

Pre-Law Advising Packet

Is law school my best next step?

Deciding to go to law school is a huge step and costly in terms of your time and money. Answering the questions below might help clarify if law is a good career choice for you.

- Do I enjoy working closely with people regarding significant events or issues affecting their lives?
- Do I enjoy educating or teaching a person about a subject about which he or she may be ignorant or have serious misconceptions?
- Am I able to articulate in a clear and concise manner my analysis of a problem to others, whether it be verbally or in writing?
- Do I enjoy being and advocate? Can I argue both sides of the question with enthusiasm?
- Do I like detail work? Do I enjoy searching for the facts of a situation? Do I like to read and study?
- Can I balance career goals with quality of life goals? (Do I do it now?) Or am I the kind of competitor who will focus my all in the legal arena? Put another way, do I have hobbies, friendships and interests that have little or no relation to my career interests? (The bad news is that narrow career focus tends to lead to early burnout and enormous unhappiness.)
- Am I naturally competitive? Do I like competitive activities like card games, board games, sports, etc.
- Can I take life's little losses in stride, recognizing that "you can't win 'em all"?
- Can I "hold my own" in verbal or written disagreements? Can I maintain inner peace in the presence of verbal conflict and angry people? Or does that type of thing really get to me? If I can't, am I willing to learn how?
- Do deadlines motivate me? Or do they hang over like ready guillotines?
- Am I a decent negotiator with family and friends when differences of opinion or conflicts arise?
- Am I comfortable working long hours on most workdays? Or am I pretty much of a "40 hours and that's it!" type of person?
- Do I have high status needs? Can I live with the ambiguity and misunderstanding most people have about the roles of lawyers in our society?
- Do I like taking on responsibilities, seeing them as challengers? Or do they feel more like burdens?
- Do I like to problem solve? To puzzle things out, strategies? Explore different solutions to problems? Or do I really like clear rules and unambiguous answers?
- Do I recognize that the law field is crowded with talented, hard working people, and that I may have difficulty getting an "ideal" job or making more than a modest living? Am I willing to take that risk?

Application Timeline

From the first day of college, you must start strong and stay strong academically. **Remember, you have only SIX semesters to establish your academic credentials before applying to law school in the Fall of your SENIOR year.**

Graduation from UT:	_____
Begin Law School:	_____
Early App Deadline:	September 1 - November 1, _____
Regular App Deadline:	February 1 – May 1, _____
LSAT Prep Class:	<u>1-2 months prior to taking LSAT</u>

What to Do and When

Freshman/Sophomore/Junior Years

- **Focus on your grades** so that you'll have a competitive GPA (always do as well as you can, even if you decide to attend a community college for summer courses).
- **Get involved** in some extracurricular activities. Join a group on campus that interests you, take a part-time job, and/or volunteer. If you become involved in a group as a freshman or sophomore, the chances for you to hold a leadership position as a junior or senior will greatly improve.
- **Research the legal field** as much as you can. Read books about the law, talk with current law students and lawyers, sit in a law class. Make sure that three years of law school will be worth your time, energy, and money.
- **Secure an internship** as it is a great way to expand your resume and learn more about career fields. (NOTE: An internship at a law firm is NOT a requirement, nor necessarily recommended.)
- **Get to know your professors and employers.** Eventually, you will need to ask those that know you well for a letter of recommendation.
- **Take an LSAT practice test.** Or Google LSAT test question examples. Doing either will help you determine if you really need to take a prep class, get tutoring, or just self-study.

Junior Year

Spring/Summer

- January through May - Prepare for June LSAT
- June - LSAT offered
- June through August - Prepare for September/October LSAT and/or work on applications, contact/meet with letter of recommendation writers, and work on personal statement

Senior Year

Fall

- September – Work on applications, contact/meet with letter of recommendation writers, and work on personal statement
- September/October - LSAT offered
- November 1st - Early decision application deadline for most law schools and financial aid (scholarships, etc.)
- December - LSAT offered
- End of Fall Semester - Send updated transcript to law schools to which you are applying

Spring

- January-April - Responses from law schools arrive
- February - LSAT offered
- February 1st - April 1st - Regular application deadline (Varies by school)
- End of Spring Semester – Send final transcript to law school certifying graduation

Source: Judy McMaster, *Pre-Law Services*, Southern Methodist University, 2004.

