

25

BOOKS TO READ

BEFORE (AND DURING) YOUR MBA



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Introduction

These aren't just “bestsellers”—they’re tools.

If you’re planning for an MBA (or already in one), this curated list will give you a head start across business fundamentals, leadership, strategy, and personal growth.

I wish someone had given me this reading list earlier—it would’ve saved me years of catch-up. Whether you're still prepping or already deep into your B-school grind, this will help you think sharper and show up stronger.

— Rishikesh, IIM Ahmedabad

Section 1: Business Fundamentals

1. The Personal MBA – Josh Kaufman

An all-in-one guide to mastering core business concepts without enrolling in a traditional MBA. Covers everything from value creation and marketing to sales, productivity, and systems thinking. Clear, actionable, and perfect for self-starters.

2. Accounting Made Simple – Mike Piper

Breaks down accounting jargon into plain language. Learn how to read income statements, balance sheets, and cash flow statements with confidence. A great primer for anyone coming from a non-finance background.

3. Financial Intelligence – Karen Berman & Joe Knight

Goes beyond spreadsheets to help you understand what the numbers mean. You'll learn how to analyze financial data, spot red flags, and make better business decisions. Essential for future managers.

4. Marketing Management – Philip Kotler

This is the marketing bible in most MBA programs. Learn how companies position products, segment markets, and influence customer behavior. While dense, it's foundational for understanding strategic marketing.

5. Operations Management – William Stevenson

Covers supply chain, capacity planning, lean systems, and project scheduling. Even if you're not going into ops, this book gives you a framework for how businesses run behind the scenes.

Section 2: Strategy, Economics & Decision-Making

6. Blue Ocean Strategy – Chan Kim & Renée Mauborgne

Teaches how to make competition irrelevant by creating new market space. Includes tools like the Strategy Canvas and real-world case studies. A must-read if you're aiming for innovation or entrepreneurship.

7. Good Strategy Bad Strategy – Richard Rumelt

Demystifies what real strategy looks like—and why most companies get it wrong. Offers a clear structure: diagnose the challenge, create a guiding policy, and take coherent action. Sharp, practical, and honest.

8. The Art of Strategy – Avinash Dixit & Barry Nalebuff

An accessible intro to game theory and strategic thinking. Helps you anticipate others' moves, make better decisions, and negotiate smarter. Full of entertaining and surprising business applications.

9. Thinking, Fast and Slow – Daniel Kahneman

Explores how our brains make decisions through two systems—intuitive and analytical. Loaded with insights into bias, risk, and irrational behavior. Essential if you want to lead with better judgment.

10. Freakonomics – Steven Levitt & Stephen Dubner

Uses economic thinking to unpack surprising truths about human behavior. Each chapter explores real-world puzzles through data and storytelling. A fun way to practice analytical reasoning.

Section 3: Leadership, Influence & Team Building

11. Leaders Eat Last – Simon Sinek

Argues that great leadership begins with empathy, trust, and service. Shows how strong teams are built when leaders prioritize their people's well-being. Backed by neuroscience and case studies.

12. The Five Dysfunctions of a Team – Patrick Lencioni

A business fable that breaks down what causes teams to fail—lack of trust, fear of conflict, and unclear goals. Offers a practical framework to create high-performing, collaborative teams.

13. Drive – Daniel Pink

Reveals that autonomy, mastery, and purpose—not money—are what truly motivate us. Useful for future leaders, managers, or entrepreneurs who want to inspire peak performance.

14. The First 90 Days – Michael D. Watkins

A blueprint for navigating any new leadership role. Learn how to secure quick wins, build alliances, and avoid early missteps. Invaluable before internships, new jobs, or post-MBA roles.

15. Radical Candor – Kim Scott

Teaches how to be a better manager by giving feedback that's both direct and caring. Builds a framework to lead with honesty and build trust in teams. Practical and full of memorable examples.

Section 4: Entrepreneurship & Innovation

16. The Lean Startup – Eric Ries

Introduces the “Build-Measure-Learn” loop for rapid experimentation. Helps entrepreneurs create successful products through validated learning and fast iterations. A staple for startup-minded MBAs.

17. Zero to One – Peter Thiel

Challenges you to build something truly innovative instead of copying others. Offers bold insights on competition, monopoly, and progress. A mind-stretching read for anyone exploring startups.

18. Rework – Jason Fried & David Heinemeier Hansson

Rips apart traditional business advice—like growth-at-all-costs or long business plans. Advocates for doing less, focusing on what matters, and running lean teams. Simple, punchy, and contrarian.

19. The Innovator’s Dilemma – Clayton Christensen

Explains why even successful companies fail when they ignore disruptive innovation. Crucial reading for product managers, tech professionals, and future consultants.

20. How I Built This – Guy Raz

Stories from founders of brands like Airbnb, Patagonia, and Spanx. Offers real-life lessons on grit, creativity, and resilience. Great inspiration for anyone chasing big ideas.

Section 5: Self-Development, Habits & Mindset

21. Deep Work – Cal Newport

In a world of distractions, the ability to focus deeply is your superpower. Learn how to work smarter, cut shallow tasks, and get meaningful work done –especially useful during your MBA grind.

22. Atomic Habits – James Clear

Shows how tiny habits lead to massive results. Offers a step-by-step guide to habit formation and breaking bad patterns. Great for building routines that stick during high-pressure MBA life.

23. So Good They Can't Ignore You – Cal Newport

Debunks the myth of “follow your passion” and instead focuses on building rare and valuable skills. Encourages long-term career thinking and craftsmanship over instant gratification.

24. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People – Stephen R. Covey

A timeless guide to personal growth and leadership. Covers goal-setting, integrity, communication, and time management. One of the most foundational self-help books ever written.

25. Range – David Epstein

Makes the case that generalists (like most MBA grads) thrive in complex, uncertain environments. Uses stories from sports, science, and business to explain why breadth beats depth.

Turn Opportunities into Success

The books listed in this guide provide valuable insights that will help you prepare for and excel in your MBA journey. Whether it's mastering business fundamentals, enhancing leadership skills, or refining your decision-making, these resources will equip you with the knowledge and tools you need to succeed. Reading these books will help you think critically and act strategically, giving you a competitive edge in both your MBA program and your professional career.

In today's fast-paced world, an online MBA is a valid and flexible alternative to traditional in-person programs. It allows you to balance your studies with work and personal commitments while still gaining a world-class education. An online MBA enables you to learn at your own pace, apply knowledge immediately, and connect with peers and professors globally.

The PW Medharthi Online MBA, in collaboration with India's top MBA colleges, offers a unique opportunity to pursue a prestigious degree with the flexibility of online learning. With a top-tier curriculum, experienced faculty, and valuable networking opportunities, this program is designed for ambitious professionals who want to advance their careers without sacrificing flexibility.

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