

Personal Statements

Writing a personal statement is the one aspect of the application process that the applicant fully controls. Furthermore, because law schools rarely if ever ask for personal interviews, this is the applicant's chance to elaborate on details about themselves that the rest of the application may not accurately capture. The length of personal statements varies slightly and it is important to know what length is required for each application, but most schools want about two pages.

The personal statement should reflect the individual student and no one else. Therefore, it is difficult to offer a model. It is important, however, to devise an "angle" to hook the reader. Is there an event or person or experience you have had that really transformed or shaped you, and helped convince you to pursue a legal career? Shape your essay around that, if you can.

In addition, law school admissions people at a NAPLA conference came up with the following list of Dos and Don'ts to help (from NAPLA Handbook for Pre-Law Advisors, 4th Edition, Dom DeLeo et. al.) write your personal statement.

Do

1. Write well, making the essay flow.
2. Have a strong first sentence.
3. Double space and leave significant margins.
4. Type it! Do not hand-write.
5. Keep it within the prescribed length.
6. Put your name on each page.
7. Be specific and accurate.
8. Be truthful.
9. Have the statement support and be supported by the rest of the application.
10. Look beyond fraternity/sorority offices or athletic experiences.
11. Acknowledge the negatives in your application.
12. Turn those negatives into positives.
13. Mention sensitive topics in an appropriate way – don't be dramatic.
14. Explain why you have chosen law.
15. Show who you are – this is essentially your interview!

Don't

1. Overuse a thesaurus.
2. Use clichés or quote others extensively.
3. Misspell words.
4. Use the third person.
5. Title your statement.
6. Send multi-media presentations/modeling photos.
7. Gush about law school or philosophize about the role of law in society.

8. Include the name of the law school – it may end up in the wrong envelope.
9. Pat yourself on the back too much.
10. Be too cynical.
11. Come across as a victim.
12. Be too specific as to what you will do with your law degree unless your experience shows that it is a logical extension of what you've already done.
13. Focus too much on another person, even if they have been influential.
14. Give a narrative resume, listing activities already mentioned in the application.