

Law Personal Statement Do's & Don'ts

Adapted from Traci Howard, Assistant Dean for Admissions at the California Western School of Law,
and Karen Clemence, Senior Associate Dean at Lafayette College.

Do's

DO treat your personal statement as if it is an admission interview. It is your best chance to make your case for admission and to communicate important information about yourself not readily ascertained by merely looking at your numerical profile.

DO follow directions. It is important to adhere to page limits set forth by schools. If they ask for 1-2 pages, give them 1-2 pages. In law school and in the legal profession concision is much appreciated, and the ability to follow directions is vital. And don't try to cheat by using small font!

DO make your personal statement responsive. Individual schools may ask you to provide specific information in your statement. Be sure to respond accordingly.

DO write about yourself. We all have our own "stories" and life experiences. Thus, you should be sure to discuss those things that make you unique. This information, when presented with sincerity, can help improve your chance of admission by providing the committee with a well-informed image of who you are.

DO include real evidence and examples. Make sure your story substantiates your claims.

DO discuss your professional interests and goals. *(If these interests and goals are part of a law school's personal statement prompt and it fits with your statement, then do include it. If it's not in the prompt or it doesn't fit with your statement, then don't include this). * Though they may change before you finish law school, it is helpful to write about your goals and how a law degree would nurture and help you achieve them.

Don'ts

DON'T submit a narrative of your resume. While it is OK to choose one or two things from your resume to elaborate on, a statement that simply lists information already contained in your resume or vitae is boring and will not help you stand out.

DON'T even think about submitting your personal statement without having it reviewed by someone else for clarity, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. It is always helpful to have a fresh pair of eyes reviewing your writing, even after you have edited it several times.

DON'T rely too heavily on spell check. Spell check is a good initial tool to use in editing your personal statement, but it is not infallible. Spell check should not be your ONLY check!

DON'T submit a personal statement addressed to another school. It is important that you personalize statements to individual schools. In doing so, be sure to remove all references to other schools. Law schools are fully aware that applicants apply to multiple programs; but schools want to feel as if you have a "special" interest in their program.

DON'T write your statement with the goal of telling schools what you think they want to hear. Sincerity is important and recognizable.

DON'T use quotes or give a title to your statement.

DON'T use the statement to explain something negative. This can be explained in an addendum.

DON'T ramble. Have a topic sentence or main theme.