

# Syracuse University

## College of Arts & Sciences

## Advising and Career Services

### The Personal Statement

#### Making an Impact

A personal statement is your opportunity to share your voice in the application process, not a time to rehash your resume. Personal statements incorporate what led to your interest in law, why you have continued on this path, and what you hope to do with a law degree. Reflect on what is most important in your experience, and be sincere. Admissions committees are comprised of real people; be your real self. Most importantly, address the question asked by each law school.

#### Start Early

Writing the Personal Statement will take longer than you think. Do not wait until the last minute to write one. It should be carefully constructed, then polished, and reviewed by those whose opinions you value. Effective Personal Statements take several drafts.

#### It's About You

Make it personal; this essay is about you, not others. Be remembered as unique. Consider family, education work, volunteerism, extracurricular experiences, your personal background, and life after law school.

#### Don't Be Cliché

Be wary of beginning or ending your essay with quotes or sentimental inspirations. Committees have seen many of these, and might be weary of yours

#### Know the Purpose

The purpose of this essay is to convey to the admissions committee that one day you will make a worthy lawyer. The committee is interested in more than your ability to succeed academically. Do not rely solely on telling the reader that YOU ARE prepared for school and will make a good lawyer – show them by buttressing your claims with specific examples that illustrate each point. Don't duplicate information from other sections of the application—offer information they won't glean elsewhere.

#### Show, Don't Tell. Be Reflective.

Don't just list all the things you've done; select one, two, or a few to tell about, and write from the point of view of what you got out of the experience, not how much you worked or how hard it was. Make a point of what you learned, or why you selected the particular experience – this will provide the reader greater insight into your initiative, values and priorities.

## Vary your Sentences and Use Transitions

The best essays contain a variety of sentence lengths. Also, remember that transition is not limited to words like nevertheless, furthermore or consequently. Good transitions flow from natural thought progression of the argument. Example: Before — “I started playing piano at eight years old. I worked hard to learn difficult pieces. I began to love music.” Example: After — “I started playing the piano at the age of eight. As I learned to play more difficult pieces, my appreciation for music deepened.”

## Use the Active Voice

Passive-voice expressions are phrases in which the subject receives the action expressed in the verb. Passive voice employs to be, such as, was or were. Overuse of the passive voice makes prose seem flat and uninteresting. Make verbs active, not passive. For example, “I helped him” is preferable to “He was helped.”

## Be Specific and Answer “Why”

This is not the time to be vague. Details are important. Be honest and a real person; we all have our strengths and weaknesses. Being honest helps present a real person with self-confidence, maturity, and self-awareness that is memorable to a reader. Anytime you make a claim about yourself, ask the question “Why?” and answer it. Your written word should reflect the answer.

## Highlight your Growth. Address Weaknesses.

Show progression throughout your past experiences, your current ambitions, and what you can offer or expect to accomplish in the future. Be positive and optimistic; however, avoid the Fairy Tale Syndrome (FTS), e.g., “I have always dreamed that someday...” If something in your academic record needs explanation, make one, but do not dwell on the negative. Just don’t dwell on it. No excuses, either. Take ownership of any transgressions—and the ensuing growth.

## Don’t Preach

Don’t enumerate the attributes of a good professional (other people may have different ideas.) Be careful with criticism of others in the field to which you are trying to gain entry. You might discuss what specialty, if any, you would pursue. What are your related attributes? What experiences have pointed you in this direction?

## Proofread and Seek Feedback

Does your essay flow? Check your spelling and grammar on a hard copy, not only on the computer screen. Since you have read and reread your personal statement so many times, you are less likely to notice mistakes. Ask your prelaw advisor, friends, family, professors and anyone else with great writing skills to look over your statement and provide you with honest feedback.

## Exercise Judgment

Be careful with the use of “I” or “me” and “myself.” Use them sparingly. Do not use “myself” when “I” or “me” is correct. Your writing should be more sophisticated than your speech, but don't make it so stilted that there is a question as to who wrote or assisted in writing your essay. Be careful of wordiness or redundancy.

## Integrity and Honesty

You must be able to defend everything that you write in your personal statement. Be honest. Don’t exaggerate. Don’t brag or lie. Admissions Committee members have well developed, highly sensitive radars. If you’ve had a bad semester or LSAT score, you can address this, but you may choose to write a separate statement about this. You may not want to utilize your personal statement to dwell on negatives. Keep a copy of your personal statement and any additional statements to review before your interview.