



BUSINESS ANALYST
MENTOR

Blueprint for Success starting a Business Analyst Career

The step by step guide to starting a successful career as a business analyst including training, gaining experience, searching for your first job, preparing your CV and ensuring success in your first interview.

About Business Analyst Mentor

Business Analyst Mentor was launched in October 2008 to support business analysts in their professional development.

There is a wealth of content written by experienced business analysts designed specifically for new or relatively inexperienced business analysts. The articles are practical and borne out of real world experience. There are few 'theoretical' articles as the Business Analyst Mentor's goal is to educate on what is best practice that can be applied today in the majority of organisations, not what may be best practice in the future.

Business Analyst Mentor was created by Alex Papworth and most of the articles have been provided by him from his own experience in his ten years as a business analyst both as a permanent employee and freelancer (consultant).

Alex has worked for many blue chip companies including Bass Taverns, Frans Maas, Glaxo Smith Kline, Sky, Lloyds Banking Group (as was LloydsTSB). He has also worked in two startup ventures so he has experience of both the process-oriented and risk-focussed environment of large corporates and the agility and risk taking approach of very small ventures.

He has worked in the Information Technology sector for nineteen years; initially as a developer before discovering his vocation in business analysis. He has worked across the world with various assignments in places as diverse as Singapore, Dallas, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Paris, Bonn as well as Edinburgh and now London which is what he considers home.

His authoring of the blog and desire to look further afield for professional development has revealed many resources available on the internet and made him aware of the IIBA (International Institute of Business Analysis) and the UK chapter in particular.

He is on the board of the IIBA (UK) responsible for Marketing and Sponsorship.

Through research on services available for business analysts pursuing professional development, he has established partnerships with a variety of training companies with high quality training products.

Note: Any books or training courses recommended in this guide have been personally tested by me and/or one or more of my mentees.

About this guide

This advice in this guide is the result of combining my knowledge and experience of the business analyst role with the knowledge acquired from helping a number of individuals who want to become business analysts. I have also consulted recruitment consultants and other specialists in the field of business analysis.

This guide is deliberately brief so that it can be read quickly and easily.

If you feel the need for more detail or guidance in any of the areas, please let me know by providing feedback here.

This is the first version of this guide and I intend to continually improve it and release new versions as I help individuals who wish to become successful new business analysts. Your help is key in achieving this. Please contact me at alex@bamentor.com with stories, recommendations and advice on training, gaining experience and presenting yourself as a credible business analyst.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone who wants to become a business analyst but is unsure how to go about it.

This guide will help you if:

- ✓ You have some experience of business analysis but have not had the formal title and/or had no or limited formal training
- ✓ You have business experience and want to leverage this as a business analyst (your experience is a huge asset as a business analyst)
- ✓ You are brand new to business analysis with no or limited business experience

I recommend you read the guide from start to finish in order. Most sections are relevant if you fit into one of the categories above.

If you are short of time and feel you know plenty about business analysis already and just want to get started, go straight to page 6, Roadmap to Success. It's an action plan to achieve success in becoming a business analyst.



It's a common misconception that you need technical knowledge to be a business analyst.

This is not true.

It can be helpful but is not essential.

Why become a business analyst?

This is a good question as you need to know your motivations are right before you invest time and money in becoming a successful business analyst.



In the UK, the [e-skills](#) initiative has commissioned a report on the IT & Telecoms sector (of which business analysis forms a part), which shows that jobs in this area will grow at a rate of 2.5% per annum for the next decade rather than 0.5% in jobs in the rest of the economy.

- ✓ Growth market

Business analysis is a growth market. This role used not to be highly valued and poorly understood but many companies are starting to realise the value of skilled business analysts. Good business analysts have the skills to ensure businesses invest their most precious resources of manpower and money wisely. Indeed, time is an even more precious resource in today's marketplace where poor investment decisions allow the competition to gain advantage.

- ✓ Low barriers to entry

At present, the role is still very immature compared to that of other professions (e.g. architect, engineer, accountant). Professional qualifications are not necessary but this is changing rapidly with the rise in importance of the IIBA (International Institute of Business Analysis) and the CBAP accreditation (Certified Business Analysis Professional) and, in the UK, the ISEB qualification and other national equivalents.

- ✓ Challenging and demanding job

Business analysis is a varied and demanding career which utilises many skills including problem solving, relationship management and time management. It can be very satisfying but is NOT an easy ride. It is important that you enjoy a challenge and see that providing you with job satisfaction.

