

Learn What It Really Takes to Become a Business Analyst

by

Laura Brandenburg



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Table of Contents | 2 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| [Become a BA #1] What everybody ought to know about business analyst roles | 4 |
| [Become a BA #2] Your Natural BA Talents | 7 |
| [Become a BA #3] 93 BA Career Backgrounds and Counting – What Will be Yours? | 9 |
| [Become a BA #4] You Can Have a Fulfilling BA Career and a Future | 11 |
| [Become a BA #5] 3 Simple Ways to Build BA Experiences | 13 |
| [Become a BA #6] How to Get Rid of Your “Experience Gap” Once & For All | 17 |
| [Become a BA #7] Find Your Inner Business Analyst (yes, it’s there) | 20 |
| [Become a BA #8] Finding the BA in You: Elicitation | 23 |
| [Become a BA #9] Answers to 9 Questions No One Wants You to Ask | 25 |

INTRODUCTION

I'm on a mission to help talented professionals like you become business analysts. I am passionate about this profession and I want to make it better by helping strong business analysts break in.

Most professionals I talk to are 75% there...they are so close to being a BA but they just don't know it. I'll help you discover **how close you might be** to becoming a business analyst and ease your transition.

Important Notice!! If you happened to receive this document from a friend or colleague, you could be missing bonus lessons. Be sure to [sign-up for the free e-course](#) to receive future communications and lessons.

As always, wishing you the best in business analysis.

Laura Brandenburg



- Your Host, [Bridging the Gap](#)
- Your Instructor, *My Business Analysis Career*

[BECOME A BA #1]

WHAT EVERYBODY OUGHT TO KNOW ABOUT BUSINESS ANALYST ROLES

This is your first lesson in the Become a BA e-course. You'll receive a new lesson every couple of days. Be sure to set aside some time today or tomorrow to read through the entire lesson and take the suggested action step.

We're starting by exploring what exactly is *business analysis* and what is a *business analyst*.

You'd think a professional role would have one clear definition that is consistently used across industries, organizations, and professional websites. Well, there is one clear definition, but it is not consistently used. And this can cause a lot of unnecessary confusion.

When we start to look more carefully at different business analysis roles, we will discover the BA within each of them.

DEFINING BUSINESS ANALYSIS

Let's start with the definition of business analysis, as provided by IIBA in the *Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK)*, the primary text defining the collection of activities part of formal business analysis.

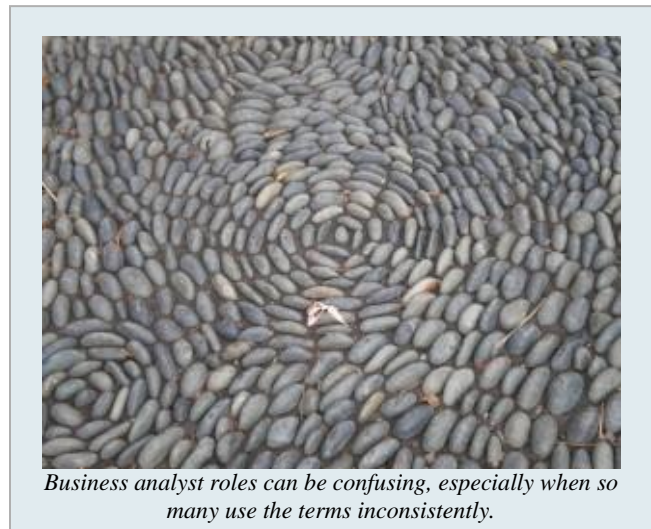
Business analysis is:

...the set of tasks and techniques used to work as a liaison among stakeholders in order to understand the structure, policies, and operations of an organization, and to recommend solutions to enable the organization to achieve its goals.

I'd summarize this as follows:

Business analysts solve problems for organizations.

Professionals become business analysts partly to unleash their passion for solving problems and making things better. They find in business analysis a challenging career that leverages their natural talents.





Where the confusion starts, is that the BABOK does not define the BA role (or a BA job). It defines a “set of tasks and techniques.” The BABOK goes on to define a **business analyst** as:

“any person who performs business analysis activities, no matter what their job title or organizational role may be...”

Many job roles contain only some of the business analysis activities. Still other roles include business analysis activities and activities from other professional domains. For example, many project management positions include a fair amount of business analysis.

Most business analysts use elicitation, analysis, and validation techniques to discover and solve these problems. They rely on their core strengths in communication and problem-solving for success.

FINDING THE SOURCE OF THE CONFUSION

There are many approaches to the BA role. There are professionals who work on IT changes, business process changes, logistics, or ensuring compliance with regulations. The role includes professionals who work on projects focused on integrating multiple software systems, building new software systems, and modifying existing software systems, or migrating from one software system to another. Pick any attribute of a project, organization, or stakeholder group and often you’ll find that the business analyst role is shaped around that context.

