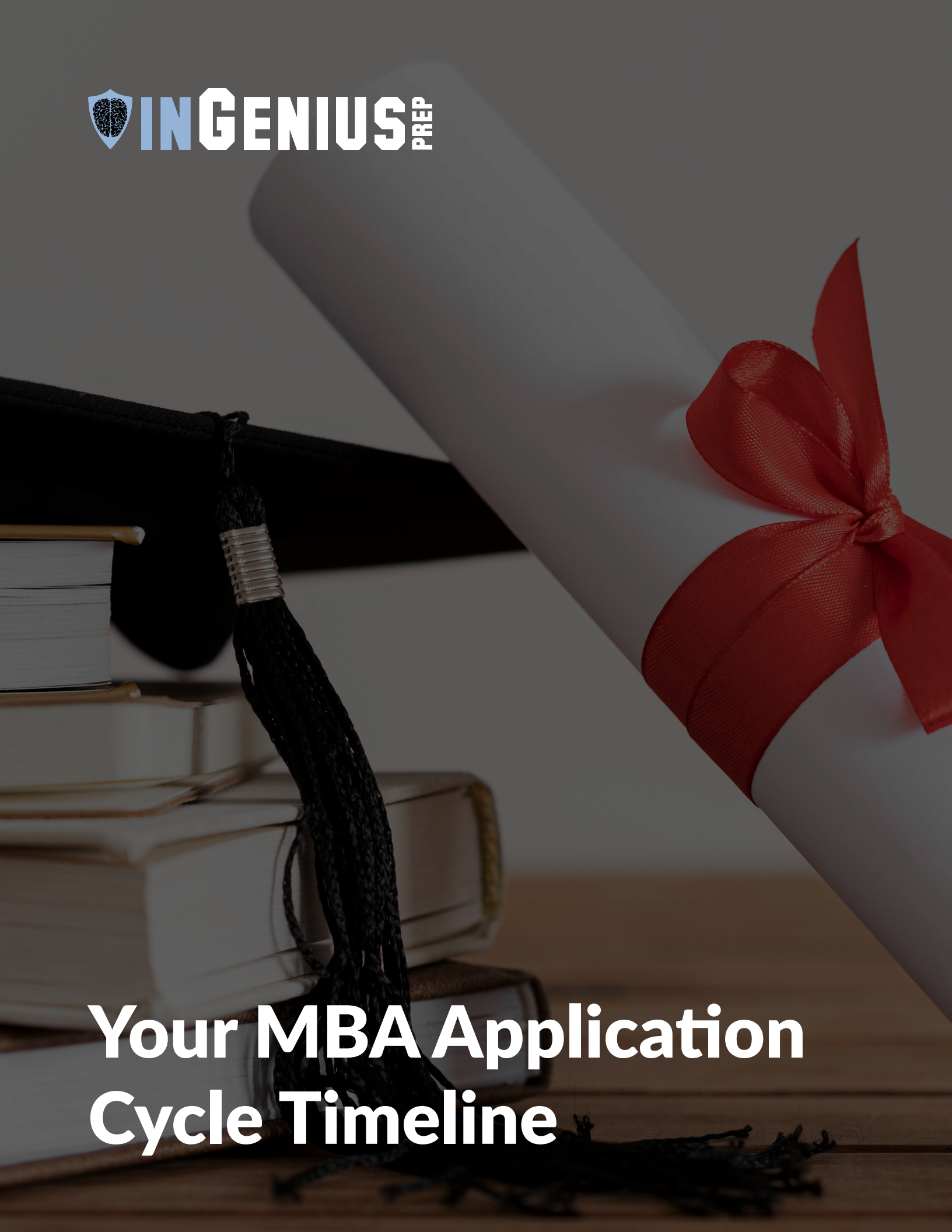

Your MBA Application Cycle Timeline

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If you plan to apply to an MBA program in the coming months, you will want to ideally submit your applications before the Round 1 deadlines in September and October. This means that you will need to utilize the start of the year to work on your essays and other admissions materials. But before you can begin, it's helpful to have a bigger picture of what the entire application process entails. So, we've prepared a timeline for you!

BEFORE YOU BEGIN APPLYING

- **Gain Enough Work Experience** - Almost every applicant at the top schools has some level of work experience before they apply, whether the school requires it or not. Although Columbia does not enforce a work experience requirement for applicants, 99% of its 2018 incoming class had worked before applying to b-school. To go up against the tough and experienced applicant pool, you should plan on heading into the workforce and taking at least a couple of years off. Only a handful of lucky students—with outstanding academic records—are accepted to the top business schools directly out of college.

- **Start Drafting Your MBA Resumé** - While you might already have a resumé from applying to jobs, you will probably have to tweak certain aspects and follow a particular protocol when it comes to preparing the document for business school applications. Make sure it's formatted correctly, you've quantified your achievements and ordered the listings in order of impressiveness. Watch out for mistakes such as listing high school achievements, exaggerating what you've done, and adding unnecessary skills.

