

Personal Statement: Step-by-Step Guide



A starting point for applicants

1. Purpose of the Personal Statement

Your personal statement is a chance to explain why you want to go to law school while also highlighting your character, values, and passions. It allows you to expand on experiences from your resume and/or personal life that shaped your decision to pursue law, humanizing your application and showing the person behind the numbers.

What it is:

- A chance to add context and meaning to your application
- A way to show reflection, motivation, and growth
- An opportunity to highlight qualities and stories not obvious from your transcripts or resume

What it is not:

- A recap of your resume in paragraph form
- A list of accomplishments
- A list of reasons why you would be a strong law student academically

2. Trends in Strong Personal Statements

The most compelling personal statements I have read are authentic, reflective, and rooted in personal experiences—whether personal, academic, or professional. It is clear when an applicant has thoughtfully considered why they want to pursue law and what lessons from their experiences have shaped that decision. While essays may begin with early experiences in childhood, the reflection usually emerges from college-age and later experiences. The statement should also be about you. It is ok to highlight impactful people, but they should not overshadow your story. Strong statements come from a variety of topics — it's not what you write about, but *how* you write about it that makes the impact. Many also make it clear why law school over other graduate programs.

What it is:

- Authentic — the essay reflects the applicant's true self (the focus should be you)
- Growth-focused — experiences are framed around your learning and personal development

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- Clear — statement shows *why* your experiences mattered, not just what happened + answers the “why law” question (why you want to go to law school)

What it is not:

- Focused only on early life events without connecting to growth or current perspective
- Limited to one “correct” topic or format
- A generic essay that lacks personal insight

3. Before You Write: Reflection & Brainstorming

Questions to consider before writing:

- What experience(s) most shaped your interest in the legal field?
- What qualities/characteristics do you want to demonstrate in your application?
- What do you want an admissions officer to learn about you that isn’t elsewhere in your application (also applies to every other statement)?
- Why do you want to go to law school instead of pursuing another graduate program? Why is a JD necessary for what you want to do?

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4. Example Draft Framework

(This is one of many ways to structure your statement. It is not one size fits all.)

1. Opening insight or moment

- Introduce a meaningful experience or realization (the first paragraph is the perfect place for your hook)

2. Context

- Brief background: the reader needs to understand the significance of the short story you shared, so you can then transition into the rest of your statement.
- Highlight experiences (whether personal, academic, or professional) that allowed you to grow your interest in law/law school

3. Reflection & growth

- What you learned, how you changed, or how your thinking evolved throughout those experiences

4. Forward-looking close

- How your experiences have led you to law school and (if you know) what you hope to do in law school and/or in your legal career

5. Drafting Process Tips

- Start with a rough draft
- Focus on substance first before style/edits
- Write in your own voice
- Avoid over-editing in early drafts — just write and get all your ideas out then edit it down