

MBA 520 Final Project Guidelines and Rubric

Overview

Businesses and other organizations must regularly measure their financial performance and health to make operational and strategic decisions affecting the organization's future. Management professionals utilize income statements, balance sheets, cash flow statements, and a variety of other reports and techniques to evaluate an organization. They also work closely with professionals from departments across the organization—including marketing, human resources, and operations—to ensure that the business runs smoothly and financial decisions are not made in isolation.

For this project, you will use the accounting and finance skills you learned in the course to review the past and current financial performance and health of a global, publicly traded company. Using that analysis, you will create initial financial projections that forecast the company's performance under different scenarios and identify internal risks and opportunities in order to begin planning future activities.

In this assignment, you will demonstrate your mastery of the following course outcomes:

- MBA-520-01: Assess an organization's underlying financial performance and health by analyzing relevant financial statements, variances, ratios, and other financial information
- MBA-520-02: Draw connections between accounting and financial information and the broader organizational context for making integrated business decisions
- MBA-520-03: Assess critical factors driving financial risks and opportunities for informing management priorities
- MBA-520-04: Forecast business performance under different assumptions about inputs and processes using simple financial models
- MBA-520-05: Evaluate the internal costs and benefits of business opportunities for their impact on budgeting and business decisions
- MBA-520-06: Communicate financial analyses clearly and coherently for persuading internal stakeholders of the validity of observations and conclusions

Prompt

Imagine you are a newly hired manager at a publicly traded, global corporation of your choosing.

You have been asked to review the company's past and current financial performance and health and make initial financial projections in order to begin planning for the upcoming year. Your supervisor is particularly interested in a fresh perspective on what your analysis reveals about potential risks and opportunities, as well as recommendations for next steps. Because you will eventually need to convince internal stakeholders, including senior management, of the feasibility and desirability of your suggested activities, it is important that you justify your projections and recommendations, explaining how they were informed by existing information and modeling different scenarios.

Your financial analysis and projection report will include several financial tables, along with a comprehensive narrative describing the company's context and financial performance and health, and your analytical approach and conclusions. Your report should be geared toward an executive audience with

basic accounting and finance knowledge and should be well organized, clear, concise, convincing, and free of distracting errors. Note that, in addition to the company's financial statements and website, other authoritative news sources—such as annual reports and external sites like Bloomberg—may offer insights that facilitate analysis or provide information on the company's priorities, challenges, and geographic distribution.

Specifically, your financial analysis and projection report must include the following **critical elements**. Most of the critical elements align with a particular course outcome (shown in brackets).

- I. **Executive Summary:** Clearly and concisely summarize your principal findings, projections, and recommendations as a manager, with the goal of persuading busy executives to support your ideas and read further. Provide your intended audience with a solid but brief sense of the parameters of your analysis and who you would consult in refining it further, and why. Remember that your goal is to convince readers of the validity of your observations while recognizing limitations that affect business decisions. [MBA-520-06]
- II. **Financial Performance and Health:** In this section, you will evaluate the company's recent financial performance and current financial health, given its organizational context. In particular, you must cover the following:
 - A. **Organizational Context**
 1. What **key goods or services** does your company provide, for whom, where, and why? How do these **features** of the company (major products or services, customers, location, etc.) help set the boundaries for business decisions? [MBA-520-02]
 2. How is the company **organized** and managed (by product groups, geographic region, function, etc.)? How does that affect accounting and financial information and subsequent business decisions? [MBA-520-02]
 - B. **Recent Financial Performance**
 1. Assess what the company's consolidated **income** statements for the last three years say about its financial performance. Use relevant indicators, graphs, and spreadsheets to support your narrative. (Include all spreadsheets in an appendix.) For example, what do the amounts and year-to-year changes in revenue, operating income, net profit or loss, and earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization tell you? Do any items stand out? [MBA-520-01]
 2. Assess what the company's consolidated **cash flow** statements for the same time period say about its financial performance. Use relevant indicators, graphs, and spreadsheets to support your narrative. For example, what do the amounts and year-to-year changes in cash from operating activities, cash from investing, cash from financing, and total cash flow tell you? Do any items stand out? [MBA-520-01]
 3. Assess the company's **underlying** financial performance. Support your answer with the analysis above and relevant research. For example, is recent performance substantially affected by unusual events such as a major acquisition or spin-off? Is the business thriving or struggling in its industry? How do you know? [MBA-520-01]
 - C. **Current Financial Health**
 1. Assess how the company is **capitalized** and what that tells you about its financial health. Support your response with relevant graphs, spreadsheets, and indicators such as cash and cash equivalents, total debt, shareholders' equity, current ratio, debt/equity ratio, and days sales outstanding (DSO). For example, does the company have enough cash for payroll and other bills? Does it have the right mix of debt versus equity (stock)? How do you know? [MBA-520-01]

