

THE LAW SCHOOL PERSONAL STATEMENT

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OVERVIEW

The Statement's Role in Admissions: During every admissions cycle, law schools form three pools of applicants: (1) clearly in, (2) clearly out, and (3) maybe. The personal statement won't help you with the second pool, but if you're in the third, a great statement can help distinguish you from your competition.

Definition: Most law schools describe the statement in general terms – see, for instance, [Harvard Law School](#)'s requirement: "Please share how your experiences, background, and/or interests have shaped you...." As HLS's language suggests, you can think of the statement broadly as a one-page, single-spaced autobiography that addresses an important aspect of your life.

The Statement's Purpose: A law-school admissions committee already knows your GPA, LSAT scores, and other objective information; the statement can convey information that is not on the rest of your application. In particular, it can show: (1) whether you can write, and (2) what kind of person you are. To accomplish the latter, you should create a narrative that illuminates the unique personal characteristics that you can bring to a school.

The Topic: Your first task is to identify a topic. One student discussed the hair colors she had tried over the years, and she compared herself to the main character in the movie *Legally Blonde*. Another student recounted her experiences growing up as a Muslim teenager in Northern Virginia. A third wrote about her experiences helping Syrian refugees write a constitution. A fourth talked about the medical malpractice that resulted in his grandfather's death. Whatever topic you decide to pursue, it should be unique to you – that is, only you could write it. See [U.S. News & World Report](#) for excellent advice on topics.

The Law School Question: You do not necessarily have to explain in your statement why you want to become a lawyer, but some schools ask for that. For example, the University of Maryland Law School [says](#) "... the statement should address why you are interested in obtaining a law degree and, more specifically, in attending the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law." George Mason University's Scalia Law requires a Mason Statement that [explains](#) "the applicant's particular interest in Scalia Law." By contrast, Georgetown Law [states](#) that you "can write your personal statement on any subject that will enable the Admissions Committee to get to know you." Because of these variations, be sure you understand the requirements of all the schools where you are applying.

The Writing Process: Once you settle on a topic, you have three tasks. First, create a narrative that pulls the reader through your statement from the first sentence to the last; this requires a clear organizational structure. Second, avoid abstract and generic language. Instead, every sentence should include specific details. Third, admissions committee members at competitive schools read thousands of statements during every admissions cycle, so try to catch their attention quickly. In other words, your first paragraph had better be good.

Length: One single-spaced page is usually plenty of space to convince an admissions committee that you are an excellent candidate, and many schools will tell you that. Scalia Law, for instance, [requires](#) “a personal statement not to exceed two pages, double-spaced.” Catholic University Law School [notes](#) that the “application clearly states that the personal statement should be no longer than two pages.” On a similar note, Harvard Law School has page-length requirements, but it also [mandates](#) double-spacing, one-inch margins, and a “font size that is comfortable to read (no smaller than 11 point).” See this Spivey Consulting [link](#) for the length requirements of the top 50 schools. Also, check each school’s website for length requirements and other matters before you apply, as you may need to create multiple statements.

Revision: Once you have created a first draft, you will need to revise repeatedly. Your statement will be complete only when an admissions committee can read your essay without pausing to consider an unclear phrase or a badly chosen word. Your statement also should be error-free, and that means careful proofing.

A Final Note: The Supreme Court’s 2023 decision in [Students for Fair Admission v. Harvard](#) held that race-based admissions standards are unconstitutional. This has changed how many schools address personal statements and diversity statements. See this Spivey [link](#) for more details on those changes. Most of these are for highly ranked schools, but applicants should consult the specific requirements of every school where they are applying.

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RESOURCES

The Schar School’s Patriot Pre-Law Program provides [advice](#) and [sample statements](#). Many of these samples are by Mason students who did quite well in the admissions process.

The other resources below are from law schools, undergraduate pre-law offices, and miscellaneous sources. These were selected either because of the number of applications the schools receive from Mason undergraduates or because of the quality of the advice.

Please note that some statement explanations include language from the time periods before and after the *Fair Admissions* case. This should give you a stronger sense of how schools envisioned the statement for many years before the Supreme Court’s decision; in many instances, the post-*Fair Admissions* framework still includes many of the same elements, and they may help you conceptualize your statement. We will discuss this in more detail below. (Note: Language before *Fair Admissions* is drawn from previous research, not the schools’ current websites.)

