

Learn What It Really Takes to Become a Business Analyst

by

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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.

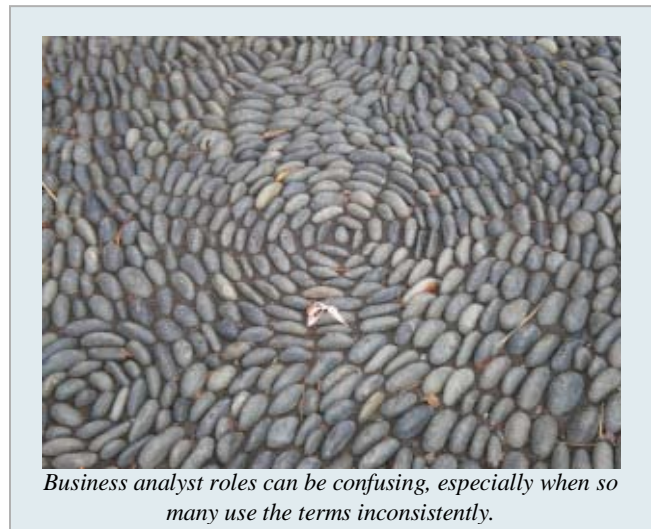
Business analysis is:

...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](#).



[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 interview 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.

YOUR NEXT STEP

I'm guessing that you didn't fully appreciate the value of your soft skills before now. Identify your strongest soft skill and come up with three career experiences where you demonstrated that soft skill in action. These could very well be your cornerstone experiences helping ease your transition into business analysis. Keep them in a safe place as they will be useful to you in completing some of the later lessons. You might consider posting what you find in our [Starting a BA Career LinkedIn group](#) and receiving feedback from your peers.

[BECOME A BA #3]

WHAT ARE THE KEY SKILLS I NEED TO BECOME A BA?

As we learned in Lesson 1, there is a big difference between business analysis and business analyst roles. This means that as a business analyst we might specialize in any number of skills. It also means that even if we're experts in business analysis, we may not qualify for all business analyst jobs.

This can be a tough pill to swallow.

I would contend that even the most senior business analyst, the kind who would qualify for the CBAP based on their years of experience across multiple knowledge areas, would probably **qualify for less than the 50% of the business analyst job roles available today.**

I put myself in this camp. I regularly see jobs I'm not qualified for. I also see a lot of business analyst roles that represent work I simply don't want to do.

As a potential BA, the stakes are even higher. How do you develop a career plan to become a BA when the job market is so messy?

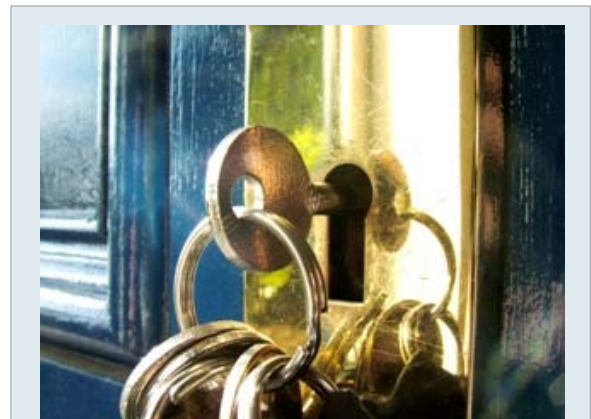
Well, let's break this down.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS SKILLS

The *BABOK*[®] is the *Business Analysis Body of Knowledge*[®]. It is considered the BA go-to resource for what is it that business analysis actually is.

The *BABOK* breaks down business analysis into 6 knowledge areas:

- Business Analysis Planning & Monitoring
- Elicitation
- Enterprise Analysis
- Requirements Analysis
- Solutions Assessment & Validation
- Requirements Management and Communication



The right skills can help you open the door to business analysis.



