The Admissions Process

What factors are considered by law school admissions offices?

Law schools employ a wide range of evaluative criteria in the process of deciding to whom they will grant their much coveted seats. These factors include, but are not limited to, your undergraduate (and graduate) GPA, the LSAT score, course of study with attention to its difficulty and depth, a personal statement, letters of recommendation, improvement of grades and grade distribution, the reputation of your undergraduate institution, extracurricular activities which exhibit character and commitment, community service, and work experience including any graduate courses you may have previously enrolled in.

And as strange as it might sound, while a student’s LSAT and GPA scores carry the most combined weight, for some schools the LSAT is the single most important criteria for admission. Oftentimes these two scores are combined into a simply calculated index which facilitates comparisons of different students’ academic strengths. Remember that the LSAT is viewed as an objective score while GPA often lends itself to more scrutiny. For example, if a student scores a 170 (out of a possible 180) it doesn’t matter whether that score came from an Ivy League institution or a small west coast school. GPA on the other hand can be influenced and interpreted by the reputation of the institution in which it was achieved. All of these factors are compiled and evaluated by file readers at the law schools to which you apply.

With such formal standards for admission, are law schools able to evaluate me as a distinct person?

It’s in the interest of admission file readers to understand just who is applying and consider how they might fit into their program. Only a small percentage of applicants are what are called “automatic admits” based on their grades and scores and implicitly expected to succeed in law school. Most applicants are carefully considered to determine what makes each student tick and thereby put together the best possible group of first year students. This can work to the advantage of students that don’t have degrees from a more “prestigious” institution. Law schools value a diverse and well-rounded student body that has been shaped by real world experience and workloads. Yet since law schools generally don’t rely on interviews in the admissions process, the resources they draw upon are limited. Therefore it’s the responsibility of every applicant to present a picture in which you come to life on paper. Other than test scores, this is the most likely avenue to distinguish you from other applicants. It’s important to remember that in recent years, law school applications have been steadily rising even though the number of available slots has remained nearly the same.

Can somebody get into law school if they had a couple of bad years and then pulled it together at the end of their undergrad studies?

Most admitted classes have students who fall into the category of “reborn” students. They’ve gone through difficult circumstances and then found an untapped academic resolve in their hard times and go on to become successful law students and lawyers. The important thing to do if you fall into this group is to show evidence that you are part of this group and not simply say that you figured things out. You need to show a file reader that you have authentically grown
from some life-changing event and are ready to meet the demands of legal study. Even if your GPA isn’t ideal, showing improvement of GPA can help you in the application process.

**What do people mean when they say you should apply to a certain number of “safe” schools?**

A “safe” school is one where your GPA and LSAT scores are above the mean rate of acceptance at the school. If you look at the *Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools*, you’ll find student acceptance profile grids for each law school to which you might consider applying. When your combined scores fall in the actual mean, these are schools at which you have a reasonable possibility of being accepted if you put your best foot forward. Those institutions whose mean of acceptance is above your LSAT and GPA scores may still be sparingly applied to as “dream” schools which might accept you because of intangibles evident in your personal statement, letters of recommendation, and life experience. The [UGPA and LSAT Score Search](https://lsac.org) page at LSAC.org can also be used to compare average ranges of accepted scores across the country.