Note: In accord with [APA Style](#), block quotations of 40 words or more are presented without quotation marks. In addition, formatting bullets have been added to enhance readability. Finally, a **bold font** is used liberally to highlight concepts.

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LAW SCHOOL DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

[University of Chicago](#)

- The Admissions Committee is primarily looking for two things in the personal statement:
 - Who are you: Will this applicant be a likeable and interesting addition to our community? Are you thoughtful and reflective? Will our professors and your classmates enjoy working with you and learning from your perspective?
 - Writing and communication ability: **Can you communicate your thoughts effectively? Are you able to present information in a clear, organized, and concise manner (much like you will be required to do in law school and as an attorney)?** (emphasis added)
- Our application does not provide a specific topic or question for the personal statement because you are the best judge of what you should write. Write about something personal, relevant, and completely individual to you. This may include writing about a significant aspect of your background, a quality or trait you believe defines you, a transformative experience, or the things that interest and motivate you. Don't worry so much about selecting a unique or novel topic. Just be yourself. Your personal statement will be unique if you are honest and authentic.
- We request a personal statement; it is not a statement of purpose. **You are welcome to discuss your reasons for applying to law school, but please make sure we will still get to know you as an individual.** Law schools have different views on this topic, so please consult each school to which you are applying. (emphasis added)

Note: This [link](#) provides more of Chicago's advice for the personal statement:

- **[B]e PERSONAL! We want to hear about you, what makes you tick, what motivates you, and what inspires you. We are trying to make up a class of interesting, dynamic people, and this is the place to show us that you will add something vital to our school.** (emphasis added)

The Diversity Statement at Chicago and Elsewhere

[Spivey](#) notes that Chicago dropped its traditional diversity statement post-*Fair Admissions* and allowed students to write instead this optional addendum:

- UChicago Law aims to train well-rounded, critical, and socially conscious thinkers and doers. Describe how your background or experiences will contribute to the UChicago Law community. Example topics include: lessons you have learned; skillsets you have developed; obstacles you have overcome based on your background or upbringing; or topics you have become passionate about studying in law school based on your lived or educational experiences.

This language should be broad enough to allow students to address race, ethnicity, and other factors that were the topics of many traditional diversity statements.

In June 2024, [Spivey](#) published an excellent overview entitled “New Law School Diversity Statements (‘Life Experience/Perspective Essays’)....” The essay notes that post-*Fair Admissions* the essay known as a diversity statement is often called “Life Experience Essays and Perspective Essays....” This article is well worth reading.

Another good report on changes to the diversity statement post-*Fair Admissions* is found in [U.S. News & World Report](#):

- Since schools are no longer allowed to ask about candidates’ race or ethnicity, law school essays no longer mention these factors. But many ask about a candidate’s background or life experience. Some ask about a candidate’s experience with promoting inclusivity, working together with people coming from different perspectives or fighting racism or bias.

Students should understand that we have had only one admissions cycle with the *Fair Admissions* framework, so our information is limited. That will change with time, but for now the goal with all statements remains the same: a well-written document that provides essential information about an applicant.

[George Mason University’s Scalia Law School](#)

- This is the opportunity for the applicant to provide the Admissions Committee with insights into himself/herself as an individual, over and above what is reflected in the other parts of the application....
- The application requires submission of an additional statement not to exceed two pages, double-spaced, that discusses the applicant’s particular interest in Scalia Law. (Note: This is called the “Mason Statement.”)

[George Washington University Law School](#)

- Applicants must submit a personal statement on any subject of importance that will assist the Admissions Committee in its decision. It should be no more than two pages, double-spaced. Applicants may also submit an optional identity statement discussing characteristics and accomplishments they believe will contribute positively to the GW Law community and to the legal profession.