There are also the underlying competencies, and we'll get to those next. From among these knowledge areas, I would say that elicitation, requirements analysis, solution assessment, and requirements communication are typically required for a junior or mid-level job role. Many also require enterprise analysis, but you might consider this a more senior-level job responsibility. Planning and monitoring is typically a senior level role.

Within each of these knowledge areas are several tasks and associated techniques. Not all BAs use all techniques. For example, elicitation has 6 or 7 techniques associated with it, everything from interviews to surveys to focus groups. But I would say the vast majority of intermediate BA roles require interviews and observation, and possibly a bit of facilitation.

Again, because the market is so messy, you'll find exceptions to every rule, so I'm deliberately being a bit vague and general here.

What you can do is go back to the job postings you found in Lesson 1 and continue looking for new postings each week. Start highlighting the business analysis skills you see in each job posting. Over time, common patterns will emerge that are specific to the jobs in your local area. The second thing you can do is go back through your career history and find the skills you already have. (We'll help you kick-start this process with elicitation in Lesson 5.) Then begin to focus your business analysis opportunity search on the strengths you already bring to the table.

UNDERLYING COMPETENCIES

The final knowledge area in the *BABOK* is the underlying competencies. You have already identified your most important underlying competencies in lesson 2 — your soft skills that will help make you a great business analyst.

Underlying competencies also include the way we behave — ethics, organization, trustworthiness — and our business knowledge, interaction skills, and technical skills, which we'll cover in detail next.

TECHNICAL SKILLS FOR BAS

For some business analyst jobs, certain business analysis technical skills can be very valuable. For example, while there is little standardization as to what modeling languages are required, technical skills such as UML (which is Unified Modeling Language) and BPM (Business Process Modeling) language are in use at a growing number of companies.

Other technical skills include the ability to use modeling tools, such as Visio or Enterprise Architect, or even standard office tools, such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, in sophisticated ways. Some companies use requirements management tools, such as DOORS or Caliber, to capture and manage their requirements and requirements traceability processes.



Any specific BA tool or specific BA technique can be valuable in a specific situation. But it can just as easily be irrelevant.

In general, focusing on specific technical business analysis skills, is not likely to be the cornerstone of a long-term career path. The tools change with current trends. UML and BPM seem to be sticking around, but 10 years from now they will have changed or possibly have been replaced.

Instead of focusing on specific technical skills, look for the “skill behind the skill”. So instead of becoming proficient at UML, consider how well you can create visual models that stimulate understanding and conversation. Instead of mastering a specific requirements management tool, seek to understand the underlying principles behind using such a tool in the first place. These skills will have a longer career shelf-life. Then, when in a position, learn the on-the-job skills needed to be successful. Add these to your tool belt and leverage them as needed throughout your career.

WHERE ARE THE REAL IT SKILLS?

Right, the “real” IT skills. The stuff that developers do, such as write SQL queries and program in .NET and Java. Outside of basic SQL queries, which are growing as a piece of the technical BA skill set, the rest of these IT skills are required when filling a blended BA/development role. Sometimes you’ll see them listed in job qualifications sections, but not in the responsibilities. Often this is because the hiring manager does not really know how to write a good BA job description. If writing code is both a responsibility and a qualification, the question for you is do you want to write code? Do you want a pure BA career or do you want a blended BA/development career?

Again, no one BA will qualify for all BA positions. I do not qualify for BA/Development roles and I simply ignore them in my career planning and in my job searches.

The decision you make here is one of the most important, as learning an IT skill involves a lot of focused effort and is often a whole other career change onto itself.

Read this article for more analysis of “[Why we see technical skills in business analysis jobs.](#)”

INDUSTRY AND DOMAIN EXPERTISE

As you look at BA jobs, you might feel like none of the above even represents the half of it. Do I need to know SAP? What about the financial domain? Or insurance? Or the ins and outs of running an HR department? How can I ever become a BA if I must learn this all first?