- ✓ Springboard to other careers

The skills you acquire as a business analyst are very useful in many other roles and will provide you with opportunities to move into higher profile, well rewarded roles in project management, programme management, business architecture and strategy.

- ✓ Use existing industry knowledge

This can be either general business knowledge or particular to a sector which can make you very valuable.



Industry knowledge and insight makes you very valuable.

Use this when applying for jobs



Do you really want to be a business analyst? Find out what it takes before investing time and money.

Who can become a business analyst?

Anyone can become a business analyst but you need to have certain characteristics and it is important that you check these are skills you have or can and want to develop before you commit your valuable time and money.

These are the characteristics of a good business analyst:

- Analytical thinker
- Good communicator
- Enjoys problem solving
- Can create a rapport/relationship with different people (e.g. senior management, end user)
- Persistent and determined when tackling problems
- Quick and enthusiastic learner
It is often necessary to understand the operations of business areas with which you have no or limited familiarity
- High level understanding of business
This can be developed over time and/or through education
- Experience of business in one or more industry sectors
This can be developed over time and will make you more valuable in protecting the business interests
- High level understanding of technology
This can be developed over time and will make you more valuable in the detail of IT focussed projects

What is a business analyst?

The business analyst bridges the 'understanding gap' between the business and technology. He/she is an interpreter whose job is to protect the interests of the business and ensure their objectives are met. The business analyst also helps the business communicate their needs clearly and express them in a form that is suitable for all stakeholders including the technology team.

Roadmap to success

There are a number of milestones you need to hit to enter the career of business analyst:



A mentor doesn't have to be one person, it could be several people who are willing to give you a little of their time.

Recruitment consultants have informed me that employers look very favourably on people with mentoring experience – use this as motivation for any potential mentors.

IIBA - International Institute of Business Analysis – trade body representing professional business analysts.

I recommend you join your local chapter and attend meetings

- **Find a mentor who is an experienced business analyst**
This eBook is a very good starting point but you would benefit from advice from someone who's been there to provide/advise on training, evaluate and suggest courses, suggest books and give general career advice.

Treat this as a long term objective and continue with pursuing the other objectives

Action Plan	Done?
<p>Join the local IIBA chapter (see list of chapters under the Chapters link here.)</p> <p>Volunteer and offer to help with whatever needs support. If you do people favours and demonstrate you are willing to contribute you will find people are much more willing to help you. Volunteering might well present unexpected opportunities.</p>	
Attend local IIBA meetings and ask about mentoring	
Speak to current contacts, especially current or recent employers	
Ask your current employer if there is a mentoring or coaching scheme or, if there isn't, ask if you can start one!	
<p>Visit online resources, register and ask on forums or blogs including:</p> <p>www.BusinessAnalystMentor.com</p> <p>www.ModernAnalyst.com</p> <p>www.theIIBA.org</p> <p>Professional groups on www.Linkedin.com including BA Forum, Business Analyst Professional, Modern Analyst, IIBA</p> <p>www.requirementsnetwork.com</p> <p>www.practicalanalyst.com</p> <p>www.bridging-the-gap.com</p> <p>www.betterprojects.net</p>	



Invest in training to give you a few core skills in detail rather than ‘everything’ at great expense. Also, be wary about certificates other than the CBAP or ISEB (UK only). Find out how widely recognised they are by employers. You should start by speaking to recruitment agents and IIBA in the area you live.

- **Get training**

This step isn’t obligatory but strongly recommended. You may feel you know a lot about business analysis already BUT it is important for successful job hunting because:

- Knowledge gives you confidence
- Confidence helps you perform better in interviews and makes you more credible
- Knowledge will help you narrow down the most suitable business analyst jobs
- Knowledge will help you when starting your job
- Differentiate yourself from the competition with your investment in training
- CBAP accreditation - if you have 5 or more years relevant experience and can pass the exam (read more [here](#))

However, be selective on your training. Research training offerings and companies and make sure you don’t invest in training that is not relevant when you’re starting out.