The well-intentioned advice you find in the online forums is often a bit obscured by that individual’s experience in the business analyst role and the approach that they are most familiar with. Although we might share the same title, we can be a bit of a grab bag of professionals.

The IIBA takes a broad view of the role of the business analysis professional, encompassing all of these approaches into a single discipline. It’s likely that your organization takes a more limited view. Or, if you are out looking for business analyst jobs, the recruiters and hiring managers you are speaking with take a more limited view. They’ve just carved a job role from within the business analysis discipline that best meets the needs of their organization. There’s nothing inherently wrong with this. But it does cause confusion and it wreaks havoc for job seekers and career changes.

LOOKING FOR THE REAL BA IN THE SHADOWS OF BUSINESS ANALYSIS

A story from our freshmen philosophy class can help us see the problem more clearly here. In *The Allegory of the Cave*, Plato shares a story about a group of men who throughout their entire lives have only seen shadows of real objects against the wall of the cave. They falsely believe the shadows are reality. Plato likens an intellectual awakening to these men turning around and seeing the actual objects that created the shadows against the wall. Because the shadows are all they have ever known, it is difficult for them to come to terms with the fact that the shadows were a mere representation of reality. In the same way, we might think of each job role as a shadow against the wall and the pure definition of business analysis as the actual object.

But the analogy breaks down for us. In our case, the shadows came first. Before there was a profession of business analysis, there were many BA-related job roles. Only in the last 5-10 years are we beginning to group these together into a single discipline.

GOING BEYOND JOB TITLES

The root of confusions about “what is a business analyst?” stems from the false assumption that all the places we see the title business analyst will (or should) be the same. Given that the job roles came first and that organizations have no inherent reason to align their job roles, the current state of business analyst job roles is quite messy.

While there is one clear answer to “what is business analysis?” there are several, often conflicting answers to any of the following questions:

- What is a business analyst role?
- What does a business analyst do?
- What qualifications are required to become a business analyst?

Remember, most simply put, business analysts solve problems for organizations. While activities, responsibilities, and qualifications might vary between jobs, this essential definition remains at the root.

And those activities, responsibilities, and qualifications will vary depending on the organization’s approach to the role and the types of projects to which BAs contribute.

Part of building a fulfilling business analysis career is finding your focus amidst all of these opportunities. New BAs tend to leverage their strengths and prior experiences in their first role and expand out from there.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Your homework for today is to go out and find 3 job postings in business analysis. Consider what’s the same about each role and what’s different. By looking at different job roles (or “shadows”) you’ll begin to see for yourself what lies underneath each business analyst job role. Share what you learned and read what other course participants discovered in the [Starting a BA Career LinkedIn group](#).



Walking into a cave...the shadows of individual job roles obscure our understanding of what a business analyst is.

[BECOME A BA #2]

YOUR NATURAL BA TALENTS

In today's lesson I'm going to give you a key that will help you unlock your door to business analysis.

THE YIN YANG OF BUSINESS ANALYSIS

During the interviews I conducted with [Ellen Gottesdiener](#), she mentioned the tension between hard skills and soft skills. She called this the yin and the yang of business analysis. Others call it the art and science. It doesn't quite matter what you call it. Understanding the concept will help you find **your path into business analysis** that leverages **your natural talents**.

The technical skills of business analysis are **techniques** and **deliverables**. [Elicitation techniques](#) such as interviewing, [analysis models](#) such as use cases, and specification documents such as BRDs are common technical skills. They are the science or discipline of being a BA. If you are naturally strong at analysis and [problem solving](#), you can often quickly learn how to create a model or a specification. It's not creating the spec that's the difficult part, it's discovering the information to put into the spec and ensuring it's complete that's the hard part.



That leads us to the soft skills. These are **how you do business analysis**. How well do you [communicate](#)? How strong are your [relationships with stakeholders](#)? How good are you at problem solving? Do you root out information? Do you see what's missing from the puzzle when there's no box? These are the underlying competencies of what it takes to be a solid BA. It's likely that you are already strong in one or more of these areas.

THE MISLEADING SURFACE OF BUSINESS ANALYSIS

On the surface business analysis might look like it's about writing specifications and creating models. In reality this is the easy part. It's easily teachable which is why you find so many people teaching it. The art of **how to do great business analysis** is harder to teach and harder to learn. You can't learn it sitting in a classroom. You can practice the technical skills but without a real stakeholder environment, it's just practice. Until your professional credibility is on the line and you are dealing with an evasive stakeholder, a misinformed sponsor, and a [stubborn developer](#), and you need to rely on your soft skills to create a positive outcome from a challenging situation, you are just practicing the techniques of business analysis.

