communication courses, the first of which must be LHC 522 (Managerial Writing Fundamentals); the second can be any other 7-week communication course.
3. Take LHC 522 (Managerial Writing Fundamentals) and receive a passing score on the Exit Assessment given at the end of that course.

## ***WRITING ASSESSMENT***

### **What is the MBA Writing Assessment Like?**

The MBA Writing Assessment tests managerial writing abilities. The assessment presents MBA students with a communication case involving a critical management situation that requires a written response. For example, students may be asked to provide arguments in favor of keeping a sales training program or to describe actions an employee must take to significantly improve performance.

### **How is the MBA Writing Assessment evaluated?**

Students' written responses to the MBA Writing Assessment are evaluated for managerial writing ability. Each response is read with the following question in mind: To what extent does this student understand how to select, develop, and organize content, employ language and syntactical choices, and use persuasive appeals to achieve management goals? To address this question, assessment evaluators use criteria in the four basic areas shown in the box on the next page.

MBA students' whose responses are strong in the basic areas receive a high score. Students whose responses show some capabilities receive a passing score and students whose responses show significant problems in the basic areas receive a low score.

<b>Audience Adaptation</b>	<b>Content Development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes and addresses reader concerns.</li> <li>Structures and develops arguments that lead to the desired response.</li> <li>Selects personal references, nouns and verbs, modals, negative and positive words, in order to create a message suited to the reader and the situation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>States claims (conclusions and recommendations) clearly and consistently.</li> <li>Develops three or more arguments that support his/her claims.</li> <li>Employs data to support claims.</li> <li>Presents content that is essential rather than trivial.</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational Strategy</b>	<b>Language Control</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops the message from beginning to end with a clear sense of logic.</li> <li>Has paragraph-to-paragraph and sentence-to-sentence transitions so that the message is coherent.</li> <li>Positions claims according to a deliberate communication strategy suited to the situation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manages grammar, spelling, and mechanics so that they do not interfere with comprehension and so that management goals for the situation may be achieved.</li> <li>Uses vocabulary suited to the situation.</li> <li>Has overall mastery of correct sentence structure.</li> </ul>

high score	4% - 8%
passing score	54% - 78%
low score	18% - 38%

## Who fails the MBA Writing Assessment?

A wide variety of incoming Michigan students fail the MBA Writing Assessment. Every year a number of individuals who have a great deal of writing experience receive low assessment scores. This fact coincides with research showing that individuals with strengths in one type of writing will not automatically have strengths in another type of writing. The writing abilities required for management are different from those needed for academic, journalistic, or creative writing. For one thing, managers use writing to get work done and need to use persuasive strategies and syntactic choices (e.g. pronouns and reader references) that motivate individuals in organizational settings.

International students regularly pass the MBA Writing Assessment. Every year some non-native speakers of English enter Michigan's MBA program with strong competencies in English and extensive management experience, that equip them to achieve passing or high assessment scores. Native speakers of English, who do not have similar backgrounds, may fail the test.

To understand why individuals fail the writing assessment, it is useful to consider the assessment criteria, specifically the four major areas that are evaluated: audience adaptation, content development, organizational strategy, and language control. To fail the assessment, an individual must demonstrate lack of sufficient understanding in these areas as needed for MBA coursework and managing.

## Who evaluates the MBA Writing Assessment?

The MBA Writing Assessment is evaluated by University of Michigan Business School writing consultants. All Michigan consultants have advanced degrees in writing, professional writing experience, and take Michigan's training in managerial writing assessment. Some also have expertise in information technology.

## How well do students do on the MBA Writing Assessment?

As shown below, the majority of entering Michigan MBA students receive passing scores on the MBA Writing Assessment. This means that the majority of entering MBA students are not strong management writers. Low or failing scores are received by 18% to 38% of the entering class whereas 4% to 8% score at the highest level.

An individual who has some problems with language control (e.g. grammatical and spelling errors), but strengths in the other areas will pass the assessment; an individual who demonstrates facility with the language, but has problems developing and organizing content appropriate for managing the communication situation will fail the test.

