

Personal Statement Writing:

Writing the personal statements for your law school application can seem daunting because each school has their own questions, format, and requirements. We have some tips for how you can tackle all of these submissions.

Start by deciding what category you will be applying under. Sometimes there are different essay questions and character lengths depending on the category you apply under. Each school has their own categories and they are all defined differently. Make sure to read the OLSAS booklet for more information on this. It is not detrimental to apply under a category other than “general” and in some cases it can help you because a lower GPA and LSAT score may be considered for that category.

In terms of format, typically you are entering information in text boxes. If you copy and paste text from Word, you will lose characters, and they may distort to different shapes or upside down question marks when you save; however, you can go back into the submission to make the changes and save again, or copy into Notepad first.

Although each school has different wording and character lengths for their questions – there are 3 things that all of the schools want to know. Read the OLSAS booklet and school websites to learn more about each individual school’s motives and instructions, but think about:

Why do you want to study law?

Why do you want to study law at this specific school?

And what do you want to do with your law degree?

This doesn’t mean you need to know the type of law you want to practice – in fact most people have no idea – that’s what law school is for! You do know, however, that you want to make some sort of impact with your degree, so articulate your goals to the admission committee.

Really demonstrate your fit with each individual school. If there is a specialization or core courses that you are interested in, you can specifically speak to that. What do you know about the structure of the courses, additional opportunities that fit your skills and goals, and campus experience that you can demonstrate a match with? Are there law clinics, research opportunities, or specific faculty members that have similar goals and interests? How can you contribute to these areas?

Contact the schools or visit for a tour if possible. You can also attend Professional and Post-Degree Day in the Student Life Centre (held each October) to speak with law school admissions representatives and ask questions about the schools.

In your personal statement, it will be important to create a bigger picture of how your experiences have shaped your interests and goals so that you are not just repeating the information in your Sketch. Showing your motivation is key, as is demonstrating skills you have gained, and things you have learned through all of your life experiences. If you make a claim that you developed a certain skill, you must back it up with proof to be credible. Along with indicating your goals and intentions, you need to show what value, perspective, and experience you have to offer the law program.

You will also have space to discuss any anomalies in your application. You must address any sudden drops in grades, off terms, program switches, WDs or failed courses. State the facts of the situation – no

excuses regardless of who or what was at fault. Make the focus of your answer on the specific strategies you used or steps you took to overcome the situation. If you are discussing grades, how did you improve them? Did you attend study strategy workshops? Did you approach professors and ask for help? If there was a personal or medical issue, what support system did you use, and is it still in place in case something similar happens again? End your paragraph with positive results. Give proof such as: your current grades have increased since implementing these strategies.

Details and tips for individual school submissions are discussed in later videos.

Let's look at an example to work through the basic steps to writing your personal statements. This particular question is asked in Windsor's application, however, all of the schools will want to know this information, potentially just asked in a different way or format.

"How do you think your academic, business employment, and/or professional experiences have contributed to your development as an individual and prepared you for the study of law?"

Step number one is to brainstorm a list of your major academic, employment, professional and volunteer experiences to make a list of what you could discuss in your answer.

You can start with the items you listed in the Sketch, but be mindful that you do not repeat the same information in your personal statements as you wrote in your Sketch material. You want to build on your Sketch and how the experiences specifically shaped your thinking and skills.

Try making a list of your experiences out loud with a friend. They may even think of a few more items to add to your list.

Next, reflect on these experiences on your list and the associated accomplishments, challenges you overcame, and how the experiences support your character and personal qualities like integrity, maturity, honesty, compassion, judgement, motivation, perseverance, and tenacity.

Choose the top 3 experiences that have really helped you grow as a person and in your pursuit of a legal education. Really think about how you developed in the listed skills and areas on this slide.

Knowing or stating you developed communication, planning, and time management skills through advocacy work is not enough, however.

Step 3 is to provide examples or proof of how you actually used these skills to make your statement more credible. Think about details of the experience that made the situation unique, challenging, or an opportunity for growth, and the specifics of HOW you went about your actions to include enough depth to your experience description.

Providing proof can make a huge difference in the depth and quality of your application. Check out the difference between these two experience statements:

My internship last summer prepared me for law by developing my time management skills... Compared to ... I pursued an internship with a law firm last summer to learn more about the profession. There I was exposed to a variety of cases, ranging from family to corporate. Each case presented a unique set of problems, and I enjoyed conducting research on multiple cases at once. The challenge of juggling many assignments taught me how to be efficient and prioritize, and confirmed that I can handle the number of hours required, and ebbs and flows of case work, in a law firm.

Many students find completing an OLSAS application is like taking an additional course, so you want to start early. The application opens at the end of August, so prepare a realistic timeline keeping in mind that the Sketch always takes longer than anticipated. The personal statement & sketch are the only parts of the application that you can now control, so you need to ensure you have enough time to review, edit, and re-write! We recommend writing your personal statements in one sitting and then putting them away for a while. When you re-read them you can reflect on what you want to change with a clear perspective. It might be helpful to get an application buddy who is also going through the same process to help plan your time, and review your writing.

When editing, read your statements out loud as you can often catch awkward sentence structures, grammatical mistakes, and get a sense of the flow better with this method. Make sure to ask someone to evaluate for typos and grammar. When it comes to content changes, remember each person will have their own opinion. There is often many ways to say the same thing. This is your document – you want to go with your own approach and what you will be happy submitting.

In the Further education – Applying section, you will find information on how to develop content for your personal statements, templates and examples. We also have a Letter of Intent Binder that is kept behind the front desk of the Centre for Career Action. You can review this binder to see application examples from previous Waterloo students who have been accepted to law schools – with their personal information removed.

The Centre for Career Action also has a small library with some books with tips on writing your personal statements.