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# ESSAY WRITING FOR LAW SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

**GECCDC**

GLOBAL EDUCATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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



# Introduction

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



# Purpose of Workshop

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- 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?

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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
  - Ex. Why are you pursuing law?
- Show you have desired qualities
  - logical in your reasoning, ability to defend your viewpoint, organized, etc.)



# Basics about Law School Essays

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- Length varies from school to school. Typically 1-2 pages.
  - Reminder: Please include your LSAC ID number on each page of the statement.
- 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?

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



# How to convey your message

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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...

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- Life events and changes
- Achievements
- Significant people in your life
- MIT experience
- Influential books
- Extracurricular activities
- Employment experiences
- Travel experience
- Exposure to legal field (if applicable and appropriate)



## Writing Tips

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- **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...

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- 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. Instead focus on what you have already done/accomplished.



## Common Pitfalls

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- Overusing “I” to start sentences
- Being negative about your experiences or individuals
- Use of profanity or racial slurs
- Taking a strong position without showing an understanding for the opposing view.
- Delivering statements as facts without making an effort to substantiate them.



## Common Pitfalls

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- Trying too hard, essay is not about creative writing
- Rewriting your resume/being overly biographical
- Using highly technical language
- Using legal jargon
- Discussing why you didn't think law was for you



## Common Pitfalls

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- 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
- Focusing on weaknesses (grades, scores, etc.)
  - Weaknesses/Special circumstances can be best addressed in an addendum. However, be brief.



# Essay Critique Activity

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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?
  - Is the essay overly logical or overly emotional to a fault?
3. As a group, select which ONE essay you would offer admission.



# To get you started...

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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

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- 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?



# Essay Critiques offered by Preprofessional Advising

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## **Option #1: Appointments**

- Call 617-715-5328 to make an in-person or phone appointment with Tamara Menghi. Front desk staff will assist you with making an appointment.
- Send your essay 24 hours prior to your scheduled appointment.

## **Option #2: Email Critiques**

- Email Tamara Menghi ([trmenghi@mit.edu](mailto:trmenghi@mit.edu)) with a Word copy of your essay. (please no PDFs)

## **Essay Critique Policy**

- Maximum of 2 critiques per applicant.
- Essay critiques are returned within 3-4 business days of requesting an email critique.



# Writing Resources

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- Preprofessional Advising Staff
  - Email staff members with draft of essay for a critique,  
<http://web.mit.edu/career/www/preprof/index.html>
- 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/>
- 55 Successful Harvard Law School Application Essays by The Staff of the Harvard Crimson