

# Law School...the Juris Doctorate

## Why Law School?

Information provided by [Kaplan Test Prep - Kaptest.com](http://Kaplan Test Prep - Kaptest.com)

The decision to become a lawyer is a highly personal one, based on a number of factors that you must weigh for yourself. It's not a step to be taken lightly.

### Your Direction

Having a law degree no longer automatically means having to be a lawyer. There's a wealth of opportunities for people with law degrees. The truth of the matter is that, despite all the jokes, a law degree will always be an attractive commodity in the job market. Take a few minutes to jot down your personal reasons for wanting to go to law school. Rank them in order of importance so that you can maintain a sharper focus as you move along in the planning of your application itinerary.

Being able to articulate why you want to go to law school will not only help ensure your happiness as an attorney, but will also help you to gain admission. The top schools are looking for people who know why they want to go to law school and have focus and direction in their lives.

### Good Reasons

#### Versatility:

Law may be an option if you are not entirely sure of your career dream and feel more than half-certain that you'll change careers at some point in the future.

#### Excitement:

There are aspects of lawyering that can be a great deal of fun, such as preparing for a trial, defending a client, or putting together a business deal.

#### Empowerment:

Many people pursue a law degree in order to be more effective or influential in their field.

#### Job Security:

The fundamental role that legal systems play in our increasingly global working world is striking. Your training and skills can allow you to stay employed and prepare you for a variety of situations.

#### Personal Experience:

Whatever your other reasons for wanting to obtain a law degree, don't lose sight of your personal investment in the process.

### Bad Reasons

*"I have nothing better to do with my history, English, or poli-sci degree."*

There are better career moves than spending three very hard years in grad school, going heavily into debt, and then emerging with a degree in a field in which you have very little interest.

*"I'm good at arguing."*

Oral argument is a very small part of law school life and for the vast majority of lawyers, it's a fairly small part of their practice. Additionally, a legal oral argument is quite different from the average debate with your housemate over who gets to choose what channel to watch.

*"I'll be making six figures before I hit 30."*

Most attorneys do make six-figure incomes, but don't be deceived; they earn every cent. 70-80 hour weeks, mounting pressure to bill more hours, and a lot of research work are usually part of the deal. Even if you decide you're willing to do the hard work, the opportunities to make the big bucks are not always there.

*"My family wants me to be a lawyer."*

That's a long time to fulfill someone else's expectations. If your parents are adamant about the idea, maybe they should go to law school themselves. Age is no limitation to the feasibility of practicing law.

### The Bottom Line

If you enjoy thinking, writing, solving problems, negotiating compromises, and advocating on behalf of people or causes, then law school will be a good fit for you. If you'd rather have

someone else tell you how to solve a problem or how to think about a dilemma, then you might find that law is not your best option.

Think seriously about the "fit" - be honest with yourself as you contemplate your future career. Be certain that you have chosen the right destination before you begin planning your trip.

## **The Application**

Information provided by [Kaplan Test Prep - Kaptest.com](http://Kaplan Test Prep - Kaptest.com)

After you've made the decision to apply to law school and have decided where and when to apply, your first move is to order the application forms from the various schools you've chosen.

However you obtain your applications - the Internet, sending a postcard, calling, etc. - once they begin arriving you will notice that no two are exactly alike. Despite the differences, most applications follow a general pattern with variations on the same kinds of questions.

### **Application as a Marketing Tool**

Probably the most important thing to keep in mind about your law school application is that it is, above all else, a sales pitch. It's your single best opportunity to sell yourself.

So, what's the best way to sell yourself? Organization.

Carefully plan a coherent presentation from beginning to end and pay attention to every detail in between. Start thinking early about what theme you want your application to convey. Decide what your real purpose is in applying to law school and make sure that this sense of purpose permeates every aspect of your application.