Action Plan	Done?
<p>Gain credibility and confidence in your ability to understand the work and talk like a business analyst (at a high level) by</p> <p>EITHER</p> <p>Reading <i>The Software Requirements Memory Jogger</i></p> <p>(complete guide to the work of a business analyst - highly recommended)</p> <p>(buy now in US)</p> <p>(buy now in UK)</p> <p>AND/OR</p> <p>Attending an eLearning course to introduce you to business analysis</p> <p>I have reviewed a number of courses and have negotiated discounts on my recommended courses</p>	

Visit online resources and ask for advice on training at these sites including:

www.BusinessAnalystMentor.com

www.ModernAnalyst.com

www.theIIBA.org

Professional groups on www.Linkedin.com including BA Forum, Business Analyst Professional, Modern Analyst, IIBA

www.requirementsnetwork.com

www.practicalanalyst.com

www.bridging-the-gap.com

www.betterprojects.net

- **Acquire experience**

This step isn't obligatory but highly recommended. You will spend the rest of your career acquiring experience BUT it does help job hunting because:

- You differentiate yourself from the competition with your new skills
- It demonstrates your commitment
- It may lead to a job

You can gain experience with your current employer (see below) or whilst looking for work (see next page)



It is easier to pursue opportunities to gain experience from **inside** an organisation. You will also have income which gives you choices and doesn't force you into making risky choices



Business analysts who are also subject matter experts are very valuable as they have insights not available to BA's with no industry experience 'from the inside'. I would describe this sort of BA as an industry specialist BA as opposed to a generalist BA.

Action Plan (currently in employment)	Done
Look for opportunities to gain experience within your current organisation.	
Ask around to find out if IT projects take place within your organisation and ask for names of people who are involved. If your organisation outsources IT projects they will still need business analysts to ensure their business objectives are delivered and requirements are managed	
Speak to colleagues to determine what approach to getting involved is most likely to be successful in your organisation. Would you be willing to offer some of your time for free whilst continuing in your current role?	
Ask for the opportunity to move across to a business analysis role. Consider volunteering to pay for your own training as an incentive	
Request to participate in a project, possibly as a subject matter expert. This is someone who knows some or all aspects of the impacted business area. When in the role, ask to help with the business analysis.	
Request to shadow a business analyst on a part time basis whilst still doing your day job	
Offer to assist in planning and participating in the 'user acceptance testing' as this will require contact with the business analyst. This is a reasonable request for anyone who understands the user's point of view	
Be flexible and consider how to make it a win-win for you and your employer? If you can gain BA skills whilst doing your current job, they will have a much more useful and skilled employee	



Recruitment consultants will have the best overall knowledge of the job market in your area and will provide you with very useful insights on how and where to look for work.

Speak to several agencies to identify those who understand the business analyst role.

Take advice from the local IIBA chapter on the best agencies

The IIBA should be keen to accept support from business analysts in, for example, modelling their own processes

Action Plan (<u>looking for work</u>)	Done
Network with current contacts and IIBA for opportunities	
Ask for advice or opportunities online; through the IIBA; and through your contacts	
Identify charities, not for profit organisations or companies with good internship/apprenticeship culture (including the IIBA!)	
<p>Consider small, medium or large companies.</p> <p>Larger companies are likely to undertake projects in house but bureaucracy and process may make it harder to gain access to decision makers or make decisions based on free resources</p> <p>Smaller companies undertake less projects in house but will be much more flexible and keen to accept cheap/free help. They will still need business analysis skills (as well as project management) to work with an external supplier.</p>	
Draw up a short list of companies to target that you would be happy to work for and any contacts in those organisations	
<p>Decide which ways of gaining experience would work for you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offering time for free working as a business analyst (part or full time) - Applying for internships (apprenticeships in UK) - Applying for junior BA positions - Request to shadow a business analyst (part or full time) - Applying for normal BA positions - Applying for IT project management, user acceptance testing or system testing positions to gain project experience <p>Obviously, these positions require their own levels of experience so only pursue these if you have the right skills or the right opportunity arises</p>	

Action Plan (<u>looking for work</u>)	Done
<p>Speak to the contact in each organisation and agree the best approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contact speaks to decision makers in organisation on your behalf - contact sets up meeting on your behalf - you send speculative letter to decision maker - you apply for existing programme (internship, volunteering etc) 	

- **Prepare for job hunting and interviews**

Action Plan	Done
<p>If you are currently in work, look for opportunities within your current organisation (see Action Plan for Acquiring Experience when currently in employment above)</p> <p>OR</p> <p>If you are currently looking for work, look for opportunities with the organisation through which you are acquiring experience (see Action Plan for Acquiring Experience when looking for work above)</p>	
Network with current contacts and IIBA for opportunities	
Ask for advice or opportunities online, through the IIBA and through your contacts	
Identify companies with good internship/apprenticeship culture.	
Draw up a short list of companies to target that you would be happy to work for and any contacts in those organisations	



Industry knowledge and insight makes you very valuable.