LSAT Prep Options

Depending upon what company you choose, test prep classes can cost between \$800 - \$1500 and may last six to twelve weeks. Various options are available with each course, though, so contact company directly.

Classes

- Blueprint Test Prep www.blueprintprep.com
- Get Prepped www.GetPrepped.com
- Kaplan Test Prep www.kaplan.com

- Nexus <http://nexuslsat.com>
-
- PowerScore Ultimate Test Prep www.powerscore.com
- ScorePerfect www.scoreperfect.net
- TestMasters www.testmasters180.com
- Test Prep Guy www.TestPrepGuy.com
- The Princeton Review www.PrincetonReview.com

Tutoring

- Advantage Testing Austin <https://www.advantagetesting.com/locations/austin>
- HOFT Institute: House of Tutors <http://www.hoft.edu/>

Self-Study

- UT Perry-Castaneda Library (PCL)
Prep tests are available to be checked out from the Perry-Castaneda Library (PCL) for two hours or more and labs are available for preparation.
- LSAC
Purchase LSAT practice tests at www.lsac.org

Application Checklist

Taking the [LSAT](#) in June or October solidifies you as one of the many hopefuls who are applying to start law school in Fall. But, the LSAT is just one step in the process... a process that, before long, will begin to feel like a full-time job! As you prepare to apply to law school, the following information might be helpful:

Monitor deadlines. Some law schools have earlier application deadlines than others.

- The early application deadline for **most** schools is November 1st; Regular decision applications are generally due between February 1st and May 1st. A few law schools have early decision applications due as early as October.
- Some law schools have rolling admissions, reviewing applications as they are submitted until the entering class is full.

Apply to a few schools for each level of admission difficulty.

- Don't apply only to schools where you're likely to be admitted. Your admissions targets should include a few "reach" schools in addition to your "target" and "safety" schools.

Safety Schools: Law schools where you believe your likelihood of admission is about 60% or higher.

Target Schools: Law schools where your LSAT score and G.P.A. are near the school's admission standards, and you believe you have a 50% chance of admission.

Reach Schools: Law schools with average academic credentials significantly higher than yours. Many prospective students say that stepping out of their comfort zone and applying to a reach school changed their lives.

Attend to financial aid forms due early in the year.

- Financial aid for Fall matriculants can be filed as early as October by filling out the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA). The FAFSA must be filled out and submitted on time to qualify for certain types of aid.

Obtain letters of recommendation now!

- Choose your references wisely. Professors are usually the best recommendation sources for prospective law school applicants. However, if you have been out of school for some time and you are unable to obtain recommendations from academic sources, it may be best to have your letters of recommendation come from an employer who knows you well.

- Request letters of recommendation early so your references have the time they need to write thoughtful communications.
- Be sure to prepare your recommender. Provide your resume, a statement of your career goals, postage, and due dates to help your reference write a glowing recommendation letter.
- Follow-up with your reference to ensure your recommendation has been submitted on time.

Register with LSCAS (Law School Credential Assembly Service)

- You do not need to sign up for CAS at the same time you register for the LSAT; however, you should sign up at least four to six weeks before your first law school application deadline. It takes approximately two weeks to process a transcript from the time it is received.
- Your Credential Assembly Service fee covers five years of service, starting from the date you register. If you register for an LSAT at any time during this five-year period, the five-year period will reset, and you will be covered for five more years from the date you registered for the LSAT.
- In order for law school reports to be sent, they must be requested directly by the law schools to which you apply.
- If you do not have a complete Credential Assembly Service (CAS) file, your report will not be generated.

Send in all of your transcripts.

- Be sure to include transcripts from all undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools you've attended.

Create/update your resume.

- Unlike an internship- or job-search resume, your resume for law school applications can be 2-3 pages. Include details and explanations of honors, scholarships, awards, etc. Just because you know what they are doesn't mean others do.

Perfect your personal statement; it could be your ticket into your reach school!

- **Be original.** Avoid clichés and generalizations.
Be genuine. Speak about a personal experience or event and why it matters to you. Your sincerity will separate you from the pack.
Be concise. Using impressive words and long sentences just to sound important will generally have the opposite effect, making you appear pretentious, inarticulate, and undesirable.