### **Getting Organized**

The first step in organizing your campaign for admission is to put together a checklist of the forms that each of your chosen schools requires. Next, make photocopies of all forms to be filled out (unless you use application software). The photocopies are what you'll work on--neatness is a big factor. Don't transfer items to the original application until you're sure you're ready.

### **The Application Form**

For the most part, filling out the application form requires simply putting down factual information. But even in something so apparently mindless, you can still present yourself as a thorough person who can follow directions. The key to filling out the application form can be summed up in a single sentence: Don't make the admissions officers do more work than they have to.

## **Admissions Tips**

Information provided by [Kaplan Test Prep - Kaptest.com](http://Kaplan Test Prep - Kaptest.com)

The most important thing to do when applying to law school is to determine the admissions requirements for the programs to which you are applying. Although, expectations may vary from program to program, a few admissions requirements are common to most law school admissions offices, including:

- Undergraduate GPA
- LSAT\* scores
- Letters of Recommendation
- Personal Statement

### **General Tips**

- Photocopy all applications and keep a comprehensive file on each school that records all of your interactions with that school in it.
- Follow all rules set forth by the application. If you have questions or are tempted to "break a rule," be sure to call the admissions office and ask for advice.
- Put your name and social security number on any additional pages.
- Make certain the presentation of your application is both neat and professional looking.
- Have someone proofread your essay(s) and application. A single mistake can cast doubt on your application.

## Law School Personal Statement Secrets

Information provided by [Petersons.com](http://Petersons.com)

The law school personal statement, more so than essays for other graduate programs, resembles the kind of essay you wrote for your college applications. The topic is often completely open-ended. This freedom intimidates many students who prefer to have guidance and a clear notion of what admissions officers are looking for. Your goal must be to avoid depending too heavily on preconceptions and to focus instead on what you have to offer. In sum, law school admissions committees want interesting, confident, and successful people. When writing your law school personal statement, you should reflect on two fundamental questions:

1. Why do I want to be a lawyer?
2. What are my qualifications?

As the founder of EssayEdge.com, the Net's largest admissions essay prep company, I have seen firsthand the difference a well-written application essay can make. Through its free online admissions essay help course and 300 Harvard-educated editors, EssayEdge.com helps tens of thousands of student each year improve their essays and gain admission to law schools ranging from Harvard to State U.

Having personally edited over 2,000 admissions essays myself for EssayEdge.com, I have written this article to help you avoid the most common essay flaws. If you remember nothing else about this article, remember this: Be Interesting. Be Concise.

### Why Do I Want to Be a Lawyer?

In the tired eyes of an admissions officer, nothing is more tedious than an essay that starts off, "I have always wanted to be a lawyer," and then cites a list of trite reasons. One obvious mistake is to focus on your parents' experiences as lawyers without demonstrating any independent, mature thinking about your own goals. A less obvious, more common mistake is to write about how you want to help people. The fact is that most law school graduates, especially from the top schools, go on to work in the private sector. Law school admissions officers are well aware that most of their graduates will go on to seek financially rewarding careers, so applicants who mention cliches about wanting to "improve society" usually sound disingenuous.

If you have a specific goal, such as working for a particular disadvantaged group that lacks advocates, then the situation is different: It's always good to showcase a unique, focused commitment. Even better would be if you had a track record of community service to back up your objectives. For example, you may have worked with handicapped people for several years, and this exposed you to certain injustices that you want to correct. The same approach would work for topics that are not about public service. For example, one might describe a background in science and connect this to current interests in intellectual property law.

### How Am I Qualified to Be a Lawyer?

Unlike medical schools, which want to assess specific personal qualities in their applicants, law schools use academic achievement as the primary criterion in evaluating your ability to succeed in law. Thus, you need not be concerned if nothing in your essay directly addresses the issue of why you're qualified for a legal career. However, if you have substantive points to make within this area, you can certainly help your case.