[Georgetown Law School](#)

- **Personal Statement**
Georgetown Law does not have a minimum or maximum length for the personal statement, though we recommend around two pages double-spaced. You can write your personal statement on any subject that will enable the Admissions Committee to get to know you. (emphasis in original)
- **Optional Statement**
At Georgetown Law, we have always taken great pride in having an admissions process that focuses on the individual – We do this one at a time. If you would like to share any additional personal perspectives, reflections, or experiences – whether positive, challenging, a combination of both, or something else entirely – that have contributed to who you are as a person and as a future legal scholar and lawyer, we invite you to do so in an additional statement. (emphasis in original)
- **Optional Responses**
An optional response is another way for the Admissions Committee to get to know you. If you wish, we encourage you to submit a 250-word statement or one minute video, as applicable, for any of the following:
 1. Describe an experience that changed your perspective on an issue.
 2. What do you love that everyone else hates?
 3. Describe your perfect day.
 4. Share a Top Ten List with us.
 5. Prepare a one-minute video that says something about you. (emphasis in original)

[William & Mary Law School](#)

- **Personal Statement:** This personal statement is your opportunity to provide the Admissions Committee with information you believe to be relevant to your admission decision. Topics may include academic interests, significant accomplishments, and educational achievements, and/or any way in which your perspective and experience will enrich the William & Mary Law School community. (emphasis in original)
- **Why W&M Law Statement:** As the nation's first law school, William & Mary Law School seeks to enroll a class of talented and engaged students committed to advancing our long-standing tradition of achieving and celebrating academic and professional excellence in an inclusive environment. We recognize the challenges of our history and our responsibility to pursue the realization of justice through the rule of law. This statement is your opportunity to share how your experiences, perspectives, values, and future goals align with William & Mary Law School's vision and mission. (emphasis in original)

[Howard Law School](#)

- Your personal statement assists the Admissions Committee in selecting a diverse entering class of students. It is also used to assess each applicant's **written**

English skills. The personal statement provides applicants with an opportunity to describe the uniqueness of his or her character, abilities, and experience and to assist us in getting to know and understand you as a person.... Personal statements should also detail the applicant's interest in Howard's Law School and how attending Howard will allow you to realize your dreams and aspirations. (emphasis added)

[University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law](#)

- We recommend that you use the personal statement to present to the Admissions Committee information and perspectives regarding your background, experience, special circumstances and interests that you believe will help the Committee understand your unique story. In addition, the statement should address why you are interested in obtaining a law degree and, more specifically, in attending the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.

[University of Richmond School of Law](#)

- Your personal statement should be approximately 1-3 pages written in your own words on a topic of your choice that will provide additional insight into your experiences, qualifications and interests. While there is no required topic, if you are unsure of a topic, you may consider sharing why you are interested in pursuing a law degree or what your anticipated career goals & interests are at this time.

[American University Washington College of Law](#)

- Our personal statement prompt is open-ended in order to give you the chance to discuss what you feel is important for the Committee on Admissions to know about you. Your personal statement should focus on who you are and why you want to attend law school, either in general or at [American] specifically.

[Catholic University Columbus School of Law](#)

Note: This school does not describe the personal statement; it only offers formatting requirements:

- The application clearly states that the personal statement should be no longer than two pages. We do not recommend exceeding the two page limit. If you have additional information you wish to share with the committee, you may include it in a brief addendum. (See this [link](#) for an explanation of addenda: "A well-written addendum supports your case for admission by providing missing context to answer questions that your application might raise.")
- Our general recommendation is that your personal statement should look as neat and professional as possible. While we do not have official regulations for font or spacing, we recommend that students use **at least a 10-point font** and double spacing. (emphasis added)

[Yale Law School](#)

Requirements before the *Fair Admissions* case:

- A good personal statement provides a coherent narrative of what has brought you to this point (in your life, of applying to law school, or a combination of these two). What this narrative consists of will depend on the person writing it. For some, it may focus on their upbringing or cultural background. For others, it may be an intellectual journey, where certain ideas or courses influenced you. And for others it may be one or several experiences, personal or professional, that were meaningful. Whatever the narrative is, the reader gets an idea of the major events, turning points, influences, or experiences that make up who you are.

Requirements after the *Fair Admissions* case:

- Applicants must submit a personal statement that helps us learn about the personal, professional, and/or academic qualities they would bring to the Law School community and the legal profession. **Applicants often submit the personal statement they have prepared for other law school applications.**” (emphasis added)

Note: While the language has changed, the most recent description of the statement is conceptually about the same as the earlier version. YLS has provided a [video](#) describing what the school is looking for.