A lot of BA jobs require special areas of expertise. These aren’t formally “business analysis” skills. But the reality is that when you are so close to the business, as a BA is, sometimes prior knowledge of the business is seen as more important than knowledge of business analysis. This is just the reality of today’s BA job market.



If you have areas of expertise, by all means leverage them. Take full advantage of them as you look for your next opportunity! But if you don't, you might want to focus your search on opportunities that will value your soft skills and business analysis qualifications. Building expertise in a domain will really only come with project work and experience in that industry, so there's no way to build these skills across multiple industries simultaneously. As you mature your BA experience, you'll be able to make a more solid case about your ability to work effectively as a BA regardless of domain knowledge, but in your early days this is likely not a battle worth fighting.

If you are targeting a specific industry and care more about getting into that industry than becoming a BA, then begin networking with professionals in that industry and find out how they got started. You might want to put your BA transition on hold while you figure out how one breaks into that industry.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Start a skills inventory. Track the skills and areas of expertise you bring to the table. Add to this list the skills that you are finding in the most relevant BA job postings. Keep a running list of skills and begin to research them.

- What is the skill?
- What is the context in which it is used?
- What does proficiency or mastery look like?
- Is this skill specific to an organization or an industry?
- Is this skill something with broad application?

Your skills inventory will evolve. As you broaden your experience as a BA, you'll add more skills to your repertoire. As you broaden your awareness of business analysis and related professions, you'll discover new skills you want to add to your tool belt. In any given month there are 5 to 10 skills on my "let's try this out" list that I'm looking for opportunities to learn and leverage. As a business analyst you'll be always learning and trying new things.

[BECOME A BA #4]

95 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.

6 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.

[Michiel Erasmus](#) just recently transformed a career in software development into his first business analyst position.

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. [Kimberley Heath](#) became a business analyst after a long history in various business roles within the travel domain. She used volunteering to build relevant experiences and in 2011 accepted her first full-time BA role.

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 95 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 #5]

FINDING YOUR INNER BUSINESS ANALYST: ELICITATION

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.

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 that 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.



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.

AN EXAMPLE: REQUIREMENTS ELICITATION

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.

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.

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

Take some time and write down all the elicitation 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 might go back to the 3 project experiences you identified in Lesson 2, the ones that highlighted your soft skills. Can you think of any elicitation experiences in that context?

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 Jogger](#).

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 am helping members of *Launching Your Business Analysis Career* go through this step-by-step. I break down each knowledge area and the key natural talents of business analysts, providing 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.

To be the first to know when enrollment reopens, [sign-up for the *Launching Your BA Career* early bird list.](#)



[BECOME A BA #6]

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 95 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.

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.



This is the real value of “volunteering” for experience. If you can put a project experience on your resume and speak to it in an interview situation, it’s worth doing. The volunteer time pays for itself in terms of increased future opportunities. Consultants do this all the time; they just call it “pro bono” work. Pro bono work can lead to lucrative contracts or, minimally, a fresh experience to talk about and through which to try new techniques or explore a new domain.

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 #7]

HOW TO SELECT A BA TRAINING PROGRAM

If you've started to look into training options in business analysis, you might be feeling overwhelmed by the number of options available. You probably have a fixed amount of time and money to invest in training and even if your resources are not too limited, you probably don't want to spend more time than you have to in training before actually getting started in your business analyst career.

The options can seem overwhelming. You might be asking the following questions:

- What's really needed to become a BA?
- How do I sort through all of these options?
- Is expensive necessarily better?
- And what about a certificate—does that have value for my BA job search?

What follows is a series of checklists that you can use when evaluating BA training options. We're breaking down the decisions and criteria. The idea is to help you define a list of criteria that you can use when evaluating a training program and feel confident about your choice.

Just a word of warning – this lesson contains A LOT of information. And to keep it all in perspective, at the end we'll wrap all this up into a worksheet to guide you through the decision-making process. The worksheet will help you prioritize *your* training requirements and evaluate your options.

