



Personal Statements – Law

The information contained in this handout is taken from a panel information session and is specific to Texas Tech University School of Law, Charleston School of Law, and University of Tulsa College of Law. However, much of the information is relevant to any law school application process.

Personal Statements

A personal statement distinguishes you from others and gives the admissions panel or reviewer information about who you are. Your goal in the statement is to tell the reader who you are in a way that the application does not. Show passion and desire to study law. It is your opportunity to sell yourself to the committee, providing what you want the reader to know about you.

Personal statements need a hook that makes the reader want to continue reading the statement; remember, law school admissions committees receive thousands of applications. Be creative, but not over the top. You are applying for a selective, professional program, so be professional while setting yourself apart from everyone else. Think about your life and what will interest the reader and write it in an imaginative and creative way, keeping an optimistic and upbeat tone.

If using a negative experience as the hook, be sure to put a positive spin on it. What did you learn? How did this experience influence your career choice? Do not overwhelm the reader with details of the experience; instead, focus on using the experience as a hook that will draw in the reader. The negative experience should not be the focus of the entire essay.

The admissions committee is made up of a combination of staff from admissions, administration, and faculty. The makeup of the committee changes often so be sure to write for all of those possible audiences. The personal statement should be written in a formal tone. Always use proper grammar. Write the statement and let it sit for a day or two. Once you have had a little time to process, it will be easier to edit the statement. Use spell check and ask others to proofread the statement.

Be sure that you are answering the question or addressing the prompt. It is better to have a focused statement with in-depth information than to have many ideas that jump from point to point. Think about the law schools you wish to attend. What types of students does this university or program attract? How can you position yourself as one of those students?

Reflection

Take time to think before you write. Serious reflection about yourself and your goals will be apparent in a well-written statement. During your reflection, think about what makes you unique. What qualities and personality attributes make you the right fit for law school? Think about what personal characteristics led you to choose the particular law school? What makes you a strong candidate?

Think about the past; what happened in your history that started you down this path? When did you start thinking about a career in law? What obstacles have you overcome to get to this place? Who or what inspired you to pursue this goal? Even the smallest detail makes you stand apart from others who are trying to gain a spot in the program.

Think about your successes and failures. What is your biggest accomplishment? How have you overcome failure in your life? What was your family situation or upbringing that brought you to this point in your life?

Keep in mind that the personal statement is only part of the application. Schools are seeking well-rounded applicants.



Writing a Successful Personal Statement for Law School

- ◆ Read and follow the instructions for length and the topic the prompt addresses. Use good judgement about what you include in the statement. Concentrate on your reasons for law school.
- ◆ Decide on a theme or topic. Brainstorm with others to get additional input. Focus on one thing, such as an accomplishment, skill, or challenge.
- ◆ Be sure to address the topic of why you want to attend law school. Provide a unique perspective about how you see the world and that you can share with the cohort in law school.
- ◆ Make an outline and write a first draft. Capture the reader with the hook in the first paragraph. Hold the reader's attention through the entire statement.
- ◆ Have someone else review and proofread. Make sure the document is error-free.

Elements of Standout Personal Statements

- ◆ Many applications will present the essays as either required or optional. Applicants should submit all the essays! Think of the optional essay as another opportunity to sell yourself.
- ◆ The best statements are honest and provide insight into the student. Give some insight into yourself, your character, your values, your goals, who you are, and who you want to be.
- ◆ Aim for consistency in writing ability throughout the application. The documents need to sound as if they are all written by the same person!
- ◆ Focus on the reader – what do you want the reader to know and understand about you? The personal statement should reflect focused, intentional writing.
- ◆ Tailor the statement to the law school. Law schools have various missions, and you want to show how your goals match the mission of that particular school.
- ◆ Reach out to the law school with questions regarding the process or the prompt.

Suggestions for Avoiding Common Mistakes

- ◆ Unless you have an extraordinary experience, don't write about COVID-19 and the pandemic.
- ◆ Apply attention to detail – do not send a personal statement directed to a different law school.
- ◆ Don't waste space telling them what they already know about their program or providing flattery about how great the program is.
- ◆ Don't try to impress the committee by using legal concepts, write in legalese, or over-the-top language. Phrases such as “fights tooth and nail to right injustices” may not resonate with the committee. Such writing may also indicate you do not understand the mission or culture of that institution and are not a good fit for that particular law school community.
- ◆ Don't offend readers by using biased or offensive language. You may need to write about a sensitive subject but present it in an unbiased and inoffensive way.
- ◆ Be careful of using humor. It might not translate well in writing.
- ◆ Do not restate your resume – that information is already provided in the application.
- ◆ Be careful of writing a personal statement that is too short and uninformative or too long and detailed. Answer the prompt, but do not add fluff in order to use all the space allowed.
- ◆ Don't copy your personal statement content from a Google search or template. This document needs to be about you. This is your chance to have a voice in the application process.

Misdemeanor and Felony Criminal Disclosures

- ◆ The application asks for disclosure of your criminal record. Each state has different disclosure rules. Err on the side of disclosure even if the information has been expunged from your record.
- ◆ Use other narrative documents such as a diversity statement or addendum to address issues and disclose academic infractions or run-ins with the law. Demonstrate that you take responsibility and explain changes and corrections made based on these issues.