Visit as many law schools as you can before you decide where to attend.

- Reading about a school on paper doesn't compare to seeing it in person. When you visit:
Talk to current students. They are the best sources of information about student life and the campus environment.
Sit in on classes. This is a great way to experience the rigors you'll be expected to endure once you become a law student.
Meet with Admissions Staff. Don't be afraid to ask a law school admissions officer for an appointment in person or by phone. If you're offered a face-to-face opportunity to meet an admissions officer, say yes, dress appropriately, and arrive early.
Visit the Career Services Office. While you may not need the assistance of Career Services personnel right away, you should be familiar with the types of job planning and placement services each law school offers. Since you're attending law school to enhance your career, it's imperative that the school you choose will meet your career needs.
Ask about support services available for your family. Because law school requires an enormous commitment of time and energy, it is important your family and/or spouse are included in the process. Ask representatives at your target law schools if they have any special programs that allow family to be included in the law school experience (e.g.: orientations, mixers, special events, housing assistance, procedures to help with family emergencies, etc.)
Call an admissions officer if you have questions. Specific questions and concerns can't always be addressed by a Web site or brochure. Admissions representatives are in business because we know the ins and outs of our school's procedures. Don't hesitate to call them.

(Source: University of La Verne College of Law – “In Brief” by Alexis Thompson, Summer 2008, www.law.ulv.edu)

Mastering the LSAT

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is tough. Although it is difficult to say when you are sufficiently prepared for the LSAT, very few people achieve their full potential without preparation. Below are some recommendations for students taking the LSAT:

1. **Practice, practice, practice.** Regardless of whether or not you take a prep course, you should still plan on taking as many practice tests as you can. The practice tests should be taken under timed conditions and you should evaluate why you missed questions and determine what you need to do to improve. LSAC (Law School Admissions Council) has many products students can buy—various “**Preptests**” and/or the “**Super Prep.**” Further explanation of these products, and additional tests can be ordered online at www.LSAC.org.
2. **Get up early.** Except for the June test that starts at 12:30 pm, all the tests start in the morning. When you take those practice tests, you should be up and doing those tests at 8:00 am. One the day of the exam, do a couple practice questions to get your brain working.
3. **Know what to expect.** The test consists of six 35-minute sections. Four of the five sections contribute to the test taker’s score. These sections include one Reading Comprehension section, one Analytical Reasoning section, and two Logical Reasoning sections. The unscored section, commonly referred to as the variable section, typically is used to pretest new test questions or to pre-equate new test forms. (The placement of this section will vary. Identification of the unscored section is not available until you receive your score report.) The sixth section is a 35-minute, unscored writing sample administered at the end of the test. Copies of your writing sample are sent to all law schools to which you apply. You should be so familiar with the instructions and question types so that nothing you see on the test can delay or distract you from thinking about how to answer the questions.
4. **Correct mistakes.** Determine what your compulsive mistakes are when taking a test and work to correct them. Talk to someone about good test-taking strategies.
5. **Feel free to guess.** Only correct scores count, so it’s ok to guess answers.

NOTE: Starting in mid-2018, prospective law students will have more opportunities to take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). The Law School Admission Council announced an expanded testing schedule that will increase testing dates from four to six annually.

Effective Sept. 2017, LSAC announced that there will no longer be limitations on the number of times a test taker can sit for the LSAT in a two-year period.

For more information about these changes, please visit [LSAC’s website](http://LSAC's website).

Sources: Dr. Roberta Alexander, “5 LSAT Home-Improvement Tips” from *preLaw* magazine article, “Do-It-Yourself LSAT Improvement,” Summer 2004, Vol. 8, No. 1 and Judy McMaster, *Pre-Law Services*, Southern Methodist University, 2004.

Law School Personal Statements

“Submit a statement which would provide the Admissions Committee with information regarding such matters as personal, family, or educational background, experiences and talents or special interest, one’s reasons for applying to law school as they may relate to personal goals or any other factors that you think should inform the Committee’s evaluation of your candidacy for admission.”

“Submit a personal statement.”

Most, if not all, applicants find writing the personal statement to be the most difficult part of the application process.