### **What is the personal benefit of the MBA Writing Assessment?**

The MBA Writing Assessment provides all incoming Michigan students with a baseline analysis of their managerial writing abilities and the opportunity to have a writing consultation and to receive an individualized Writer Profile with scores in five fundamental areas. Students find these post-assessment consultations valuable for setting personal goals, including determining which communication courses will be useful for their development as managers. Moreover, students who take the Managerial Writing course LHC 522 take an Exit Assessment that allows them to quantify improvements in their writing, evidence that may be useful for potential employers.

### **How does the Michigan MBA Writing Assessment differ from the GMAT Analytical Writing Assessment?**

The Michigan MBA Writing Assessment is a **case-based** writing test and is different from the GMAT Analytical Writing Assessment, which is an **essay** writing test. This difference is significant. **In contrast to the GMAT writing assessment**, the Michigan MBA writing assessment *involves writing in response to a particular management situation or specific audience that reflects the kind of on-the-job writing that Michigan MBAs will encounter in the workplace.*

### **When Do I Take the Writing Assessment?**

The Writing Assessment is offered online at the beginning of the Fall and Winter semesters. For those who are not comfortable with computers, a sit-down test may also be offered. Information regarding the dates when the assessment is available can be found on MTrack and on signs throughout the school. You may take the writing assessment as many times as you wish. Students who pass the assessment on the second or subsequent tries will not be required to take courses but may elect to do so to improve their communication skills.

### **COURSES**

#### **What courses are required when a student receives a low MBA Writing Assessment score?**

MBA Day Students who receive low scores on the MBA Writing Assessment are required to take LHC 522 (Managerial Writing Fundamentals) plus one additional communication course of their choice. If students receive a passing score on the exit assessment given at the end of LHC 522, their requirement is satisfied and no additional courses are necessary. Evening students who do not take the writing assessment or who receive low scores on the test must take LHC 520 (Managerial Writing) or LHC 560 (Managerial Communication). These courses cover ways to develop and structure management messages as well as the use of language and syntactical choices to achieve management goals. Also covered are techniques for managing multiple messages within organizations. Cases and writing tasks provide students ample opportunity to practice writing for various management situations: informational, promotional, transformational, and relational.

Michigan's MBA writing courses are not remedial. Rather, these management communication courses center around the study of written and oral messages as they operate to manage effectively in diverse organizational settings. For example, students learn language structures that can be used to create highly relational and “conversational” messages; passive voice is presented as a tool for creating objective, non-accusatory documents; active voice provides a way to assert conclusions or recommendations.

### **Are the MBA writing classes largely composed of international students?**

A wide variety of students take Michigan's MBA writing courses. Although these writing classes are required for those who fail the assessment, these classes are also electives and are regarded as highly relevant to management practice.

The number of international students in any writing class varies widely. Foreign students may comprise 75% in one section and 5% in another section. International students are encouraged to take communication electives and their contributions to class discussions, are invaluable (cultural differences in politeness and reasoning).

### **What writing resources are available for Michigan MBA students?**

In addition to a variety of communication courses that cover aspects of managerial writing, the University of Michigan Business School also provides a Writing Consultant Service. Consultants available through this service are professional writers who have extensive business writing experience and Michigan communication training. Throughout the academic year, Michigan writing consultants are available to assist

individual students and student groups with written course assignments, application materials, essays, case analyses, MAP reports, etc. Consultants are available to work with students (individually or in groups) at various stages of the writing process: brainstorming, drafting, and revising. Consultants have helped Michigan MBAs get articles published, secure internships, get accepted into law school and international programs, win grants, land good jobs, and do well on written course assignments. Consultants also provide assistance with English as a second language.

You may arrange a meeting with a writing consultant by signing up on the bulletin board outside the Consultant's office at K1325, on the first floor of Kresge.

### **For More Information**

For more information about the MBA Writing Program contact Ms. Margaret Oberle, Assistant to the Director.

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For information on Communication Courses and Programs at the University of Michigan Business School, see the following website:

<http://webuser.bus.umich.edu/programs/bmc>