[Yale Law School 250-Word Essay](#)

- The Law School is a vibrant intellectual community where students are expected to engage academically with faculty and fellow students. In no more than 250 words, applicants must write about an idea or issue from their academic, extracurricular, or professional work that is of particular interest to them. The idea or issue you choose does not have to be law-related; this is an opportunity for readers to learn more about how you would engage intellectually in the Law School community.

[Yale Optional Essay](#)

- Applicants may choose to submit an essay in response to one of the four questions below, each related to a value that is central to the Law School community. This is an opportunity to provide readers with relevant information that may not be found elsewhere in your application. If you choose to answer one of these questions, your essay should focus on your relevant personal, professional, and/or academic experiences and not on specific reasons why you wish to attend Yale Law School.

- The optional essay should be approximately one page double-spaced. The prompts for the optional essay are as follows:
 - Option 1: The Law School has a strong tradition of public service and encourages its students to contribute to the community in a wide variety of ways. Describe a community that has been particularly meaningful to you. Discuss what you have gained from being a part of this community and what you have contributed to this community.
 - Option 2: The Law School encourages its students and alumni to be leaders, innovators, and changemakers across many different sectors. Describe one of your most important accomplishments and explain why it is important to you. Discuss how you demonstrated leadership, helped innovate, and/or drove change as part of that accomplishment.
 - Option 3: The Law School values determination and resilience and recognizes that these traits are critical to success at the Law School and in the legal profession. Describe a significant challenge, disappointment, or setback that you have faced. Discuss how you approached this experience and what you learned from it.
 - Option 4: In order to succeed at the Law School and in the legal profession, you must be able to have discussions across difference and be open to changing your mind. Describe a time when you changed your mind on an important topic after discussing it with a person with whom you disagreed or learning additional information. Discuss what you learned from this experience.

[Harvard Law School](#)

Requirements before the *Fair Admissions* case:

- The personal statement [should] give the Admissions Committee a better sense of who you are as a person and as a potential student and graduate of Harvard Law School. In many instances, applicants have used the personal statement to provide more context on how their experiences and strengths could make them valuable contributors to the Harvard and legal communities, to illuminate their intellectual background and interests, or to clarify or elaborate on other information in their application. Because applicants and their experiences differ, you are the best person to determine the content of your statement.

Requirements after the *Fair Admissions* case:

- Every applicant must submit both a Statement of Purpose and a Statement of Perspective, responding to the prompts below. Each Statement must be one to two pages in length, using double-spacing, one-inch margins, and a font size that is comfortable to read (**no smaller than 11 point**). We expect every applicant to use at least one full page for each Statement. (emphasis added)
 - **Statement of Purpose:** What motivates you to pursue law? How does attending law school align with your ambitions, goals, and vision for your future? (emphasis in original)

- **Statement of Perspective:** The Admissions Committee makes every effort to understand who you are as an individual and potential Harvard Law School student and graduate. Please share how your experiences, background, and/or interests have shaped you and will shape your engagement in the HLS community and the legal profession. (emphasis in original)

Cornell Law School

Requirements before the *Fair Admissions* case:

- The topic of the personal statement is up to you. We suggest that you approach the personal statement as your opportunity to present personal information about yourself that you would discuss during an interview. **Your statement will be evaluated for both content and construction, so write about something interesting and write about it well.** (emphasis added)

Note: This last sentence is no longer in Cornell’s description of the personal statement, but rest assured the school is still looking for an interesting, well-written statement.