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION – ANSWER IT FIRST

What do you envision happening as a result of you participating in a training program? What is the big goal that's pushing you towards pursuing training in the first place?

One thing we learn very quickly as business analysts is that the more measurable and specific we can make our project goals, the easier it is to find the best possible solutions. The same thing holds true for our professional goals. So taking a bit of time to reflect on what it really is that you want *before* starting a training program will help you craft a plan that gets you from where you are to where you want to be.

Your answer could be:

- Find a new job with a core set of business analysis responsibilities.
- Create a business analyst role within my organization. And fill it!
- Create long-term career security by qualifying myself for a wide variety of business analyst jobs.



- Become recognized by my manager or colleagues as a business analysis professional, by earning a title change, a promotion, or an updated job description accurately describing my business analysis responsibilities.

The answer to this question is yours and yours alone. I just give you these answers as suggestions because they are the most common career goals I hear from those professionals actively seeking to become business analysts.

FINDING THE MOST DIRECT ROUTE FROM HERE TO THERE

Once you've identified your primary goal, you'll need to determine what you need to learn or do to make that goal a reality.

Here's a list of fairly common learning objectives for professionals pursuing the above goals.

- Be able to define and describe the fundamental techniques of business analysis.
- Be able to talk the BA talk.
- Identify past experiences that are relevant to your business analysis career transition.
- Identify the most important "soft skills" or underlying BA competencies that you bring to business analysis.
- Identify the relative value of your professional qualifications, experiences, and competencies given your career goals.
- Be able to distinguish between the types of business analyst roles that are available and make an informed choice about the path to pursue as part of your career planning.
- Be able to strongly position yourself in the BA job market, crafting a strong resume that helps you obtain interviews and presenting your qualifications appropriately in interviews.
- Create a professional development plan to fill any remaining competency gaps that might prevent you from achieving your career goals.

This list might contain items you've never thought of before. You might want to read through the list a few times and consider carefully whether each learning objective will help you achieve your career goal. In the worksheet provided below, you'll prioritize these learning objectives and be able to add additional ones as well.

BUT WAIT, WHAT ABOUT THIS??

Even with these learning objectives defined, you might still have some questions about them. Here are answers to some of the most frequent ones. (And if you have more, please get in touch!)

How deep to I need to learn about business analysis?

When you are making a career transition, you need to get less deep than you might assume. The challenge is, as we learned in lesson 3, there are just so many skills that can help you become a BA. It's



unreasonable to expect yourself to become an expert in every one of those skills before getting started. (Yes, you can breathe a deep sigh of relief if you'd like right now.)

Instead, what seems to work best is for potential BAs to get a **broad understanding of business analysis** and identify the strengths they bring to the career based on their past experiences and, often, what they've done because they have good BA instincts. Then formal training can help plug small gaps in knowledge and transform an informal experience into a formal understanding of how to do a specific aspect of business analysis really well.

So, I don't suggest you go deep into all the techniques until you have a solid grounding of the whole picture first. Your career development doesn't end with your first BA job, so there will always be time to fill additional knowledge gaps and learn more about business analysis.

Am I going to find this all in one program?

You might look at the list of learning objectives above and think this is a tall order for any one training program. And it is. Most BA training programs support the first two learning objectives quite well, probably better than is necessary for the career changing BA. (That's because they are serving multiple audiences, and often their primary client base for their Intro to Business Analysis classes are existing BAs within organizations who participate in the class together.) Because of this, they do a good job teaching you the fundamentals, but then they leave you to your own device to take what you learned and apply it to make your career change a reality.

If you go this route, you can combine training with other support, such as mentoring or training in career development and conducting a job search.

If you'd like to check out an option that does meet most of these objectives, I do have a program that might be appropriate for you. For more information [click here](#).

THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

How do you learn best? There are a wide variety of formats available. You can learn about business analysis everywhere from reading books to attending university classes to participating in online training programs. The decision you make here might largely depend on your time and monetary resources, as there is a wide range of costs and it typically varies most by format.