2. Does the company have the right amount of cash and other resources (e.g., key people, technologies, reputation, physical assets) to fuel future **growth**? What does this suggest for business decisions? For example, if it has too much cash, should it pay a large dividend, repurchase its own shares, or reinvest the excess funds? [MBA-520-02]
3. Assess the **financial value** of the company using relevant indicators. What does your assessment imply for future business health and performance? For example, what is the business's current market value? What is its price-to-earnings ratio? What do these suggest about investor perceptions of the business's future? [MBA-520-01]

III. **Success Factors and Risks:** Use this section to discuss the factors that may affect current and future performance. Specifically:

- A. How do the company's financial and strategic **priorities** affect accounting procedures and business decisions? How might that affect business success? For example, is management growth-oriented or efficiency-oriented? What is the company's approach to risk and short- versus long-term planning horizons? [MBA-520-03]
- B. How might the company better capitalize on **nonfinancial factors** such as market share, reputation, human resources, physical facilities, or patents? Support your response with relevant research and analysis. [MBA-520-03]
- C. What are the most significant internal **risks** to the company's financial performance? Give evidence to support your response. For example, is the company vulnerable to technological changes or cyberattacks? Loss of high-talent personnel? Production disruptions? [MBA-520-03]

IV. **Projections:** Using what you know about the company's financial health and performance, forecast its future performance. In particular, you should:

- A. Project the company's **likely** consolidated financial **performance** for each of the next three years. Support your analysis with an appendix spreadsheet showing actual results for the most recent year, along with your projections and assumptions. Remember that your supervisor is interested in fresh perspectives, so you should not just replicate existing financial statements: You should add other relevant calculations or disaggregations to help inform decisions. [MBA-520-04]
- B. Modify your projections for the coming year to show a **best- and worst-case** scenario based on the potential success factors and risks you identified. As with your initial projections, support your analysis with an appendix spreadsheet, specifying your assumptions and including relevant calculations and disaggregations beyond those in existing financial reports. [MBA-520-04]
- C. **Discuss** how your assumptions, forecasting methodology, and information gaps affect your **projections**. Why are your projections appropriate? For example, are they consistent with the company's mission and priorities? Aggressive but achievable? How would changing your assumptions change your projections? [MBA-520-04]

V. **Business Opportunities:** In this section, discuss the incremental impact of a hypothetical but reasonable and simple new investment project, such as a new product or facility or a cost-cutting investment, as an initial step in thinking about the future. Be sure to address the following:

- A. Based on your knowledge of this company, what is a **likely investment** it would consider and why? Be sure to describe the basic features of the investment as a foundation for considering its potential financial impact. [MBA-520-05]
- B. Evaluate the approximate **costs and benefits** of the investment you identified, explaining how they would affect your spreadsheet projections and business decisions. Estimates are sufficient but should be grounded in common sense and insight into the company. [MBA-520-05]

- C. Assess the implications of how the potential investment affects budgeting and related business decisions. For example, does the investment involve significant cash spending this coming year, followed by benefits in the following year? How might that affect short-term and long-term spending priorities? Does the benefit outweigh the cost? [MBA-520-05]

Milestones

Milestone One: Financial Performance and Health

In **Module Three**, you will submit your first milestone, in which you will evaluate the company's recent financial performance and current financial health given its organizational context. **This milestone will be graded with the Milestone One Rubric.**

Milestone Two: Success Factors and Risks

In **Module Five**, you will discuss factors that may affect current and future performance. **This milestone will be graded with the Milestone Two Rubric.**

Milestone Three: Projections and Business Opportunities

In **Module Seven**, you will forecast future performance based on what you know about the company's financial health and performance. You will then discuss the incremental impact of a hypothetical but reasonable and simple new investment project, such as a new product or facility or a cost-cutting investment, as an initial step in thinking about the future. **This milestone will be graded with the Milestone Three Rubric.**

Final Submission: Organizational Financial Analysis

In **Module Nine**, you will submit your final project. It should be a complete, polished artifact containing **all** of the critical elements of the final product. It should reflect the incorporation of feedback gained throughout the course. **This submission will be graded with the Final Product Rubric.**

Deliverables

Milestone	Deliverable	Module Due	Grading
One	Financial Performance and Health	Three	Graded separately; Milestone One Rubric
Two	Success Factors, Risks, and Projections	Five	Graded separately; Milestone Two Rubric
Three	Business Opportunities	Seven	Graded separately; Milestone Three Rubric
	Final Submission: Financial Health and Performance of an Organization	Nine	Graded separately; Final Project Rubric

Final Project Rubric

Guidelines for Submission: Your financial health and performance report should be approximately 12–15 pages (excluding title page, spreadsheets and graphs, and references list). It should be double-spaced, with 12-point Times New Roman font and one-inch margins, and use the latest guidelines for APA formatting for references and citations. Include your name, course name, and report title on the title page.