Requirements after the *Fair Admissions* case:

- ... RESPOND TO AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS (required). YOU MAY RESPOND TO AS MANY AS YOU WISH BUT DO NOT EXCEED A TOTAL OF FIVE (5) PAGES.
 1. We aim to train excellent lawyers. GPAs and test scores have some predictive power, but they don’t tell the whole story. Please describe any significant challenges you have overcome, including but not limited to economic hardship, discrimination, trauma, or disability, and/or significant accomplishments of which you are proud.
 2. In the aftermath of the U.S. Civil War, Ezra Cornell wrote, “I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study.” For over 150 years, Cornell University has remained deeply committed to Ezra’s vision. Explain how your life experiences will help inform your contributions to a law school learning community devoted to “...any person...any study.” We encourage you to think broadly about what you will contribute to a law school class and eventually to the legal profession, including but not necessarily to expertise you have, experiences you can share, and how communities of which you have been part have shaped your perspective.
 3. From its founding, Cornell Law School has not only focused on producing excellent lawyers, but “lawyers in the best sense.” A law school education teaches you a craft, and prepares you for a great career, but law is also a calling, and a lawyer in the best sense is one who will, in some way, serve justice. If your career goals include representing under-served populations or otherwise vulnerable

individuals or groups, please tell us about those goals and how you hope to pursue them.

4. Is there anything else you wish the Admissions Committee to know about you beyond what you have revealed in other parts of your application? **You can describe a formative experience, or your motivation to go to law school, or a story that reveals your character, personality, or strengths, or whatever else you think is relevant.** (emphasis added)

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UNIVERSITY DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

[William & Mary](#)

- Regardless of which advice you pursue and consider, keep in mind that your personal statement is an opportunity to let an admissions committee get to know you on terms you control – a rarity in the application process. **So, try to see the statement as an opportunity to provide insight into who you are and what you would bring to their incoming class that no other applicant does.** (emphasis added)
- The personal statement should be positive. This is not a venue to explain poor grades or campus disciplinary action. Instead, choose an accomplishment about which you are proud and that says something about you and the things you value. For example, if you participated in a spring break medical trip, or if you helped build a house through Habitat for Humanity, you could talk about that. Or, perhaps you have worked part-time while in college to help pay for your expenses or to pay for your own tuition. These are important accomplishments that say a lot about you as a person. You could discuss why you felt it was important to work and what this says about your dedication to your own education.

[Georgetown University](#)

- Your personal statement is an opportunity to highlight your **writing ability**, distinct personality, and diversity of experience. Think of it as a written interview during which you get to choose the question. **Your answer should be a story that demonstrates (perhaps implicitly) why you will succeed in law school. The story could describe a single experience, or a series of related experiences transpiring over the course of many years. What's crucial is that your personal statement provides insight into who you are.** (emphases added)
- **Law schools are looking for strong writers, and admissions committees view your personal statement as a writing sample.** Show them that you can be articulate, persuasive, and engaging. **This will likely require you to draft multiple versions and proofread each one carefully. Grammatical or mechanical errors are inexcusable.** (emphases added)
- Focus on a concrete experience (or related series of experiences) from your life, and the impact it has had upon you. Do not write someone else's story, as

compelling as it may be. **This is one of those rare situations in life when it's all about you. Similarly, do not write a detached opinion piece on a topic that is important to you, but not you. If analysis is your strong suit, analyze yourself!** (emphasis added)

- Above all, be who you are, and not an imaginary person you think law schools want. As Nkonye Iwerebon, the Dean of Admissions at Columbia Law School says: "It is fairly obvious to us when an applicant tries to be someone or something s/he is not, which is not only off-putting, but can also cast a shadow of doubt on other parts of your application."

Princeton University (no link provided)

- Google "pre-law Princeton University personal statement," and you will find a pre-law guide with this language: "**Personal statements are a critical sample of your ability to write and since most schools do not conduct interviews, the statement represents an opportunity for you to distinguish yourself and potentially offset weaknesses in your application.**" (emphasis added)
- You will also find this: "Law schools are looking for **strong writers and admissions committees view your personal statement as a writing sample. Show them that you can be articulate, persuasive and engaging and follow a logical progression. This will likely require you to write multiple drafts and proof-read carefully. Pay attention to syntax, grammar, spelling and possible auto-correct errors.**" (emphasis added)

Swarthmore

- This is your opportunity to distinguish yourself from other applicants, and explain why you would be a perfect an [sic] excellent addition to their student body. **An essay that is powerful and vivid and focuses on you and your experiences and accomplishments is much more powerful and effective than an essay on your thoughts on, say, the American legal system.** You might discuss 1) a turning point in your decision to attend law school, 2) a role model for yourself, 3) a personal struggle or accomplishment, or 4) a leadership, employment, or community service experience that is somehow related to your interest in law.... (emphasis added)

University of Connecticut

Writing (Some Do's):

1. *Outline what you want to say.* Organization is critical; **logical, concise writing is essential to law school success.** This is your first (and only) opportunity to show the admissions committee you will succeed at their law school. (emphasis added)
2. *Explain, in detail, why you want to be a lawyer.* Connect your passion to life experiences. Give your readers a picture of why their law school will help you achieve your career goals, but don't gush about the law or the law school experience.