And those professionals who create fulfilling business analyst careers don't just enjoy creating technical documents. They are motivated to **jump into messy problem-solving activities, wade through the complexities** created by the people involved in the project, and find **intrinsically good solutions** that are accepted by everyone involved.

THE SECRET (SHHH...)

Now, I'm going to let you in on a little secret. This is why, if you have all the soft skills and even training in the technical skills but little of the real-world experience, you are finding it difficult to convince most hiring managers that you can do the job. They want to hear about your **experience succeeding as a business analyst**. They want to see evidence you have the Yin Yang, or, at least, that you have succeeded in the kinds of situations a business analyst faces day-to-day.



The key to unlocking your entry into business analysis is to focus on both the Yin and the Yang and, most importantly, to bring them both together in your work experience.

I'm starting to get ahead of myself, but I just don't want to leave you hanging. The thing is that **you can build relevant experiences** whether or not you are officially a business analyst today. And the truth is that you **might already have these experiences but not yet appreciate the value of them** in the context of your career change. Re-read these last two sentences because either one or both could contain your key into the business analysis profession.

[BECOME A BA #3]

93 BA CAREER BACKGROUNDS AND COUNTING – WHAT WILL BE YOURS?

Many people get stopped becoming a business analyst before they even get started because they think they don't have the right background to be successful. Today I'm going to dispel that myth so it doesn't happen to you.

4 INTERVIEWS....

Like [Steve Blais](#) and [Rick Clare](#), many early programmers became business analysts as software development matured. They rose up from the development ranks because they had management and people skills. IT is a common background for business analysts because most often, but not always, jobs with the business analyst title solve problems using technology.



But not all business analysts have an IT background. Many, like [Kupe](#), were subject matter experts. Others, like [Kent McDonald](#), became senior BAs after strong careers in project management.

Professionals become BAs from all kinds of different backgrounds. It doesn't quite matter what your career history looks like, there is probably something in it that will help you clear your path into business analysis.

89 FORUM RESPONSES...

There are a couple of great LinkedIn forum threads where BAs share how they became BAs – if you joined these groups now, you probably wouldn't find them because they are buried in the archives. (You'll have to be a member of the group to see the thread, but joining is fairly simple.)

[How did you end up as a business analyst?](#) (IIBA) – last check 81 responses

[How did you become a business analyst?](#) (Modern Analyst) – last check 8 responses



ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES...

Some careers do make the transition easier than others. And Adrian Reed provides a comprehensive overview of [roles that can lead to business analyst jobs](#).

Those with an IT background and strong communication skills seem to have a bit of an easier path. (Read more: [How to become a business analyst when you have an IT background](#).) But if you read this post you'll also see that IT backgrounds often come with some baggage that needs to be released before becoming a business analyst.

Other common backgrounds include technical writers, business process experts, and operational roles. Even sales, a profession we might consider well outside the boundaries of business analysis has some transferable skills. Read more: [How big is the gap between sales and business analysis?](#)

As Kathleen Barrett, CEO of IIBA said in her review of ["How to Start a Business Analyst Career"](#),

"There is no one path to becoming a business analyst."



YOUR NEXT STEP

This was a short lesson but you have a lot more reading to do. Your homework today is to read the interviews or the forum posts and study how these individuals became business analysts. There are no less than 93 paths offered in these posts. Any one of them could unlock your path into business analysis.

Start a motivation file and print or save any stories that resonate with you. You'll know you are on the right track with this lesson when you have at least one "AHA" moment in which you see a bit of you in a now-BA too. Share your results in the [Starting a BA LinkedIn group](#).

[BECOME A BA #4]

YOU CAN HAVE A FULFILLING BA CAREER AND A FUTURE

Career changes represent significant investments in time and energy. In this [instructional video](#), Professor Herminia Ibarra at INSEAD and 13-year Harvard Business School faculty member, said that an average career change takes three years.

(She also shares some great tips for those making career changes, based on in depth research with other career changers. [View the entire video.](#))

Wow. Three years is a heck of a long time.

Before deciding to make the investment to become a business analyst, it makes sense to ask yourself, “**Is it worth it?**”

You might be looking for a creative outlet to unleash your problem solving potential. And if so, business analysis is likely a good career fit. But what are the prospects for business analysts?

As a talented professional with the desire to make a positive contribution, the last thing you’d want to do is spend three years investing in a change that leads you to a dead end.

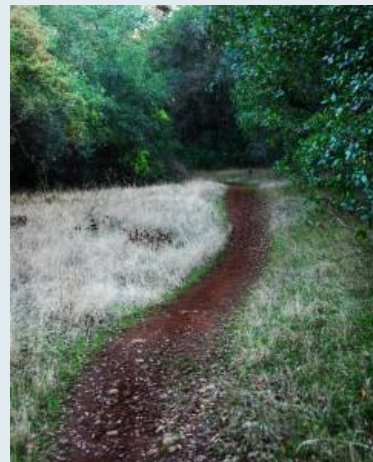
THE BENEFITS OF BEING A BUSINESS ANALYST

Some professionals are attracted to business analysis because of the relatively **high salary**. According to the recent [BA salary survey](#), the average BA in the US makes **\$82,493**, nearly double the median household income.

