Georgia Southern University Office of Pre-Law Advising
Writing Your Personal Statement

What is a Personal Statement?

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

- It serves as a writing sample
- It provides applicants an opportunity to demonstrate the ways in which they can contribute their unique talents and experiences to the law school. 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 supply it with personality.

Make sure to consider your audience when constructing your personal statement. With possibly thousands of statements to read, law school admissions committee members may give your personal statement only a few minutes of attention initially. Consider carefully what the admissions committee needs to know about you, and try to say it in 500 words or less. In addition, consult each application carefully to determine what the law school wants. You may have to write several very different personal statements.

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

**Personal statement:** Provide a personal statement as an electronic attachment. You may write about anything you deem relevant to your application for admission to the University of Georgia School of Law. Transfer and visiting applicants should state the reason(s) for desiring to attend the University of Georgia School of Law.

**Diversity Statement:** The School of Law believes the overall educational environment of the law school may be enhanced by life experiences or personal characteristics that significantly add to the academic, cultural, ethnic, geographic, racial or socioeconomic 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. (OPTIONAL)

**Example #2: Georgia State University College of Law**

**Personal statement:** Please attach your personal statement. The personal statement should be limited to two pages double space.
Example #3: Mercer University School of Law

Personal statement: 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 these, please describe.

How do I come up with a topic for my personal statement?

• **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!

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. Making 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.
Writing the personal statement

- Do not wait until the last minute to write your personal statement. You should reserve plenty of time to craft a well-written essay.
- Follow the application directions precisely.
- Avoid jokes and gimmicks such as poetry, recipes, etc.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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: 478 -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.
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<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Be authentic. Use clear, solid, concise prose written in your own voice.</td>
<td>• Write about something you think the admissions committee wants to read.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Follow the directions.</strong></td>
<td>• Try to impress by using an elaborate vocabulary or complex sentences.</td>
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<td>• Choose a topic that you are passionate about. Explain what motivates you, what you care about, what truly inspires you.</td>
<td>• Refer to the law school by another law school’s name.</td>
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<td>• Show, don’t tell (use examples and evidence to support your claims).</td>
<td>• Try to be too “creative” or funny, e.g., poetry, writing your own obituary, mailing a shoe saying you want to get a foot in the door.</td>
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<td>• Be reflective, e.g., describe how your life experiences shaped you, why they are important, how they helped you define your goals and aspirations.</td>
<td>• Submit a personal statement with typographical and grammatical errors, or one that is poorly constructed.</td>
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<td>• Share something interesting about yourself, something the admissions officers wouldn’t otherwise know from the application file. Showcase your skills, talents, abilities and give a sense of your character.</td>
<td>• Use an inspirational quote.</td>
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<td>• Be positive. The addendum is the place for any negatives.</td>
<td>• Submit a personal statement that tracks the changes of the people who reviewed and commented on your work.</td>
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<td>• Show your maturity; accept responsibility.</td>
<td>• Be arrogant or show a sense of entitlement</td>
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<td>• Be confident (but humble).</td>
<td>• Whine or blame.</td>
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<td>• Proofread and get other readers to make comments.</td>
<td>• Rewrite your resume.</td>
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<td>• Avoid clichés.</td>
<td>• Make claims you can’t support, e.g., don’t talk about how you plan to serve the underserved and work with the impoverished when you have nothing in your application to back up that assertion.</td>
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<td>• Link your personal statement to your interest in attending law school and what is motivating you to pursue a career in law.</td>
<td>• Wait until the last minute to write your personal statement.</td>
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<td>• See <a href="http://www.admissionsdean.com/researching_law_schools/interviews-with-deans">http://www.admissionsdean.com/researching_law_schools/interviews-with-deans</a> for what the Admissions Deans have to say!</td>
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