But you'll also do well to consider how you learn best and find a program that supports your learning style. If you don't know much about how you learn, you might check out these free online assessments.

- [Edutopia Learning Style Quiz](#)
- [LD Pride Learning Styles Self-assessment](#)
- [Learn More Indiana Learning-style Assessment](#)



USE YOUR LEARNING STYLE TO DEVELOP A FEATURE LIST

When it comes to training options, there are many available. We could look at the pros and cons of each option. But then I'd run the risk of embedding my personal learning preferences and biases into the mix. Instead, I'll run through a list of the features a typical training program might have. And you'll have the opportunity to do a bit of business analysis by weighing the value of each feature to you, your career goals, and your learning style.

The checklist you can download at the end of this lesson supports you customizing this list by adding your own priorities and then using it to compare different options as you make your decision.

Instructor-Led

Most training programs are instructor-led. This means that you have access to one or more instructors as part of the course. They establish a pace for the course and deliver the materials live, whether in-person or via a web-based interactive tool. Some lower cost virtual options are not instructor-led. They are available on-demand and offer pre-recorded lessons.

Ongoing Access to Lessons

Once you've attended the initial lesson, are you able to go back through the materials or will you need to rely on handouts and notes? The advantage of some virtual options is that they provide limited, ongoing, or lifetime access to the lessons, enabling you to go back as needed and revisit the materials.

Instructor Access

Oftentimes all of our questions are not answered "in class" and it can be helpful to have access to instructors outside of class time when you get stuck trying to apply some aspect of what you learned. Instructor access might be provided in the form of office hours, phone support, email support, Q&A sessions, or online forums.

Reinforcement of Learning

As adults we do not learn very well by simply sitting in a classroom. We need to apply what we learned to cement new ideas. Reinforcement can happen via online quizzes, interactive exercises, homework, next action worksheets, and practice work.

Project Work

A strong way of reinforcing learning is by working on a real or simulated project. Some university programs offer students the opportunity to connect with local businesses and perform volunteer work to handle a small project as a BA or team of BAs. These have real value in that you are practicing your skills in a real-world environment, with real stakeholders and real issues.



Other programs offer simulated projects where a case study is provided and you work through sample deliverables based on those materials. These are a great reinforcement tool in terms of learning the techniques, but not as valuable from a real-world experience perspective. You might consider whether or not the project is “real enough” that you could put it on your resume and talk about it in an interview.

Meet and Collaborate with Other Students

Students who have gone through the same course, program, or material together often develop a sense of camaraderie. They have set of shared experiences and learnings. They may become close collaborators throughout their career journey, helping each other with future on-the-job challenges or job searches. Courses offered in a live classroom setting often offer the most opportunities for building relationships with peers, but don’t overlook the online interaction available through ongoing access to forums. Deep relationships are not likely to develop in a few days time, so if this is an important feature for you, look for programs that support continued contact with other students.

Support from Real-World Practitioners

It’s no secret that the longer you are not active as a business analyst, the more distant you become from the real-world challenges business analysts face. University instructors who have been in academia for a long-time might have a deep understanding of the tools and techniques but may not be able to help you apply them in a real-world setting.

We’ve all had that experience where someone “throws the book at us” and we look at them in disbelief for their apparent disregard for what’s “really going on.” Instructors with recent and practical real-world experience know that techniques and templates rarely solve problems perfectly and the ability to improvise and respond to new information is often your greatest strength. Consider access to real-world practitioners as part of your training.

CDUs for IIBA® Certification

If pursuing either the CBAP® or CCBA™ certification is something you are considering, then it you might want to select a program that will qualify for Professional Development credits (PDs). You’ll need 21 PDs to apply for either of these professional certifications. Believe it or not, most BA training programs will qualify for PDs, regardless of whether or not they advertise this fact. If the provider is an EEP™ (see below) their endorsed courses will automatically qualify. But if they are not an EEP (and many reputable providers are not) then you simply need to do a bit more work to ensure the course material aligns with the *BABOK*®. If you can spell this out as part of listing this course on your application, then it’s likely the course will count.