Still others see business analysis as a **way out of the rat race**. Development roles require continuous upgrading of technical skills and certifications and the pace of change only becomes faster the farther you move up the career ladder.

In *How to Start a Business Analyst Career*, Doug Goldberg told us:

“I like the fact that BA work does not change as fast as software development but that I am continuously learning.”



Business analysis can be a fulfilling career path that can lead to many possibilities.



And, while we are seeing a growing number of development and quality assurance roles being outsourced, **business analysis roles tend to be kept in-house**. When you are solving the organization's most critical business problems, there is just no replacement for tight communication with someone vested in your business.

OK, so business analysis is a great career to get into. But what about when I'm ready to move on or move up? Will my business analyst background help my future career prospects?

THE CAREER PROSPECTS OF A BUSINESS ANALYST

Five or ten years ago, the common career advice was that to be promoted as a business analyst, you should become a project manager. Today, the BA to PM path is still legitimate. But so is the reverse. Professionals like [Kent McDonald](#) are transitioning from senior-level project management careers to business analysis. This is a sign that the role is in a much different state than it was a few years ago.

Project management is no longer the only possibility.

When you think about it, the logical career progression for a business analyst is "CEO" (an idea I stole from IIBA CEO Kathleen Barret). And it's definitely true that the skills you learn and the competencies you strengthen as a business analyst create the possibility for a strong future.

Check out some of the [senior level business analyst roles](#) and also the [roles just beyond business analysis](#).

YOUR NEXT STEP

"What's in it for you?" is one of the most important questions you can answer. Your next step is to envision yourself as a business analyst and imagine what your future as a business analyst will be like. Do you want to follow this career path all the way up to CEO? Do you want first dibs on the most exciting projects because of your excellent track record as a BA? Do you want to be working at a strategic level or given the license to work through all the potentially overlooked details on your projects?

Your answer will be your own. I can give you the ideas and lay out the possibilities, but the future you claim is yours. You'll know you've got this when you start to get more excited about the possibilities than you are frustrated about the obstacles.

[BECOME A BA #5]

3 SIMPLE WAYS TO BUILD BA EXPERIENCES

If you did the homework in Lesson 1, you will have found a few business analyst job descriptions. Did any of them say “entry-level” in the title? On average, how many years of experience are required?

The #1 problem I hear from potential business analysts is that every job they consider requires experience. They feel like they have the aptitude to become a BA, they just need someone to give them a chance. However, each and every BA job requires experience and they are not qualified. Does this sound true to you?

Today’s lesson is about how to build BA experiences and increase your chances to qualify for BA jobs.

THE COMMON THREAD BEHIND THE 93 TRANSITIONS

One pattern that may have emerged from the interviews and forum posts I pointed out to you was that each person sort of slid into business analysis. They didn’t go from 0 to 60 in 5.9 seconds. They went from 0 to 5 to 10 to 20...stopped for lunch at a local diner...got started again....they gradually built momentum behind their BA career, one step at a time.

They demonstrated their capacity to be a BA and BA opportunities started to gravitate to them.

And they did this because the role of business analysis played to their natural strengths, much like you may have discovered when you considered your soft skills.

With a bit of focus, you can do this too because there really is nothing standing between you and becoming a BA.

By building BA experiences, you can either:

1. Convince your organization that they should put you into a business analyst role.
2. Create enough relevant career experiences that you can qualify for a business analyst role in a new organization.





You can build these BA experiences one step at a time. There are opportunities in your current work, through volunteering, and in your personal life.

3 ACHIEVABLE BA EXPERIENCES

While there are many possible experiences open to potential BAs, I've found that 3 experiences tend to sum up the majority of opportunities out there. One of these three experiences is likely to fit where you are along your transition and the career situation you find yourself in.

The three options we'll explore in this lesson are:

- Take notes in a meeting;
- Scope a project;
- Document a process.

TAKE NOTES IN A MEETING

This might seem trite to you. How can something as simple as taking notes in a meeting help you become a business analyst? Consider carefully how active you are in the meetings you attend today. Are you leading the meetings or sitting on the sidelines?

If you are leading the meeting, you might be much further along the path to BA than you think. And we'll get to that in a later lesson. If you are on the sidelines, offering to be the note-taker is an excellent way to demonstrate your capabilities, contribute to the team, and open up new opportunities.

Being a note-taker helps you build upon two critical business analysis elicitation skills – listening and asking questions. It also provides an opportunity for you to experiment with validation. The trick is not just to take notes, but to leverage this as a career opportunity.