The “personal statement” portion of a law school’s admissions application presents a great opportunity to sell yourself to the school. Since law schools rarely, if ever, grant interviews as part of the admissions process, you must consider your personal statement to be your interview.

Possible Personal Statement Topics

1. Something about which you are passionate, such as a sport or volunteer activity and *why*.
2. An experience that resulted in intellectual or emotional growth.
3. A challenge that you not only met, but surpassed and *how* the process/end result has influenced you.
4. Your academic interests and research.
5. A person who really influenced your life.
6. Diversity issues and *how* they impacted your life, perspective, experiences, relationships and/or choices

Poor Personal Statement Topics

1. “I want to be a lawyer because...”
2. “I’ve wanted to be a lawyer since I was 10 years old...”
3. “Lawyers run in my family...”
4. “If I’m admitted to your law school, I will save the world...”

Personal Statement Format

- Since most law school admission officers face the enormous task of reading over a thousand personal statements within a period of a few weeks, your essay should probably not be longer than two pages, double-spaced. In any event, do not exceed the specified page or word limitations.
- Do not submit a handwritten essay unless requested to do so. When typing your essay, use an easy-to-read font size and style. Don’t use a point size less than 11 or 12.
- Your essay should be submitted on white 8.5 x 11 inch typing paper. Use one-inch margins at the top, bottom, left, and right sides of the page.
- The pages of your personal statement should contain your name on each page, be numbered, and paper-clipped (not stapled) together.

Personal Statement Do’s

- Do make sure that you follow the directions in the application regarding the personal statement. Pay special attention to what each school is asking for in a personal statement.
- Do make the essay about you. Tell an interesting story about yourself. Talk about a person or people who have played a role in you becoming the person you are today.
- Do try to grab the reader’s attention in your opening paragraph, if not in your opening sentence.
- Do be positive. Rather than include negative information in your essay, consider adding an addendum to your application to explain deficiencies.
- Do remember that writing a good personal statement takes time. Be prepared to write many, many drafts.
- Do have your essay reviewed by at least 3 people: 1) Someone who knows you well, 2) Someone who doesn’t know you at all, and 3) Someone who writes well and knows all the grammar rules (Resources: University Writing Center, Career Exploration Center, CoC Pre-Law Advisor).
- Do be diligent in your attention to detail. Admissions Committees look for easy things like misspellings, typos, and poor grammar to reject personal statements.

Personal Statement Don'ts

- Do not rewrite your resume in a narrative form or write about why you want to go to law school.
- Do not worry about following the traditional essay format that includes an introduction and a conclusion. Concentrate instead on making sure that you have a well-conceived narrative that flows from beginning to end.
- Do not discuss your minority status or history of disadvantage unless you have a compelling story that relates directly to it. Keep in mind that the tone and content should not make you sound pathetic or whining.
- Do not try to be the “ideal” applicant and do not just write what you think the committee wants to hear. Be yourself; provide the reader an opportunity to learn what makes you unique.
- Do not use legal jargon such as “pursuant to,” “aforementioned,” and “party.” Using these kinds of words will make you sound ridiculous.
- Do not use unconventional and/or gimmicky writing styles or write about yourself in the third person. For example, “Mary thinks your law school is...”
- Do not begin with a quote or title your statement. Quotes are the ideas of others and the theme of your statement should come from your writing, not from your title.
- Do not teach, preach, or make a speech.
- Do not write about anything off-color. Enough said.
- Do not send a personal statement to school B meant for school A. Harvard Law School does not want to read about your desire to attend Yale Law School.
- Do not resort to gimmicks such as writing in crayon, modeling your personal statement as a legal brief, or writing it as a poem.
- Do not use the personal statement as a place to discuss a bad semester, low GPA, or low LSAT score.

Recommendation Letters

As if you don't have enough to do: You must prepare for and take the LSAT, write your personal statement, complete application forms, and now you have to ask people for recommendation letters. Believe it or not, this aspect of the application process can be one of the most stressful. Following are some suggestions to help this aspect of the law school application process go a little easier.

Choose Wisely

Since recommendation letters (commonly known as “recs,” “rec letters,” and “letters of rec”) play an important role in the admissions process, it is important to select your “recommenders” carefully.

