

Personal Statement Quick Guide

University of South Alabama Pre-Law

What is the Personal Statement?

The personal statement is your primary narrative essay in the law school application. Unlike undergraduate admissions essays that focus on external events, or corporate applications that sell qualifications, law school personal statements are designed to help the admissions committee evaluate who you are as an individual beyond your transcripts and test scores.

Admissions committees use this essay to evaluate two core elements:

- Who You Are: Whether you are a thoughtful, authentic, and reflective individual who will enrich the law school community.
- Writing Ability: Whether you can organize and communicate complex ideas clearly while balancing concision and detail.

Personal Statement Do's & Don'ts

What To Do:	
<i>Share a focused, authentic story</i>	Write about an experience or value that genuinely matters to you and that demonstrates growth and/or illustrates what shapes your perspective (rather than trying to guess what admissions officers want to hear).

<i>SHOW and tell</i>	Use specific, concrete details within your narrative rather than broad generalizations.
<i>Reflect on Impact</i>	Make it clear <u>how</u> the focus of your story has shaped your growth or perspective.
<i>Free-write your first draft</i>	Draft your initial thoughts without worrying about page limits, then edit down for clarity and conciseness in subsequent drafts. Adopt the mindset that this will take multiple drafts.
<i>Proofread thoroughly</i>	Ensure your final document is free of spelling errors, typos, or leftover tracked changes.

What NOT To Do:	
<i>Resume Dumping</i>	Avoid simply listing your accomplishments in narrative form. The admissions committee already has your resume.
<i>Attempting Legalese</i>	Do not use legal jargon or Latin terms that you do not understand fully in an attempt to sound like a lawyer.
<i>Tell your entire life story</i>	Focus deeply on one pivotal experience rather than trying to summarize your whole biography. A life story cannot be told in two pages! But, you can share one experience with rich detail in that space.
<i>Speak mostly about the school or someone else</i>	Do not waste space on a <u>personal</u> statement over-explaining your admiration for some figure, a mentor, or the school to which you are applying! They want to know about <i>*you*</i> not about anyone else.
<i>Exceed the page limit and/or ignore formatting requirements</i>	Admissions officers read thousands of essays. Respect their time by following their university's formatting guidelines and length requirements with precision. If a school does not state a page limit, keep it between 400-500 words.

Brainstorming & Finding Your Topic

If you aren't sure where to begin, spend 15 minutes freewriting answers to these questions:

- *What is a problem or challenge you encountered, and what specific action did you take to resolve it?*
- *What is a strongly held belief or assumption you used to have that changed due to an experience?*
- *What core skill or value defines how you approach work or community service?*
- *What is one personal experience that had a significant impact on how you view yourself, others, and/or your position in the world?*
- *What is your fondest memory in life thus far?*
- *What personal accomplishment are you most proud of? How did you achieve it?*

In addition, you could also explore potential topics by cataloguing a “life inventory.” To do so, spend time reflecting and taking note about the following areas:

- Your personal circumstances
 - (upbringing, geographic setting, socioeconomic status, cultural background, family dynamics)
- Your beliefs & identity
 - (your core values, how you’ve evolved, times when a core value was challenged and/or changed)
- Pivotal events in your life
 - (times you’ve faced unexpected setbacks, practices you’ve developed to navigate personal growth, how you’ve reconciled with your beliefs as they’ve changed, major accomplishments)
- Leadership endeavors
 - (a community service initiative, a research project, professional experience involving leadership)

After you take stock, reflect on the following:

Could I turn this idea into a story that has a common thread (a skill, value, or perspective) that reflects who I am today and how I approach challenges?

Narrative Structure Ideas to Consider

First Paragraph: Start with a story & a hook

- Begin with a vivid, richly described anecdote or scenario that captures readers' attention.
- “Can you recall the smell of the damp room where you sat when it was announced that your boss has won the state senate seat? How did you feel on the first day of your new teaching job in the Texas border town? What was the weather like? How big was the space? Who else was there? Did someone say something particularly memorable?” ([source link](#))

Body Paragraphs:

- Add context & personal evolution
 - Explain how you responded or navigated the situation at-hand
 - Demonstrate change and growth within the story — good stories describe a conflict and a resolution
- Connect the personal to the professional
 - Connect the growth from your experience to your professional interests
 - Articulate your ‘here’s why I care about the law/want to be a lawyer’ thesis

Conclusion: Tying it all together

- Leave the reader with a strong sense of who you are and why you are pursuing a legal education
- Note: avoid cliché statements like “and that’s why I want to be a lawyer”
- Consider a call-back to a central element from your first paragraph, creating a circular structure

Resources & Examples

Personal Essay Examples

- [George Mason University Personal Statement Collection](#)
- [University of Chicago Personal Statements that Worked](#)
- [Spivey Consulting Library of Excellent Personal Examples](#)

Other Resources

- [University of Chicago Personal Statement FAQs](#)
- [Spivey Consulting First Draft vs. Final Draft](#)
- [Law School Personal Statement Guide](#)
- [Video: Choosing a Law School Personal Statement Topic](#)