As note-taker you will be listening more carefully than anyone else to what everyone is saying. You'll be seeking to understand, looking for patterns, and writing notes. When something doesn't make sense to you, because you are taking notes, you can and should ask clarifying questions. As soon as you ask a question, your perceived value as a contributor in the meeting goes up.

After the meeting, circulate your notes and ask for feedback. Use feedback to improve your understanding of what was discussed and build rapport with individual team members.

Now, note-taking is not the end-all-be-all of BA. And there are many cases when being perceived as the note-taker limits your role. But if you are not given much opportunity to participate at all today, it's a step up.



SCOPE A PROJECT

When we think about scoping projects, we often think about significant projects with multiple stakeholders. And, if we limit our understanding of “BA opportunities” to these types of projects, we will overlook many of the easier opportunities where we might start our slide into business analysis.

A project is a “temporary endeavor, having a defined beginning and end.”¹

Let’s say it’s Thursday afternoon and your manager swings by your desk and asks you to look into a problem with the application your department uses. You might think this task is small, even insignificant, but it’s an opportunity to practice your scoping skills. Can you identify the business need, clearly state the problem, and list possible solutions? Maybe this statement of scope becomes an email to your manager or maybe it’s a document that sits on your desktop as a reminder. Either way, you’ve scoped a project.

Other opportunities might include:

- Home improvements;
- Process improvements;
- New technology selections;
- Your next vacation.

Any activity that is a temporary endeavor, meaning you don’t repeat the same sequence of steps every day, is a project and could benefit from a selection of requirements techniques.

DOCUMENT A PROCESS

Let’s say your work is the same, day in and day out. You can still find an opportunity to practice business analysis. You can document the processes you do each and every day.

To document a process, open up any word processing software and start a list. Identify the activities you do, the sequence you do them in, and the rules you apply as you move through each step. Then do a bit of research on process flows or use cases and turn this list into a more formal. You just documented a process.

You can do this at home as well – just think about the complex processes of getting the family out the door in the morning or cooking a meal.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_management



LEVERAGE YOUR EXPERIENCES FOR YOUR CAREER TRANSITION

As you build experiences, you'll open up more opportunities for yourself. The first experience you build might not be worth adding to your resume, but keep building one experience on top of the other and pretty soon an opportunity will land in your lap that does belong on your resume.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Today your homework is to find one opportunity to build a business analyst experience. It can be at home or at work. It can be volunteer or paid. Find the opportunity and then create a one-page plan of what it will take to accomplish it. Then hop over to our [LinkedIn group on Starting a Business Analyst Career](#) and share your experiences.

If you are still feeling stuck, you might want to check out this [video blog post](#) on building experiences.

[BECOME A BA #6]

HOW TO GET RID OF YOUR “EXPERIENCE GAP” ONCE & FOR ALL

How are you doing on executing against your plan to build a BA experience? Is it easy-going? If so, please drop me a note, I'd love to hear what you are up to.

If you are feeling stuck, trust that you are not alone. Most BAs find building experiences the hardest part of becoming a business analyst.

So, before we move on to finding your inner BA, let's take a step back and talk about some strategies for finding opportunities.

DIG DEEP INTO YOUR CURRENT WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Because of the broad applicability of business analysis activities, nearly any position is ripe with opportunities to practice your being a BA. Core attributes of great BA work lie in communication and problem-solving. As you look around your organization, how many people communicate and problem solve day-to-day? Almost everyone! It stands to reason that in any role, you'll have some opportunities to apply business analyst principles and practices.

In general, the best thing you can do is get yourself involved in a project – anything that involves change or building something new. You might be on a team or you might be working independently. As long as something is changing as the result of your work and the work you do has a start and an end (as opposed to continuing on indefinitely), you are on a project. Day-to-day operational roles that are fundamentally the same in day-in and day-out offer the least opportunities for project work and make it the most challenging to make a transition into business analysis.





VOLUNTEER OUTSIDE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION FOR A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

There are also opportunities outside of your organization. Volunteering your time and smarts to help a non-profit organization opens doors toward accumulating BA experiences. In this post, we address the question of [how to find volunteer opportunities](#). It can be more challenging than you would think to donate your time! But by mixing some flexibility and passion, you are bound to turn up an opportunity in time.

Want to hear it from a professional seeking to become a business analyst? Two years ago Kimberley Heath was in your shoes. She had discovered business analysis and wanted to become a business analyst, but she lacked the real-world experience to qualify for most BA jobs.

Here's what Kimberley Heath wrote in the [Starting a Business Analyst Career forum](#).

"I took Laura's advice and I made a call to a nonprofit organization in my city to be matched to opportunities where I could apply and hone my BA skills. Fortunately, I was given an opportunity very quickly, and have been working to document processes in the form of a training guide for this nonprofit. I love the work and I love the people. But more importantly, the e-book spelled out what I needed to do to put myself on the right path to landing a BA job."