3. *Make it flow.* Don't write about too many disconnected events or experiences. Choose the most persuasive event(s) or experience(s) that led you to choose law school.
4. *Mention sensitive subjects in an appropriate way,* if you choose to disclose them.
5. *Be truthful.* If you have been arrested, have a DUI, have been incarcerated, filed bankruptcy, or have other challenging life circumstances, the personal statement is the place to write about it and explain how the experience has changed you. Turn negatives into positives.
6. *The final draft* should be no more than two typed, double-spaced pages with standard margins.
7. *Sell yourself.* Be persuasive, but be authentic.

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OTHER DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

[Psychology Today](#)

- Remember, **law schools are judging your writing skills.** If you can't write a grammatically correct essay, you probably won't write a grammatically correct brief. Proofread. Proofread again. Ask someone else to proofread it. **Do not rely on spell-check.**" (emphases added)
- Do not start your essay with "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." Lead with your own words--not someone else's. **Avoid using trite phrases like "I want to change the world", "I love the law", or "I want to be an international lawyer because I love to travel."** They are meaningless and don't project a professional demeanor. (This is the law school equivalent of telling an employer you "want to work with people.") Dig deeper for your reasons for pursuing a legal career. (emphasis added)

[National Jurist](#)

- When you are thinking about what to write, think about something you are passionate about – It will come through in your essay. Don't worry so much about what you think the admissions office wants to hear, or about trying to sound like a lawyer. Think about what they don't already know about you from other parts of your application. **What distinguishes you from the pack? If there were five other applicants with your same GPA and LSAT scores, they may be looking for what makes you unique.... They really want to learn more about you, so you really can't go wrong so long as you write about something important to you.** (emphasis added)

[The Princeton Review](#)

- Many applicants feel the need to say that they really, really want to become attorneys and have spent their lives pining for law school. Avoid this temptation.

Applications committees know that when you were six, you wanted to be a firefighter.... Instead, tell them why you're interested and what you bring to the table.

- Who are you? What makes you unique? Sometimes, applicants answer this question in a superficial way. It's not enough to tell the admissions committee that you're an Asian-American from Missouri. You need to give them a deeper sense of yourself. (emphasis added)

Law School Expert

- There are certain things a law school wants to be assured of – maturity despite youth, commitment to the study of law despite lacking a specific career aspiration, ability to succeed in a rigorous environment, independent thinking skills, feeling a duty greater than simple self-interest. **A good personal statement uses none of these phrases, but tells a story that convinces the reader to come to the conclusion(s) on his/her own.** A good personal statement is interesting to read, without needing to rely on shock value. It has a conversational rather than academic tone. **It's not there to show how many big words you know. Lawyers need to write like real people – clear sentences.** Start now. (emphases added)

Above the Law

- **Don't reiterate things from your resume.** Leave job descriptions to the resume, and if you discuss resume items in your personal statement, be sure to take a more anecdotal and lessons-learned approach rather than describing your duties and accomplishments. (emphasis added)

Forbes

Consider spending time jotting down every idea that falls into the following categories:

1. Life events or experiences that motivated you or changed your perspective
2. A meaningful personal achievement and what you learned from it
3. How you became interested in the law
4. Your passions and how they contributed to your individual goals

LINKS TO PUBLICLY AVAILABLE STATEMENTS

- [The University of Chicago](#)
- [Spivey Consulting](#)
- [7Sage](#)
- [US News](#)
- [Boston University School of Law](#)

- [New England Law](#)
- [Shemmassin Consulting](#) (Note: This is an excellent guide as well.)
- [Top Law Schools](#)
- [Accepted](#)
- [LSAT Blog](#)
- [Wheaton College](#)