Use this to your advantage when applying for jobs

Action Plan	Done
<p>Decide which ways of getting a job would work for you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applying for internships (apprenticeships in UK) - Applying for junior BA positions - Applying for normal BA positions - Applying for normal BA positions where you know the industry well. This a great selling point, make the most of it!! - Applying for normal BA position as a consultant. This is high risk - you need to be confident of your strengths and have good support (This is what I did but only after several years of participating on IT projects as analyst/designer/developer) 	
<p>Speak to the contact in each organisation and agree the best approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contact speaks to decision makers in organisation on your behalf - contact sets up meeting on your behalf - you send speculative letter to decision maker - you apply for existing programme (internship, volunteering etc) - you apply for job in response to job ad 	
<p>Check the job ads</p>	
<p>Filter out any business analyst roles which are inappropriate</p> <p>Make sure the role that is advertised as Business Analyst IS a business analyst role. Not all employers understand what a business analyst does. Some will expect a hybrid who also does some coding or also does project management. Your first job will be challenging enough without explaining your role to your employer! Some job ads will request this type of experience and you can filter these out unless you want to do some coding or project management! Also, if they request technical experience which you don't have, don't apply for the role. There should be plenty of roles which don't expect technical knowledge.</p>	

- **Demonstrate your credibility**



Use your resume to sell yourself. Identify the top four, relevant achievements and put them on the first page,

Action Plan	Done
<p>Consider how to structure your resume (CV in UK) and what will be relevant for a business analysis role:</p> <p>IIBA membership - shows your commitment to the role</p> <p>CBAP accreditation - if you can acquire this (requires 5 years experience) you will have a significant advantage</p> <p>Demonstrate familiarity with BABOK (Business Analysis Book Of Knowledge - free to IIBA members) - this is mainly for the interview. Not every employer will be familiar with IIBA or BABOK but the tasks and activities described are still part of the business analysis role whether the employer has heard of it or not!</p> <p>Demonstrate familiarity with business analysis fundamentals - your resume should show specific examples of when you have undertaken BA tasks and your level of success. You should consider all your experience even if it was unpaid work; tasks undertaken without having the business analyst 'title'; or not part of a job.</p> <p>This should include all of the following where you have relevant experience:</p> <p>Interviewing experience; listening skills, especially active listening; facilitation experience (e.g. brainstorming, walk throughs, focus groups); data gathering - surveys, questionnaires; team work skills - collaboration, flexibility, helping others and knowing how to ask for help; relationship building (e.g. senior and junior colleagues); negotiation - achieving consensus over prioritising requirements, resolving conflicts; communication skills, written and verbal - ability to express yourself simply and concisely to different audiences using words and models (any type of model)</p> <p>Demonstrate familiarity with the industry - you may or may not be familiar with the industry sector in which you are applying for a job. Regardless, you should attempt to demonstrate how your past experience is relevant to the industry sector in which you will be working</p> <p>Detail any training or assessments you have taken</p> <p>Tailor your resume to fit each job application or your chances of success will be reduced</p>	

Action Plan	Done
<p>Attend interviews. You should be able to confidently discuss experiences from your past where you applied business analysis skills. Be honest about the gaps in your knowledge but don't draw attention to them.</p> <p>Make it clear that you are committed to your professional development through participation in IIBA, ongoing ad hoc training and mentoring</p>	

- **Get your first position!!**

Well done, you've made it but it doesn't end here. Your professional development is just started. Continue to use the resources you have identified acquiring your first job.

Free online resources

www.BusinessAnalystMentor.com

www.ModernAnalyst.com

www.theIIBA.org

Professional groups on www.Linkedin.com including BA Forum, Business Analyst Professional, Modern Analyst, IIBA

www.requirementsnetwork.com

www.practicalanalyst.com

www.bridging-the-gap.com

www.betterprojects.net

Recommended training

Attending an eLearning course to introduce you to business analysis

I have reviewed a number of courses and have negotiated [discounts on my recommended courses](#)

Recommended reading

The Software Requirements Memory Jogger

(complete guide to the work of a business analyst - highly recommended)

[\(buy now in US\)](#)

[\(buy now in UK\)](#)