Kimberley repeated this success a second time. Now with a short BA contract under her belt, she was able to use the technique to step her career up a notch. She was kind enough to share that entire story in a *Bridging the Gap* blog post. [Read it here](#).

START SMALL AND FIND UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITIES

The trick is not to wait for the "perfect" experience or until you have 100% confidence in your BA abilities. Neither of these is likely to happen any time soon. Start small. Take on a new challenge. Do your best. Reflect on what you learned and what you can do better next time. This is what the mid-level and senior-level business analysts do all the time. Why not start today?

TACKLE YOUR PROJECTS AT HOME WITH NEW ENERGY

Don't overlook opportunities in your personal life. Anything from a home remodeling project to a decision to buy a new DVD player can provide ripe opportunities to build a BA experience.

YOUR NEXT STEP

If you were stuck on the last lesson, take 3 minutes *right now* and write down one thing you can do this week. Don't think about it too much. Just write down the first thing that pops into your head. [Go back to lesson 5](#) to refresh your memory on building experiences, then craft a plan to make it happen.



If you weren't stuck, take a moment to pat yourself on the back. Then make the most of your new experience by first, updating your resume, and second, finding your next opportunity. The trick is to make your next opportunity a bit bigger and more challenging than the last. That's what will make it a step forward.

Take a minute to share your success (or get advice to overcome your frustrations) in the [Starting a BA Career LinkedIn group](#).

I'm looking forward to helping support you on this new journey. If building BA experiences sounds like something you'd be interested in working with a senior business analyst to do, check out my [career mentoring services](#).

[BECOME A BA #7]

FIND YOUR INNER BUSINESS ANALYST (YES, IT'S THERE)

Across all the interviews I've done with now senior-level business analysts, the story essentially remains the same. They say things like: I didn't start out trying to become a BA. I didn't take a course and find my first job. No, I woke up one day and realized I was doing something very different than I had been doing before. I discovered that I was a business analyst when I filled "X" role on a project. And most of them have never looked back.

You read some of their stories in the earlier lessons – stories of transitions and how they took one step at a time. Now I want to point you to a few more stories. They are the best so I saved them for last. I want you to leave this course inspired that you can also find your inner business analyst.

3 "ONE FELL SWOOP" BUSINESS ANALYSTS

Let's start with **Doug Hill**. Doug had been working for 10 years in an ambiguous IT role. After exploring the job market, he discovered the BA profession and was able to translate his prior experience into a business analyst context. Because of this, he landed his first "business analyst" job as a *senior* business analyst. [Read Doug's advice to potential BAs.](#)

Jennifer Banzon was doing independent technology consulting and discovered business analysis while looking for her next opportunity. Jennifer landed her first formal BA job as a CRM Business Analyst by leveraging her prior experiences. Jennifer established the Los Angeles chapter of IIBA and started a CBAP study group. [Read Jennifer Banzon's story.](#)

Aaron Whittenberger shares a similar story. He learned about business analysis and became a CBAP, our profession's most relevant certification, within the span of a couple of years. [Read Aaron's interview.](#)

What's interesting about these individuals is that they discovered BA and became a BA almost in the same fell swoop. Their career transition was one of discovery.

Many people have read [How to Start a Business Analyst Career](#) or participated in a BA training program and discovered that they are really junior or even intermediate business analysts. They just didn't know how to talk about their career experiences in a business analysis context.

MY STORY

I am one of those professionals who sort of fell into their first opportunity. I was walking down the hall and a colleague suggested I apply for a new BA position that was opening up. This is how I understood the opportunity at the time. Since I've started helping others become business analysts, I've started to see how I approached my QA role positioned me as a BA-in-Waiting. [Read my story](#)

YOU MIGHT BE A BA

The thing is, this could be you. You might already have BA experiences but not yet appreciate the value of them in the context of your career change. You might be a BA and not know it. And, very likely, you are more of a BA than you give yourself credit for today.

And because every year of paid business analysis experience equates to **\$923 in annual salary**, your as-yet-undiscovered BA career background could be a goldmine.



YOUR NEXT STEP

Take some time and write down all the BA-related experiences you can identify in your career or business analysis skills you've accumulated. Don't filter this too much. Even if you think something *might* be a business analyst experience, write it down.

You can do this on a sheet of paper or in an electronic document. But my favorite way to collect information like this is on 3x5 cards. There is something concrete about a stack of cards representing your career experiences. You can also shuffle the cards around, sort them, or pin them up on the wall. This is information you are going to use through your entire transition to business analysis so you might reorganize it several times as your understanding develops.

Start right now, capturing the experiences that come immediately to mind.

