

OLSAS: The Sketch

Let's discuss the "Sketch" section of the OLSAS application. This section is most like a resume; however, the format and entry of information is time consuming and limited.

The "sketch" section is a very important part of your application. This is where you categorize every activity you have been involved in during your post-secondary years, and write a brief description of what you accomplished. There are 7 categories that you can choose from: Full-time employment, Part-time employment, Volunteer activities, Extracurricular activities, Academic honours and achievements, Research and publications, and Other.

The law schools are looking for community service involvement, and the more substantial the better, because it is a people focused profession – so make sure you have activities to enter into the Volunteer or Extra-curricular category. There is also no expectation that you will have law-related experience. It is very difficult to get, but try to get some exposure to the field to confirm for yourself that this is the career for you. The Mennonite Coalition for Refugees, Community Justice Initiative, the FEDS Volunteer Database, and the KW Volunteer Action Centre are some local ideas to get you started.

Sometimes there may not be one right category for your activity. For example, if you are a Residence Don, it may be more realistic to include in the Part-time employment category (because you would have been a full-time student at the same time), but in the description you could mention that you were on-call 24/7.

The "Other" section confuses many applicants, as they don't know what to write here. This section can be used to show how you are well-rounded – what interests or hobbies do you have? Have you travelled at all? If you have CPR/WHMIS certifications, you could also add them here. Languages, sports and exercise, and conferences you have attended out of interest fit well in this category.

The activities that you enter into the "Sketch" section can be anything you have participated in or completed since you finished high school. You have **32** entries with 144 characters (including spaces) in each entry to describe in depth what you did or accomplished in each activity. With limited space, you will want to use point form, but at the same time provide in-depth information. We have advice on how to tackle this coming up!

Use the help screens to navigate how to enter all of the information, and know that you can go back and edit or delete and re-write an activity. In fact, because you don't need to input sketch information in order of the category (because the system rearranges it into categories), you can always go back and edit or add new information – taking into consideration your character count. Because each entry only lets you use 144 characters, we recommend writing out your sketch in full, in Excel first, in case you lose information or receive an error screen for using too many characters. The system will not let you save if you enter too many characters in the activity description. In the past, without Excel, applicants have wasted a lot of time on re-writing after losing information in the online system.

As you will see on the next screen, some of the activity information is selected through drop-down menus. For one-time awards, or single day activities, you can enter the same date in both the "to" and "from" sections.

Action verbs are the first step to concisely writing your bullet points. You don't have much space to write and admissions committees will not assume what you have done, or what you have to offer. It is important to provide clear concise points, and you don't need to use articles like "a", "an", or "the", so save the space! You will be evaluated on all parts of your submission so use present tense if you are still completing an activity and past tense if it is done.

Similar to writing a concise bullet point on your resume, you can use the same formula to write a few short bullet points. Each point can be separated by a semi-colon for this section of your application.

Use a strong verb that demonstrates the skill you were using (for example: Prepared, Observed, or Created). Verbs like "helped" "assisted" or saying "responsible for" don't say very much and certainly don't prove that you were using any type of skill. You can find more examples of strong action verbs in in the Self-Marketing: Resume writing section.

After you have selected a strong action verb – include the details of what you did, and HOW you did it!

Remember law is a people-focused profession, so when describing your activities and skills used, show how you can relate to others and demonstrate the success you have had with your social skills. Take a look at this list of key words and determine how your activity descriptions are going to prove you used these skills, or embody these characteristics.

All of these skills will be important in law school and in your career, so show the admissions committee that you are prepared to succeed by demonstrating with proof that you are the right candidate.

Here is an example of how to use strong action verbs to concisely prove skills while describing an activity.

TA, Psychology, UW; Instructed 25+ students on techniques to run stats programs; Evaluated understanding of content in essays/exams.

This used 135 characters

Note the use of capital letters to start each point and the use of semi-colons to separate each point. Be consistent in the set-up of your points. It really does make a difference to Admissions Committees.

This example reads: VP, Legal Studies Society, UW; Initiate & implement events to increase students' awareness on law; Co-manage social media & funding (2)

This used 135 characters.

You will notice that each example also has a number in brackets taking up characters at the end of each description. This number represents a verifier on a list elsewhere in the application that can verify the applicant did truly participate in this activity.

You will need an "unbiased" verifier for every activity that you enter into the sketch, so do not use family with the same last name. If a verifier is not provided, the activity will not be considered by admissions.

A verifier is not a reference, it is just someone who can be contacted by phone that can verify that you completed an activity. You can also use the same verifier for multiple activities.

Any activity that can be substantiated by an academic transcript does not require a verifier.

It is a good idea to let your verifiers know that they may be contacted anytime between November to April.

Make sure to use the verifier's professional/business address if possible (for example the University's address if a professor is one of your verifiers).

The comments section does not need to be filled in, but if necessary you could include something like, "out of the country for 4 months" and provide an additional phone number where they can be reached or an e-mail address.

It is important that you fill out every piece of information for your verifier – even if the activity was completed a long time ago, you need to find an updated phone number!

We know for a fact that Admissions Committees do sometimes check verifiers.

This is an example of a portion of a sketch we completed. We started with action verbs when appropriate, and instead of writing in sentences, we have used bullet points with semi-colons to separate ideas.

You need to determine if in some cases more information could or should have been added – depending on the activity and what you accomplished.

It is important not to look like you are trying to pad your resume by getting involved in many short-term activities right before the application deadline. Admission directors want to see that you are a consistent member of your community, that you are well-rounded, and that you have the ability to do a wide range of things.

Make sure to include the "Employment History" details such as the name of the employer or organization, job or role title, and the description of the work. For any ongoing activities, you can select to indicate the activity is ongoing if there is no future end date scheduled.

Notice for the Canvasser position at the Canadian Cancer Society, we grouped the instances of this activity together, as it was participated in once a month for several years. Since you only have 32 entries you need to strategize on how to provide as much information about your background as possible.