

ACCELERATED ACCESS FULL-TIME MBA PROGRAM ESSAY #1 BRAINSTORMING GUIDE

Essay #1: What makes you feel alive when you are doing it, and why? (300 words max)

The word “alive” was intentionally chosen for this essay prompt because it can have many different interpretations depending upon your background, lived experiences, and interests.

For some, “alive” may invoke memories of thrill-seeking adventures like white water rafting in the Grand Canyon or sky-diving above Victoria Falls. For others, it may be an activity closer to home that makes you feel alive - running, yoga, cycling - or another daily practice or hobby that keeps you grounded or brings you joy – journaling, baking, gardening. Or, it may not be an activity at all. It may be quiet moments of reflection or spending quality time with a person, place, or cause that is important to you.

In other words, what specifically makes you feel alive is going to be different for every single applicant.

BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE | Think about...

Getting started can be the hardest part, so here’s an exercise to get you going. Choose one of the below prompts that resonates with you, set your timer for two minutes, and strive to write down *at least 10* responses to each. Work quickly, focusing on quantity over quality.

1. If you only had 2 free hours a week to spend doing something for you, how would you spend it?
2. Reflect on times when your schedule has been so busy that you felt you didn’t have time for anything else. What activities or pastimes were you not willing to compromise?
3. What if the word “alive” was replaced by: “fulfilled”, “inspired”, “invigorated”, “connected”, “safe”, “challenged”, “balanced” or “happy”? Then how would you respond?

Look at your list. It may be a collection of single words or actions, such as: trail running after work, hiking by the ocean, baking my grandma’s famous cherry pie, meditating every morning, skiing with my family, volunteering at my church, singing in the car, dancing in front of the mirror, building sandcastles or reading to my children. This is a great start, but let’s go further.

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Choose your favorite five responses. One at a time, go through the responses and recall a specific time when you engaged in this activity (the operative word being *specific*). As you reflect, strive to suspend your attention and really focus on experiencing that moment again. Take down notes on the following:

1. What prompted you to do this activity? Was the decision active or reactive?
2. How were your senses engaged – what did you see, hear, smell, and feel?
3. What feelings are you experiencing – excitement, calm, relief, connection, challenge, love, etc.
4. If you were to draw a picture of this scene, what details would you make sure to include in the image?

GET TO A FIRST DRAFT | Write now, edit later.

You should now have several possible ideas for your alive essay. How do you choose which one to expand upon? Remember the big picture. How do you want this essay response to complement the rest of your application? Do you want to share something new about yourself or reinforce a skill, attribute, value, or experience that has been shared elsewhere?

FINAL TIPS FOR CONSIDERATION | You can do it!

1. **Reflect.** Be intentional about carving out time and space for creative reflection. When do you do your best thinking? Is it early in the morning before the day gets started or late in the day as you're winding down? Is it while walking across campus to or from class? Or maybe during physical activity like running, yoga, or hiking? Be intentional about this thought process, and commit to reflect on it during your most creative hours.
2. **Start.** Sometimes getting started is the hardest part. Don't fret about your opening sentence or get out the thesaurus just start. Engage in the above exercises, and then challenge yourself to write your first draft in one sitting, without judgement or criticism. Step away from it for a day, and then revisit it with a fresh perspective.