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Executive Summary [MBA-520-06]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and response is especially persuasive and well-suited for target audience	Clearly and concisely summarizes principal findings, projections, and recommendations with the goal of persuading busy executives to support ideas and read further	Summarizes principal findings, projections, and recommendations to persuade executives to support ideas, but summary is lengthy, lacks clarity, omits critical details, or contains inaccuracies	Does not summarize principal findings, projections, and recommendations to persuade executives to support ideas and read further	7.5
Financial Performance and Health: Context: Key Goods or Services/Features [MBA-520-02]	Meets “Proficient” criteria and draws particularly insightful connections between company’s financial and nonfinancial features and business decisions	Describes how key goods or services and features of the company help set boundaries for business decisions	Describes how key goods or services and features of the company help set boundaries for business decisions, but response is cursory or contains inaccuracies, or links to decision making are weak or illogical	Does not describe how key goods or services and features of the company help set boundaries for business decisions	5.5
Financial Performance and Health: Context: Organized [MBA-520-02]	Meets “Proficient” criteria and demonstrates especially keen insight into relationships between company’s structure, how financial information is recorded, and impact on business decisions	Analyzes how company is organized and managed and the effect on accounting and financial information and subsequent business decisions	Analyzes how company is organized and the effect on accounting and financial information and decisions, but response is cursory or contains inaccuracies, or links between organizational structure, finance, and decision making are weak or illogical	Does not analyze how company is organized and managed and the effect on accounting and financial information and subsequent business decisions	5.5
Financial Performance and Health: Performance: Income [MBA-520-01]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and analysis and supporting evidence are particularly well-suited to drawing meaningful conclusions about financial performance	Assesses what the consolidated income statements for last three years say about financial performance, supported by relevant indicators, graphs, and spreadsheets	Assesses what the consolidated income statements say about financial performance, supported by indicators, graphs, and spreadsheets, but response is cursory or contains inaccuracies, or support is not relevant	Does not assess what the consolidated income statements for last three years say about financial performance	4.5
Financial Performance and Health: Performance: Cash Flow [MBA-520-01]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and analysis and supporting evidence are particularly well-suited to drawing meaningful conclusions about financial performance	Assesses what consolidated cash flow statements for the same time period say about financial performance, supported by relevant indicators, graphs, and spreadsheets	Assesses what consolidated cash flow statements say about financial performance, with some support from indicators, graphs, and spreadsheets, but response is cursory or contains inaccuracies, or support is not relevant	Does not assess what consolidated cash flow statements for the same time period say about financial performance	4.5

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Financial Performance and Health: Performance: Underlying [MBA-520-01]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and assessment is especially nuanced and well supported by relevant analysis and research	Assesses underlying financial performance, supported by analysis and relevant research	Assesses underlying financial performance, supported by analysis and research, but response is cursory, contains gaps in accuracy or logic, or is poorly supported by analysis and research	Does not assess underlying financial performance, supported by analysis and relevant research	4.5
Financial Performance and Health: Health: Capitalized [MBA-520-01]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and analysis and supporting evidence are particularly well-suited to drawing meaningful conclusions about financial health	Assesses how company is capitalized and what that says about financial health, supported by relevant graphs, spreadsheets, and indicators	Assesses how company is capitalized and what that says about financial health, supported by graphs, spreadsheets, and indicators, but response is cursory or contains inaccuracies, or support is not relevant	Does not assess how company is capitalized and what that says about financial health	4.5
Financial Performance and Health: Health: Growth [MBA-520-02]	Meets “Proficient” criteria and demonstrates extraordinary insight into the connections between financial and nonfinancial resources, resource management strategies, and business decisions related to growth	Determines whether company has right amount of cash and other resources to fuel future growth and what this suggests for business decisions	Determines whether company has right amount of cash and other resources to fuel future growth and what this suggests for business decisions, but response is cursory or contains inaccuracies, or links between different types of resources and business decisions are weak or illogical	Does not determine whether company has right amount of cash and other resources to fuel future growth or what this suggests for business decisions	5.5
Financial Performance and Health: Health: Financial Value [MBA-520-01]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and assessment and supporting evidence are particularly well-suited to drawing meaningful conclusions about future financial health and performance	Assesses financial value of company and what it implies for future health and performance using relevant indicators	Assesses financial value of company and what it implies for future health and performance using relevant indicators, but assessment is cursory or contains inaccuracies, or links to future health and performance are weak or illogical	Does not assess financial value of company and what it implies for future health and performance using relevant indicators	4.5
Success Factors and Risks: Priorities [MBA-520-03]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and discussion of how priorities inform management decisions is especially nuanced	Determines how company’s financial and strategic priorities affect accounting procedures and business decisions and the implications for business success	Determines how company’s financial and strategic priorities affect accounting procedures and business decisions and the implications for business success, but response is cursory or contains inaccuracies, or links between priorities and business decisions and procedures are weak or illogical	Does not determine how company’s financial and strategic priorities affect accounting procedures and business decisions and the implications for business success	5.5

