Writing Your Personal Statement

What is the purpose of a personal statement?

The personal statement has several functions in the law school application process:

• It serves as a writing sample
• It provides you with an opportunity to supply additional information about yourself. Most law schools do not have the ability to interview all their applicants, so the personal statement tends to replace the information usually learned during an interview.
• The information can make your application seem more unique; it can give it personality and character.

Who reads my personal statement?

Admissions committees are generally composed of a mix of admissions staff, faculty members, and attorneys. The committee will have diverse political and religious beliefs, and will have varied backgrounds. Make sure to consider your audience when constructing your personal statement.

Do admissions committees actually read my personal statement?

Yes, but with possibly thousands of statements to read, law school admissions committee members may initially only give your personal statement a few minutes of attention. Consider carefully what the admissions committee needs to know about you in 500 words or less. Your personal statement should stand out favorably from the crowd.
How do I come up with a topic for my personal statement?

Usually, your personal statement can be on a topic of your choosing. Consider what the law schools already know about you from the rest of your application (transcripts, LSAT score, letters of recommendation, and resume) and tell them something more. Make your personal statement stand out.

Successful applicants have elaborated on significant personal, academic, and professional experiences, as well as meaningful intellectual interests and extracurricular activities. In general, the personal statement should not be a mere catalog of accomplishments and activities, but a thoughtful explanation of what those accomplishments and activities have meant to you. To begin developing your topic, some possible approaches include:

- **Free writing.** Select a personal characteristic and take 20 minutes to write about it.
- **Journaling.** Keep a daily journal. It not only helps to determine a topic, but it also aids in forcing you to practice your writing.
- **Chronological Method.** What is your earliest memory? Write down every significant memory since then.
- **List accomplishments.** Make a list of accomplishments, big or small.
- **Personal characteristics.** Make a list of your personal characteristics or skills.
- **Ask family and friends.** Part of the difficulty in coming up with a topic is that you are probably uncomfortable with writing about yourself. Family and friends usually have no problems cataloguing your accomplishments.
- **Read the law school application.** Each U.S. law school application will provide direction on the personal statement, and some law schools are very explicit on what they prefer you write about. **Always follow the directions on each application carefully!**

See the two examples below.

**Example #1: University of Georgia School of Law:**

The School of Law believes the overall educational environment of the law school may be enhanced by life experiences or personal characteristics which significantly add to the academic, cultural, ethnic, geographic, racial or socio-economic diversity of the student population. You are invited to explain how your life experiences or personal characteristics would significantly add to the diversity of the student population and enhance the educational climate of the law school. If you choose to provide such a statement, please do so on a separate supplemental sheet. Put your name and the question number (26) on the sheet.
Example #2: Mercer University School of Law

Please give us a candid evaluation of yourself. Discuss your abilities and strengths, and include some discussion of areas that you would like to see more fully developed. What professional or personal goals have you established, and how will attending Mercer Law School help you to achieve these goals? What, in turn, do you have to offer Mercer Law School and the legal community? If you have surmounted obstacles (educational or financial, for example), encountered prejudice, or overcome disabilities, and you would like the Committee to be aware of them, please describe.

Writing the personal statement - do’s and don’ts

Don’t:

• wait until the last minute to write your personal statement. You should reserve plenty of time to craft a well-written essay.
• make jokes and use gimmicks such as poetry, recipes, etc.
• be boring!
• whine, or cast blame on others for negative elements in your application. You want to always explain, not make excuses for, discrepancies or problems in your academic or personal record, but reserve this for an addendum to your application.

Do

• follow the application directions precisely.
• keep your personal statement positive.
• choose a theme.
• create an interesting first paragraph
• personalize your essay by not just relating what you did but why you did it and what impact the experience had on you.
• explain how you broadened your horizons.
• discuss your accomplishments in terms of the obstacles you overcame.
• tell the admissions committee what you want them to know about you. Your essay may be creative and unique and should reflect your values and priorities.
• individualize your personal statement by giving specific reasons for applying to that school, but do not just use the information found in their catalog.
• summarize well
• proofread again and again and again.
Helpful Resources:

• The Office of Pre-Law Advising library has books dedicated to helping you figure out an appropriate personal statement topic and examples of personal statements that have worked.

• The advisors in the Office of Pre-Law Advising will review your statement. They will not edit your copy, but will discuss your ideas and organization.

• You may contact the law schools you are interested in applying to and inquire if they have personal statements on file.

• The University Writing Center at Georgia Southern University gives students the opportunity to get individualized feedback on their writing from experienced writers and teachers of writing. See http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/~writingc/
  Address: 1119 Forest Drive Bldg; Phone: 871-1413

• You may want to ask a professor to critique your personal statement. It is best to get several opinions about your statement as many readers will review your statement at the law schools and you want to understand how it is received.

Sources: Adapted from the University of Michigan and the University of Texas - Austin pre-law recommendations for writing personal statements; Barron’s Essays That Will Get You Into Law school (1998)