When you run out of ideas, do the following to get you started again:

- Go back to the 3 project experiences you identified in the second lesson, the ones that represented your soft skills. What BA experiences are lurking underneath those projects?
- Go back through your motivation file of interviews and forum comments from other BAs who have made the transition – what do you and that BA have in common?
- Pick up the BABOK or any other book on the business analysis fundamentals, read through it for activities you've done and experiences you've accumulated.



- Go to the "[BA Knowledge](#)" tab on *Bridging the Gap* and browse the posts for ideas.
- Read back through your cards and let them trigger new ideas.

Good luck. In the next lesson we'll break down elicitation and help you dive deep into your elicitation qualifications. If you run into any hurdles finding your BA experiences, please get in touch by responding to the email you received with this lesson or posting a question in the [Starting a BA LinkedIn forum](#).

[BECOME A BA #8]

FINDING THE BA IN YOU: ELICITATION

Even if the last exercise on writing down BA experiences did not lead you to discover that you are a BA in disguise, it's extremely unlikely that you are completely devoid of BA qualifications and experiences. It's likely there are some gems, some strengths from your career history, that will help ease your transition into business analysis.

Each knowledge area of the BABOK can be thought of as a focal point for identifying what you might already know and what experiences you've accumulated.

Let's take an example. **Requirements elicitation** is one of the most fundamental BA tasks. In its simplest form, elicitation is the process of discovering requirements most often, but not always, through conversations with business stakeholders.



WHO ARE THE PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH?

And let's not let the words trip us up. "Business stakeholders" is just a fancy word for people who know something about the project. Stakeholders might be users of the system, customers, product managers, or "subject matter experts." Anytime you ask someone a question about the project and do something with the answer you receive that helps create clarity, you are eliciting requirements, at least in a small way.

What knowledge might you have about elicitation, even with no formal training?

- Do you know how to ask questions?
- Do you know how to listen to the answers?
- Can you probe deeply into a topic?

Opportunities for experience abound as well. Asking your boss to clarify their directions to you for a project is a form of elicitation. Sitting down with a team member and asking them about what they do is an interview, the most commonly used elicitation technique. Facilitating a brainstorming session about a problem could be an example of elicitation and analysis. Surveys are an elicitation technique. So is careful reading of a document to discover its meaning and implications.



WHAT DO YOU ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT?

Elicitation doesn't have to happen in the context of identifying software requirements. Anytime you want to understand what is expected of you or how to perform an activity, you are performing a bit, albeit a small bit, of elicitation. You have kernels of experience that can be your building blocks of a business analyst career.

YOUR NEXT STEP

I bet you are itching to do so. Get out your cards and write down more experiences that come to mind. Re-read the definition of elicitation, turn it around in your mind, and write down more experiences.

You can go through a similar process with each knowledge area. I recommend you do this by an active reading of the BABOK, highlighting and noting the knowledge areas and activities that you have experience with. For new BAs with less BA experience, I often recommend side-stepping the BABOK at first and using a more accessible text, such as Ellen Gottesdiener's [*Software Requirements Memory Logger*](#).

While both of these texts are excellent resources for the new business analyst, you'll have to do a lot of thinking and analysis to apply them to your career background. It's definitely possible, but it's not simple.

I'll be helping members of my forthcoming learning program go through this step-by-step. We'll break down each knowledge area and the key natural talents of business analysts, providing you with crystal clear examples so you can discover your building blocks. We'll also dig deep into various career backgrounds and showcase the transferable skills that helped individuals from that profession become business analysts.

You'll learn more about the program at the end of this free course.

[BECOME A BA #9] ANSWERS TO 9 QUESTIONS NO ONE WANTS YOU TO ASK

It's likely you signed up for this e-course because you had some burning questions about what it takes to become a business analyst.

We've answered a lot of questions about becoming a BA. But I know you still have more, the kind you want to have answered but find no one to ask. Maybe you also have a few questions you have asked but can't seem to get a straight answer on. Well, lots of potential BAs email me questions, so I have a pretty good idea what questions you still might have and I'm going to answer them so you don't have to ask. Since it's just not in my nature to evade the truth, misrepresent reality, or mislead you in any way, you'll get a straight answer from me. I promise.

1. HOW LONG WILL THIS TAKE?

Career changes can take up to 3 years. In my experience and from the experiences of those I've worked with on their transitions, they can happen much faster with persistence, focus, and a bit of luck. The more you can put yourself in the line of BA opportunities, the more quickly you'll make the transition.



2. WHAT DOES BUSINESS ANALYST TRAINING COST?

The average in-person training course ranges from \$2000-\$3000 *before travel costs*. Others invest tens of thousands on masters degree programs related to business analysis. But becoming a business analyst does not have to deplete your savings account. If you are willing to be creative and pursue alternative options, you can do this much more cost-effectively and probably more quickly too. It's about taking ownership for your own career direction and leveraging the right opportunities.

