



ESSAY WRITING FOR LAW SCHOOL APPLICATIONS



<http://web.mit.edu/career/www/preprof/prelaw.html>

Introduction

- Group introduction
- Goals for attending the workshop
- Specific questions about essay writing

Purpose of Workshop

- Review role of essay in the application process
- Clarify content of the essay
- Review structure and style of the essay
- Discuss how to start writing
- Provide writing resources

What is a personal essay?

- A personal essay is a brief (1-2 page) narrative that describes your past experiences and future goals. It provides the opportunity to:
 - Make a positive first impression
 - Highlight strong points and abilities
 - Present goals and values

Basics about Law School Essays

- Length varies from school to school. Typically 1-2 pages.
- Important writing sample – much of law school is written work.
- Serves as the personal portion of the application process. Most law schools do not interview, so this is one of their only ways of seeing “you”.

What goes into the essay?

- The essay is an opportunity for you to describe your goals, aspirations, experiences, and motivations for wanting to pursue your chosen career path.
- It is also an opportunity to present yourself as a person, with unique talents and potential.

How to convey your message

A personal story is a powerful technique to convey a message.

- Stories:
 - Capture the audience's attention.
 - Reveal personal characteristics.
 - Allow the reader to make a personal connection with the author.
- Actual experiences that illustrate your skills and abilities.

Possible Topics...

- Life events and changes
- Achievements
- Significant people in your life
- MIT experience
- Influential books
- Extracurricular activities
- Employment experiences
- Travel experience

Writing Tips

- **Keep it simple:**
 - Focus on 2-3 experiences only.
 - Avoid writing the same information about an experience you already provide in your resume or application.
- **“Show” instead of “tell” the reader:**
 - Use action verbs and descriptive words.
 - Convey your thoughts and feelings about what you have learned from your experiences.

Be cautious of...

- Providing more information about someone else than about yourself
- Delicate/emotional experiences in your life. (ex. Death, personal illness or disabilities, etc.)
- Writing about what you will do in the future, focus on what you have already done/accomplished.

Common Pitfalls

- Overusing “I” to start sentences
- Being negative about your experiences or individuals
- Use of profanity or racial slurs
- Trying too hard, essay is not necessarily about creative writing
- Focusing on weaknesses (grades, scores, etc.)
 - Weaknesses/Special circumstances can be best addressed in an addendum. However, be brief.

Common Pitfalls

- Rewriting your resume/being overly biographical
- Using highly technical language
- Discussing why you didn't think law was for you
- Starting your essay with or focusing solely on "I want to be a lawyer because..."
- Overly focusing on your interest in a particular area of law

Essay Critique Activity

1. Break into groups of 2 or 3 people.
2. Review the assigned essays from the perspective of an admissions person.
 - What did you like about the essay?
 - Did the essay give you a clear understanding of the person's motivation for law school, etc.?
 - Did the essay pique your interest in the candidate enough to accept the person to law school?
3. As a group, select which ONE essay you would offer admission.

To get you started...

Question to ask yourself as you begin to write:

- What are your 3 biggest accomplishments?"
- Why did you choose this career path?
- What were some turning points in your life?
- What were some of the biggest challenges in your life, and how did you handle them?
- What person or event influenced you the most, and how?
- What were the reasons for the major decisions in your life?
- What are your future goals, and why?
- What is the thing that is most important to you?

Solicit Feedback

- Review your essay with the Preprofessional Advising staff
- Ask for feedback from someone who knows you well
 - Does this essay sound like you?
- Ask for feedback from someone who does not know you well
 - What did the person learn about you through the essay? Does their image of you match what you were hoping to portray in the essay?

Writing Resources

- Preprofessional Advising Staff
 - Email staff members with draft of essay for a critique,
<http://web.mit.edu/career/www/preprof/index.htm>
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- Prelaw Advisors
 - <http://web.mit.edu/career/www/preprof/lawadvisors.html>
- MIT Online Writing and Communication Center
 - <http://web.mit.edu/writing/>
- MIT Writing Center: The Writing Process *new location on campus – 12-132
 - <http://web.mit.edu/writing/>