Generally speaking, law schools prefer academic recommendations; letters that can specifically address how well you read, write, and think critically. As a result, it is very important to choose references who can speak highly of your academic work, specifically your analytical and writing abilities from first-hand knowledge.

In the absence of faculty recommendations, strong letters from employers will go a long way. A letter from an attorney who knows you well is not going to hurt, especially if the attorney graduated from the school to which you are applying.

DO NOT submit character references from family, friends, or public officials. The same goes for letters from high-ranking political figures. A recommender's notoriety or stature is not important and may in fact, even count against you.

Ask Early

If at all possible, meet with any prospective recommenders in person. The initial meeting should be a time for you to ask two very important questions: (1) Do you feel comfortable writing me a strong letter of recommendation? (2) Can you send it out by _____(state a deadline that is at least one month BEFORE your earliest application deadline)?

NOTE: If a prospective recommender so much as blinks when you ask either question, immediately run in another direction. Otherwise, you will probably end up with a letter “damning you with faint praise.”

Information to Provide to Recommenders

Provide as much of the following information in a folder for your letter writers:

- Your contact information, including cell telephone number, home telephone number, email address, and home address
- Most law schools are now requiring that rec letters be sent to the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS). The Letter of Recommendation Form (I-9) provided by law school and/or LSDAS which must accompany recommendation letters sent to LSDAS (This form can be found in the *LSAT/LSDAS Registration and Information Book*.)
- An unofficial transcript
- Resume
- Personal statement (if written)
- For academic recommenders: a list of courses you have taken with the reference indicating what grades you made and copies of recent research papers, term papers, essays, tests, etc.
- For employer recommenders: copies of last two written performance evaluations and any reports you have prepared
- If a school specific letter is being forwarded directly to a law school, provide a stamped, self-addressed envelope. **NOTE: Original letters SHOULD NOT be given directly to the candidate (you) to send to the law school.**

Letter Format

Unless otherwise specified in the application packet, the information should be in the form of a business letter, on letterhead, with an original signature. Often law schools will include a form questionnaire in their applications, on which students are to be rated or specific questions answered. Make sure your recommenders get the form(s) in a timely manner.

Letter Content

A strong recommendation letter should include information about:

- The length of time and in what capacity the recommender has known you
- Writing, speaking, and other academic strengths you possess
- Advantages you may bring to the law school
- Your ability to think critically and process, analyze, and assess information
- Other “soft” characteristics you might possess, such as motivation, judgment, maturity, creativity, etc.

NOTE: Having a recommender send the letter to the law school directly will alleviate the suspicion of candidate misconduct in the application process. Past unethical practices have included: candidates soliciting letters of recommendation for law schools to which they do not intend to apply and opened the sealed letters; candidates have solicited more letters of recommendation than needed, opened them and submitted only the most favorable; and candidates have been tempted to write and submit their own letters of recommendation.

Researching Law Schools

Whether attending a law fair or conducting a law school visit, the following questions might assist you in getting the information you need:

Questions concerning a law school's admissions process:

1. Please describe your applicant folder review process.
2. With my grades and LSAT score (tell them specifically), what would be my chances of gaining admission to your law school?
3. How do you evaluate the more subjective factors of an application and how important are they?
4. What advantages exist for applicants who apply early? What do you consider "early?"
5. When do you typically let applicants know your admission decisions?
6. (If a state-supported school) How do you treat residency status in the admissions process?
7. Do applicants with post-college work experience have an advantage over new college graduates in your admissions process?
8. What do you look for in the personal statement or essay to accompany the application?
9. Can you give me examples of the kinds of recommendations that can make a difference?
10. What should I anticipate the cost to be in attending three years of your law school?
11. How do most of your students pay for law school?
12. How does your office handle financial aid awards? Can I expect to know my aid award before I'm required to pay a deposit?
13. What merit scholarships do you offer to incoming students?

Questions about the character/ambiance of the law school:

1. What are the curricular strengths of your faculty?
2. How are first-year classes organized and taught?
3. How many students are typically enrolled in each entering class?
4. How much (or what kinds) of contact with faculty would the typical law student have outside of class?
5. How many graduates practice law in your state (or region) after graduation?
6. What factors shape the career interests and options available to your graduates?
7. What is the atmosphere within your student body concerning competition?
8. How are students selected for your law school journals/reviews?
9. Can students leave their class books and notes in a study carrel without fear of theft?
10. When your students say what they like about your law school, what things are frequently mentioned?
11. When students turn down your school in favor of another, what reasons do they cite for doing so?
12. What features do you believe set your school apart from "comparable" schools?