3. HOW MANY ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS ARE THERE?

Not many. I know one BA who landed an entry-level position with training and support from his employer to grow as a business analyst. And it took him nearly a year of searching to discover this opportunity. Yes, IIBA is working with employers on this and helping them build a career path for new



business analysts. But the return on that investment could be years out. Your best course of action is not to simply wait to find an entry-level BA job, but to go out and make this career transition happen.

4. WILL I CONVINC AN EMPLOYER TO HIRE ME FOR AN INTERMEDIATE ROLE WITHOUT EXPERIENCE?

If you have a prior connection with the organization and the manager trusts your work, then possibly yes. Otherwise, most likely no, unless they are one of the rare employers looking for entry-level BAs they can groom with an intense training program. However, as we discussed throughout this course, it's very likely you have more experience than you give yourself credit for so it might be possible for you to position yourself as a qualified intermediate business analyst.

5. WILL I CONVINC AN EMPLOYER TO HIRE ME WITHOUT THE DOMAIN EXPERIENCE THEY ASK FOR?

Again, if you have a prior connection, maybe. But 99% of the time – no. If a manager thinks domain experience is important to their position, even if they are 100% wrong, no candidate, no matter how experienced, is going to convince them otherwise. [Check out this post](#) on how industry experience can impact your job search.

6. WHAT WILL MY FIRST JOB BE LIKE?

Who knows!! Seriously, it could be any role within business analysis. It depends on the unique qualifications you bring to the table and how you choose to approach this transition. But honestly, most new BAs find roles that are partial in their scope or working on simpler projects. They might involve more analysis and less elicitation. They might be more like an Assistant to the Senior BA and involve a lot of grunt work. But the flip side is any role in BA is going to accelerate your career change and help you get to where you want to be. Most professionals that find junior-level BA roles quickly transform the role into a more senior-level role, just by making a positive impact to their organization.

7. WILL THIS BE DIFFICULT?

Yes, but more importantly it will be fun! If business analysis is the right career choice for you, then each step that gets you closer to your goal will be fulfilling in and of itself. I'm a firm believer that the easy goals aren't worth achieving nearly as much as the difficult goals are. What about you?

8. WHAT IS THE REAL VALUE OF A CERTIFICATION?

For independent certifications offered by training companies, not much. It's your combination of know-how and experience that is going to matter. When it comes to IIBA certifications (the [CBAP](#) and the [CCBA](#)) that *validate knowledge and experience*, the value is higher. But neither will independently land you a job. You still need to know how to position yourself as a BA, talk like a BA, and bring forth the most relevant career experiences from your career history.

9. WHY ISN'T ANYONE HELPING ME BUILD BA EXPERIENCES?

I don't know. Our profession needs talented professionals just like you who are ready to succeed as business analysts. But we don't make it easy to get there. This is a problem I'm going to help you solve. I'll be launching a new learning program in early March to help you discover your inner business analyst and build upon it.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Thanks again for your participation in this e-course. I hope you are now further along your path to becoming a BA than you were when you started this course 3 weeks ago.

It's time for your feedback. This survey is three simple questions. I look forward to your honest answers. I am 75% complete in planning a new learning environment which will help professionals like you break down the barriers to becoming a business analyst. But I want to ensure it's actually going to help.

[Click here](#) to complete the short survey.

As always, wishing you the best in business analysis.

Enjoy the journey,

Laura Brandenburg

- Your Host, [Bridging the Gap](#)
- Your Instructor, *My Business Analysis Career*



WAIT, THERE'S MORE...

If you want to stay updated with the latest from *Bridging the Gap*, be sure to [sign-up for our weekly eNewsletter](#). Each week I send out one action step that you can take to advance your BA career and professional insights to better business analysis from the *Bridging the Gap* community.



I'm also going to take what we did in this free course a step farther. I'm launching a new learning environment, *My Business Analysis Career: Getting Started* in March 2011 where you'll be able to work through your career transition with my support and access valuable content, like the lessons in this course, but in multiple formats to serve multiple learning styles.

This directed, action-oriented course will be your ticket to the business analyst profession. We'll help you dig even deeper into your inner BA and build a personalized roadmap following in the footsteps of other BAs who have made the transition. I'm pulling up every curtain I can find to make this not just a BA learning experience, but an opportunity to transform your career.

I'm so excited to get started and I feel like I'm sitting on my hands in anticipation. But there are a few more details to work out before I'll be ready to open the doors, as I want to ensure this is a supremely valuable experience for you.

Look for emails from me within the next few weeks with more information about *My Business Analysis Career: Getting* and your invitation to become a charter member.

I wish you the best of luck on your transition. Know that I will be here to support you every step of the way. If ever I can be of service to you, [please get in touch](#). Let me know where you are, where you are trying to go, and where you are stuck. I'd be honored to help you get moving again.