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Success Factors and Risks: Nonfinancial Factors [MBA-520-03]	Meets “Proficient” criteria and demonstrates extraordinary insight into the ways in which nonmonetary factors impact business opportunities	Identifies how company might better capitalize on nonfinancial factors, supported by relevant research and analysis	Identifies how company might better capitalize on nonfinancial factors, but response is cursory, contains inaccuracies, or is poorly supported	Does not identify how company might better capitalize on non-financial factors	5.5
Success Factors and Risks: Risks [MBA-520-03]	Meets “Proficient” criteria and provides especially nuanced and well-supported insight into the internal factors that are most significant in driving financial risk	Pinpoints most significant internal risks to financial performance, supported by evidence	Pinpoints most significant internal risks to financial performance, supported by evidence, but response is cursory or contains gaps in accuracy or logic, or evidence is weak or irrelevant	Does not pinpoint most significant internal risks to financial performance	5.5
Projections: Likely Performance [MBA-520-04]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and projections are especially nuanced and well-supported by evidence and realistic assumptions	Projects the likely consolidated financial performance for next three years, supported by spreadsheet showing actual results for most recent year, projections, and assumptions	Projects the likely consolidated financial performance for next three years, supported by spreadsheet showing actual results for most recent year, projections, and assumptions, but response contains inaccuracies or faulty assumptions or omits key details	Does not project the likely consolidated financial performance for next three years or support with spreadsheet showing actual results for most recent year, projections, and assumptions	5.5
Projections: Best- and Worst-Case [MBA-520-04]	Meets “Proficient” criteria and demonstrates especially keen insight into the range of possible financial projections based on reasonable and realistic assumptions	Modifies projections to show best- and worst-case scenarios for coming year based on success factors and risks identified, supported by spreadsheet with assumptions and relevant information beyond existing financial reports	Modifies projections to show best- and worst-case scenarios based on success factors and risks identified, supported by spreadsheet with assumptions and additional information, but response contains inaccuracies or faulty assumptions, or additional information included is not relevant	Does not modify projections to show best- and worst-case scenarios based on success factors and risks identified, supported by spreadsheet with assumptions and information beyond existing financial reports	5.5
Projections: Discuss Projections [MBA-520-04]	Meets “Proficient” criteria and demonstrates especially keen insight into the sensitivity of financial projections to changing circumstances and assumptions	Discusses how assumptions, forecasting methodology, and information gaps affect projections and why projections are appropriate	Discusses how assumptions, methodology, and information gaps affect projections and why projections are appropriate, but discussion is cursory or illogical or contains inaccuracies	Does not discuss how assumptions, forecasting methodology, and information gaps affect projections and why projections are appropriate	5.5

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Business Opportunities: Likely Investment [MBA-520-05]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and investment identified is particularly well-aligned with the needs, priorities, and goals of the company	Identifies likely investment to consider and why, describing its basic features as a foundation for considering potential financial impact	Identifies likely investment to consider and why, describing its basic features as a foundation for considering potential financial impact, but response is cursory or contains inaccuracies, or justification for why investment would be of interest to company is weak	Does not identify likely investment to consider and why or describes its basic features as a foundation for considering potential financial impact	5.5
Business Opportunities: Costs and Benefits [MBA-520-05]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and evaluation is based on realistic estimates and is especially well-aligned with decision-making needs	Evaluates approximate costs and benefits of investment identified, explaining how they would affect spreadsheet projections and business decisions	Evaluates approximate costs and benefits of investment identified, explaining how they would affect spreadsheet projections and business decisions, but evaluation is cursory or contains gaps in accuracy or logic, or links to business decisions are weak	Does not evaluate approximate costs and benefits of investment identified or explain how they would affect spreadsheet projections and business decisions	5.5
Business Opportunities: Implications [MBA-520-05]	Meets “Proficient” criteria, and discussion of budgeting implications is particularly nuanced and well-aligned with decision-making needs	Assesses implications of potential investment for budgeting and related business decisions	Assesses the implications of potential investment for budgeting and related business decisions, but evaluation is cursory or contains inaccuracies	Does not assess implications of potential investment for budgeting and related business decisions	5.5
Articulation of Response	Submission is free of errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, and organization and is presented in a professional and easy-to-read format	Submission has no major errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization	Submission has major errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization that negatively impact readability and articulation of main ideas	Submission has critical errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization that prevent understanding of ideas	4
Total					100%