Questions concerning career outcomes:

1. What is the job search experience like for your law school's graduates who want to work in Texas (or any other specific location)?
2. How many (what percentage) of your graduates have their jobs lined up before Christmas of their final year?
3. To what extent do your students get their summer jobs through your on-campus recruiting program?
4. What kinds of jobs do your first year students line up for their first summer job?
5. To what extent does class rank affect your students' job search success?

Source: Information provided through the courtesy of Tatem Oldham, pre-law advisor, Liberal Arts Career Services, The University of Texas at Austin.

Oh, and about those rankings...

Anyone who has ever applied to law school is probably familiar with *US News & World Report* ranking of law schools. Ever wonder how those rankings are determined? The following gives a brief outline of that process.

Twenty-five percent of a school's overall score is determined by a **survey of law school academics**. Four people at each law school get a survey asking them to rank the other law schools for relative merit, one a scale of one to five (one is marginal and five is outstanding).

Fifteen percent of the score is determined by a **survey of legal professionals** who regularly hire new law school graduates. For this portion, a survey is sent to hiring partners at large law firms, federal or state judges who hire clerks, state attorney generals and others. They rate the schools on the same one-to-five scale.

Another **twenty-five percent** of a school's score is based on **student selectivity**. *US News* uses statistics from the Law School Admission Council for each school on the median law school admission test score of its incoming class (12.5 percent of the score), the median undergraduate grade point average (10 percent of the score) and its acceptance rate compared to the volume of its applicants (2.5 percent of the score).

Graduate job placement is worth **twenty percent** of the overall score. *US News* uses statistics from the American Bar Association for each school on employment rates at graduation (4 percent of the score) and nine months after graduation (14 percent of the score) and the school's first time bar passage rate compared to the state's overall rate (2 percent of the score).

Finally, **faculty resources** make up the remaining **fifteen percent** of a school's score. *US News* uses statistics from the ABA for each school on the number of volumes and titles in the law library at each school (.75 percent of the score), the student-to-faculty ratio (3 percent of the score) and the school's average expenditures on instruction and non-instructional items (11.25 percent).

In addition to rankings, students should consider a school's program offerings, location, size, and cost when considering where to go to law school. Visiting various law schools, too, while perhaps costly and time-consuming, can be worth it in the long run.

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2018 TEXAS LAW SCHOOL PROFILES

Law School	Application Deadline(s)	GPA Range 25% - 75%	LSAT Range 25% - 75%	Tuition	Texas Bar Passage Rate
Baylor Law Waco	Nov 15 Mar 15 Jul 15	3.28 - 3.70	150 - 160	\$60,050	92%
SMU Law Dallas	Feb 15	3.36 - 3.79	154 - 163	\$52,586	84%
STCLH Houston	Mar 15	2.80 - 3.35	146 - 153	\$31,500	70%
St. Mary's Law San Antonio	Rolling	2.76 - 3.39	148 - 153	\$36,310	79%
TAMU Law Ft. Worth	Jul 1	3.22 - 3.60	154 - 159	\$28,504 \$34,498 (NR)	81%
Texas Law Austin	Nov 1 (ED) Mar 1 (RD)	3.49 - 3.84	161 - 168	\$35,015 \$51,995 (NR)	89%
TSU Law Houston	Rolling	2.71 - 3.31	141 - 146	\$20,418 \$27,618 (NR)	60%
TTU Law Lubbock	Nov 1 (ED) Mar 1 (RD)	3.03 - 3.64	154 - 156	\$22,996 \$34,546 (NR)	84%
UHLC Houston	Nov 15 (ED) Feb 15 May 15	3.32 - 3.69	156 - 161	\$31,021 \$46,056 (NR)	84%

- Notes:
- Data adapted from the ABA's Required Disclosures website
 - NR = Non-Texas Resident
 - Average Texas bar passage rate from Feb. and Jul. 2017 = 77%