It's most essential to discuss your background and qualifications when these overlap with your current goals. For example, you might discuss your interest in international law, tying it to a multicultural background or global work experiences. As always, the details you provide will make or break your discussion. But the strength of an "Experiences in Law" essay depends more than usual on the originality of your experience. The fact is that many people will have similar experiences and even perform the same level of duties. While such an essay can establish your competence, it will be unlikely to make you stand out. Less conventional experiences, however, are certainly worth highlighting.

## TOP 10 LAW SCHOOL STATEMENT WRITING TIPS

### 1. Don't Write in Legalese.

As a prospective law student, you may be tempted to try to impress your reader with an

already tight grasp of legal writing. Resist this temptation! You will have plenty of time to produce the labyrinthine sentences and sophisticated vocabulary for which legal briefs are famous. Your reader will have seen too many essays to appreciate bewilderingly advanced prose. Law schools are looking for unique individuals who want to learn about the law, not ready-made lawyers. Write clearly and personally.

## **2. Don't Bore the Reader. Do Be Interesting.**

Admissions officers have to read hundreds of essays, and they must often skim. Abstract rumination has no place in an application essay. Admissions officers aren't looking for a new way to view the world; they're looking for a new way to view you the applicant. The best way to grip your reader is to begin the essay with a captivating snapshot. Notice how the slightly jarring scene depicted in the "after" creates intrigue and keeps the reader's interest.

*Before: If it were not for a strong support system which instilled into me strong family values and morals, I would not be where I am today.*

*After: Although my grandmother and I didn't have a car or running water, we still lived far more comfortably than did the other families I knew. I learned an important lesson: My grandmother made the most of what little she had, and she was known and respected for her generosity. Even at that age, I recognized the value she placed on maximizing her resources and helping those around her.*

## **3. Do Use Personal Detail. Show, Don't Tell!**

Good essays are concrete and grounded in personal detail. They do not merely assert "I learned my lesson" or that "these lessons are useful both on and off the field." They show it through personal detail. "Show don't tell," means if you want to relate a personal quality, do so through your experiences and do not merely assert it.

*Before: If it were not for a strong support system which instilled into me strong family values and morals, I would not be where I am today.*

*After: Although my grandmother and I didn't have a car or running water, we still lived far more comfortably than did the other families I knew. I learned an important lesson: My grandmother made the most of what little she had, and she was known and respected for her generosity. Even at that age, I recognized the value she placed on maximizing her resources and helping those around her.*

The first example is vague and could have been written by anybody. But the second sentence evokes a vivid image of something that actually happened, placing the reader in the experience of the applicant.

## **4. Do Be Concise. Don't Be Wordy.**

Wordiness not only takes up valuable space, but also confuses the important ideas you're trying to convey. Short sentences are more forceful because they are direct and to the point. Certain phrases, such as "the fact that," are usually unnecessary. Notice how the revised version focuses on active verbs rather than forms of "to be" and adverbs and adjectives.

*Before: My recognition of the fact that the project was finally over was a deeply satisfying moment that will forever linger in my memory.*

*After: Completing the project at last gave me an enduring sense of fulfillment.*

## **5. Do Address Your Weaknesses. Don't Dwell on Them.**

The personal statement may be your only opportunity to explain deficiencies in your application, and you should take advantage of it. Be sure to explain them adequately: "I partied too much to do well on tests" will not help your application. The best tactic is to spin the negatives into positives by stressing your attempts to improve; for example, mention your poor first-quarter grades briefly, then describe what you did to bring them up.

*Before: My father encouraged me to go to \_\_\_\_\_ Law School, but I did not realize at the time that \_\_\_\_\_ Law School was not the law school I wanted to attend to obtain a legal education. I experienced both personal and academic problems, which affected my grades and my performance in law school.*

*After: Discontent with \_\_\_\_\_ Law School and my performance there, I withdrew and instead went on to attain a master's degree in Library and Information Science. But I have never abandoned my aspiration to become a lawyer. My work in the law library at \_\_\_\_\_ University has allowed me to learn more about the law, and now I plan to return to law school with renewed dedication.*

## **6. Do Vary Your Sentences and Use Transitions.**

The best essays contain a variety of sentence lengths mixed within any given paragraph. Also, remember that transition is not limited to words like *nevertheless*, *furthermore* or *consequently*. Good transition flows from the natural thought progression of your argument.