ONCE YOU HAVE DECIDED TO APPLY – JANUARY–APRIL

- **Decide on the GRE vs. GMAT -** To start, you need either a GMAT or GRE score. To have a standout business school application, you need an impressive score on one of these two standardized tests, as they are one of the few tools that graduate admissions offices have to normalize comparisons of applicants. Although the majority of business schools state that they do not have a preference when it comes to the GMAT vs. GRE, the GMAT is more desirable from an admissions perspective. Your performance in the quantitative and integrated reasoning sections of the GMAT gives admissions officers a better idea of how you will perform in the rigorous MBA environment.

- **Review your Prospects** - Visit your prospective schools while classes are in session. If you're bound by social distancing protocols, see if you can attend an online class or information session via Zoom. Take a look at the average GPA and test scores for the programs you're interested in and start making a preliminary school list.

- **Request for Sponsorship** - Ask your company about the possibility of sponsorship for your MBA. Not only will it help financially, but business schools also like to know that their graduates will have a job upon graduating.

- **Ask Your College for Your Transcript** - Order official transcripts from each of the schools and colleges that you have attended.

MAY

- **Speak to Recommenders** - Get in touch with your current and former supervisors or mentors and discuss your potential letters of recommendation. Before finalizing who will write your letter, be sure that they have the time, and willingness, to write a compelling recommendation for you.

- **Retake the GMAT if necessary** - Once you have your test score and know which kinds of schools you're looking at, you might consider retaking the test in case you're not happy with your previous result.

JUNE

- **Finalize Your School List** - When building your list of business schools, be sure to include a range of options. There are different approaches to building your list of business schools. It is always a good idea to include three kinds of schools: reach schools, schools that seem like a good match for your grades and scores, and a couple of "safety" schools that should accept you based on your academic record and accomplishments.

- **Update Your Resumé If Necessary** - At this point, conduct another resumé check. Take advantage of the MBA resumé component to convince admissions officers why you are an outstanding candidate. Use this document to bring attention to your most impressive achievements in the workforce along with any other experiences and knowledge that can help distinguish you.

JULY

- **Application Persona** - Begin brainstorming how you are going to market yourself to the admissions office. What about you is unique? What about you is different from every other applicant? Your application persona is the theme that your application components will follow that can help distinguish you from the rest of the applicant pool.

- **Write Your Essays** - Business school essays are program-specific and are geared towards helping admissions committees understand who you are and how their institution can help you reach your goals. In order to answer these prompts, you need to frame the biggest factors behind your choice of a school in terms of how they align with your personality and aspirations. You must take advantage of this essay component to give admissions committee members a concrete and memorable idea of who you are.

- **Initiate Letter of Recommendation Process** - Finalize your recommenders and provide them with your resumé, your application persona, specific examples of what you would like them to highlight—skills, personality traits, leadership examples, etc. Most schools ask for two, although a handful of programs are okay if you submit one reference. MBA programs highly prioritize professional contacts over academic references. Since most students take a few years off between undergrad and applying to these programs, your employers and supervisors (and not professors) are the best people to speak to your leadership, teamwork, and communication skills.

AUGUST

- **Continue working on your essays** - We cannot emphasize the importance of the essays enough! When reading your essays, admissions committee members look to get a greater sense of who you are and how you've taken steps to pursue your interests. While your resumé outlines what you've done so far, the business school essays tie the most important pieces of it together to portray why your experiences matter. It's crucial that you expand on a story that is your own—not your parents' or your friends'—and one which helps admissions committees understand you beyond your grades and consulting experience.

- **Finalize Recommendations** - Your recommendations should be finalized and submitted a couple of weeks before the deadline.

- **Final Review** - Ask a family member, mentor, or friend to review your application to watch out for any errors.

SEPTEMBER

- **Submit Your Application** - You want to submit your application by the round one deadlines, so this is the time. Don't procrastinate too much. Hit the button as early as possible to avoid any technical errors as well.

NOVEMBER

- **Plan Interview** - You need to check whether the schools on your list require you to sign up for interviews or if you have to wait until you're invited. Now that your schools have seen your resumé, the interview is the place where the adcom gets to know you outside of paper and answers any questions you might have about the institution. The interview format and length vary between schools. MBA interview questions typically cover the following topics: why you're pursuing an MBA, how their institution can help you, and what your short and long-term goals are. Prepare well and you should be able to get through the process smoothly.

DECEMBER

- **Wait For Results** - Around December, students will start being notified whether they've been accepted, waitlisted or rejected. Make sure you've heard back from all your schools before making a final decision.

While it's great to have a dream school, don't put all your eggs in one basket and just apply to a couple, because each year, admissions committees look for different things out of the incoming class. Give all of your schools a chance, and try your hardest to start early and go through each of the components on time. Good luck!