IIBA Endorsed Education Provider (EEP)

An EEP provider pays a fee to IIBA to evaluate and endorse its materials for a specific course. IIBA reviews the materials to ensure that they are aligned with the knowledge areas in the *BABOK*. Courses endorsed through this program are guaranteed to provide PDs for certification. IIBA does not, however, perform a quality assessment of the materials. If you use these checklists to assess potential training



options, you could safely choose a non-EEP program as the results of your analysis will be deeper than the EEP program provides.

Certificates

Certificates are typically handed out by training organizations or academic institutions and they represent the completion of a body of academic material. They may represent that you've taken a course, a collection of courses, participated in class, submitted your homework, and/or verify that you have passed an exam that covers the course material. Very rarely (or never) will you see any job posting requiring a specific certificate, except perhaps if you are applying for a job from the company that offers the certificate. You might see positions that ask for formal training in business analysis, in which case your certificate is a representation of that (but so is your participation in a course that does not offer a certificate).

In contrast to certificates are professional certifications. These are typically provided by third party professional bodies, not training companies. The two that are most relevant to us as business analysts are those offered by IIBA – the CCBA and the CBAP. Unlike certificates, certifications represent you have relevant professional experience and the understanding of a body of knowledge, in this case the *BABOK*.

Most BAs I've spoken to about certificates do not report that these really helped open many doors for them in finding their first BA job. Of course, many training companies will tell you they do, but you need to look at their underlying motivations. Certificates are expensive and they need to justify the cost. Because again, the value of the certificate is limited by the reputation of the training company and it represents you have book knowledge but it does not really close that experience gap.

Accountability

Are you the type of person who needs someone to hold you accountable for your learning? Do homework assignments and graded work inspire you to do your best work? If so, then self-directed programs are probably not a good choice for you.

Schedule

When you are pursuing training, some aspect of your schedule needs to become more flexible. You need to invest the time to make the most of the opportunity. A fixed classroom or virtual schedule can mean that you need to plan your work and/or home commitments around the class schedule. Many virtual programs offer on-demand access where you can participate at different times each week, depending on what works best for you. Again, if you need accountability, a fixed schedule might work best. But if you have a chaotic schedule and you think you might miss classes, a virtual program can provide a way to squeeze in learning on your schedule instead.

What else?

Go back to your primary goal and learning objectives. What support do you need to ensure you can meet your goals? You may indeed find a few additional features to add to this list. In the worksheet, you'll have the opportunity to add additional features.



YOUR NEXT STEP

Your Next Step

This is a lot of information and the decision you make will not necessarily be easy. But a well informed decision will free up the mental energy you need to focus on learning the most you can from the course, rather than second-guessing your decision.

[Click here to download a worksheet](#) that will help you prioritize each of these elements and compare different training options.

If you have any questions as you work through this lesson, please get in touch or post them to the [LinkedIn group](#).



WRAP UP

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.

IT'S TIME FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

Please take a few minutes and [complete a short survey](#). It's just 4 short questions and it will help me learn how I can continue to help you on your path to business analysis. [Click here](#) to complete the short survey.

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.

AND, JUST SO YOU DON'T MISS OUT...

For additional help paving your path into business analysis, [check out *Launching Your Business Analysis Career*](#). We'll help you dig even deeper into your inner BA and build a personalized roadmap based on your strengths, experiences, and competencies. I've pulled up every curtain I can find to make this not just a BA learning experience, but an opportunity to transform your career.

This is an online, interactive course where you'll be able to work through your career transition with instructor support and access valuable content, like the lessons in this email course, but in multiple formats to serve multiple learning styles.

[Sign-up for the early bird list](#) to be the first to know when we open enrollment for new members (likely sometime in June) and have the first chance to secure one of the limited spots.

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.

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](#)