*Before: I started playing piano when I was eight years old. I worked hard to learn difficult pieces. I began to love music.*

*After: I started playing the piano at the age of eight. As I learned to play more difficult pieces, my appreciation for music deepened.*

## **7. Do Use Active Voice Verbs**

Passive-voice expressions are verb phrases in which the subject receives the action expressed in the verb. Passive voice employs a form of the word to be, such as was or were. Overuse of the passive voice makes prose seem flat and uninteresting.

*Before: The lessons that have prepared me for my career as a lawyer were taught to me by my mother.*

*After: My mother taught me lessons that will prove invaluable in my career as a lawyer.*

## **8. Do Seek Multiple Opinions.**

Ask your friends and family to keep these questions in mind:

- Does my essay have one central theme?
- Does my introduction engage the reader? Does my conclusion provide closure?
- Do my introduction and conclusion avoid summary?
- Do I use concrete experiences as supporting details?
- Have I used active-voice verbs wherever possible?
- Is my sentence structure varied, or do I use all long or short sentences?
- Are there any clichés such as "cutting edge" or "learned my lesson?"
- Do I use transitions appropriately?
- What about the essay is memorable?
- What's the worst part of the essay?
- What parts of the essay need elaboration or are unclear?
- What parts of the essay do not support my main argument?
- Is every single sentence crucial to the essay? This must be the case.
- What does the essay reveal about my personality?

## **9. Don't Wander. Do Stay Focused.**

- Many applicants try to turn the personal statement into a complete autobiography. Not surprisingly, they find it difficult to pack so much information into such a short essay, and their essays end up sounding more like a list of experiences than a coherent, well-organized thought. Make sure that every sentence in your essay exists solely to support one central theme.

## **10. Do Revise, Revise, Revise.**

- The first step in improving any essay is to cut, cut, and cut some more.

## **SAMPLE ESSAY**

My interest in the law began with donuts. As a child, I developed early persuasive skills during family disagreements on how to divide boxes of the treats. My parents belonged to the "the biggest people deserve the most donuts" school of thought; while as the youngest family member, I was a devout believer in the "one person, one donut" principle. The debates were often cutthroat, but when it came to donut distribution, I sought justice at any cost.

As my family grew older and more health-conscious, we stopped eating donuts, and for many years I forgot our childhood debates. However, some recent life decisions have brought to mind those early explorations of justice. When I first arrived at the American International

School of Rotterdam, I quickly learned that my colleagues were a diverse and talented group of people. Unsure of how to establish my own place among them, I tried phrases that had always worked to impress college friends. "When I work for the UN . . . ," I told the second-grade teacher, and she answered with an erudite discussion of the problems she faced as a consultant for that organization. I told the kindergarten teacher, "When I'm in law school . . . ," only to hear about his own experiences in law school. By the time I discovered that even many grade-school students were better travelled than I, I learned to keep my mouth shut! Living alone in a new country, removed from familiar personal and cultural clues to my identity and faced with these extraordinary co-workers, I started to feel meaningless. How, I wondered, could I possibly make a difference in a place as vast as our planet? To my own surprise, I found that answer at church. Although I was raised in the Baha'i Faith, I have only recently understood the essential place that religion plays in my identity. Baha'i social beliefs include the need to work against extreme poverty, nationalism, and prejudice; and I now realize that I cannot hold those beliefs without doing something about them. My identity rests on these convictions; I cannot see the need for help and just move on. I have to help; it's who I am.

The lessons I've learned from my international colleagues have channeled my desire for service into the field of international development. I still wish to fight the "Biggest Get the Most Theory of Donut Distribution," but now on an international scale.