Personal Statement

*What role does the personal statement play in the admissions process?*

This is your opportunity to set your application apart from all those other students with similar credentials. **The personal statement is a unique chance for the reader to learn about the applicant’s personal story and character.** A well-written personal statement can make the difference between acceptance and denial of admission, particularly when a student doesn’t have the highest GPA and LSAT scores.

*How do I go about writing an excellent personal statement?*

Remember that law schools are looking for students who can mount strong arguments supported by clear evidence while being persuasive. Therefore, take your time to carefully put together a plan of action for answering the specific questions of each law school. Many students write a base personal statement and then personalize it for each school to which they apply. Just remember that each personal statement needs to speak to the meaningful differences between law schools.

Let your personal qualities emerge in a well-constructed narrative in the active voice, conveying where you have come from and where you stand. Each aspect of the personal statement matters – from what you choose to write about to how well you write it. Is your enthusiasm and creativity readily apparent? Can readers appreciate your depth of understanding and get an idea of what you’ve learned from your studies and life experiences? It is important that you are clear and present a compelling presentation to the reader.

Further, it’s helpful to indicate both your relevant strengths and limits while you show how your background has shaped your current worldview. And keep in mind that this type of writing works best when you allow readers to draw conclusions from your actions.

*Should I talk about my work experience in the personal statement?*

If the skills and character you’ve acquired in the workplace are applicable then, by all means, discuss your experience. The longer it has been since you have completed your undergraduate studies, the more important your work experience becomes. Specifically, examples of persuasive writing, insightful analysis, well-reasoned decision making, and resolute leadership, among many others, contribute helpful material for your personal statement. Avoid vague references and focus on specific examples whenever possible.
Is it worth mentioning extracurriculars at this stage of the application process?

Not all extracurricular activities are worth mentioning. Sift through your involvement for examples which show the quality of your engagements rather than the quantity of activities. It’s useful to remember the phrase “state then evaluate” when crafting your statement. Avoid simply listing off numerous bullet points without providing a summary of why they are important. Highlight the significance of your actions instead of simply listing what you’ve done.

Is focusing on community service helpful in a personal statement?

The rule of thumb here is that if you have a long-standing commitment to helping others and can relate how particular events have shaped who you are as a person, then it’s a great idea to write about your community service. But if community service has neither been a high-priority in your life nor impacted the course of your development, then it’s best to leave this aside. It’s important to be honest. Many poorly written personal statements over the years have tried to gloss over academic weaknesses with unsupported claims which are now detected by admissions file readers with amazing ease.

Does military service positively affect an application?

Certain schools weigh an applicant’s military record more heavily than others. Yet, as with work experience and community service, you need to show how your military experience evidences skills and character which will help you succeed as a law student and lawyer. Again, state the relevant particulars of your experience, such as leadership, and then evaluate the significance of these actions in the whole of who you are as an applicant.

Do you have any other general advice for writing a great personal statement?

Avoid simply restating what you have said in other places in your application. Be sure that generalities are supported with specific evidence. Hold yourself to the requested page length, and if no length is specified then limit yourself to two double-spaced pages. Beware of attempts at humor since a joke which falls flat really hurts whereas a good joke barely helps. And unless dealing with the political issues of the day has been a formative experience for you due to work on a political campaign or in some other political venue, avoid ideological arguments since they tend to evidence strong opinions rather than the open-minded inquiry needed in law school.

Make sure to carefully edit your personal statement. Ask professors you know if they have time to critique your writing. You want to put your best foot forward here, so take advantage of the resources around you to correct any grammatical, content, or spelling errors. Finally, shy away from colored paper of any variety — though thicker white paper for the statement is ok. You don’t want to distinguish yourself for the wrong reasons!