

HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

Indiana University Bloomington ■ University Division ■ Maxwell Hall 010 ■ Bloomington IN 47405
812-855-1873 ■ Fax 812-856-2770 ■ hpplc@indiana.edu ■ www.hpplc.indiana.edu

Personal Statements

I. We recently met with the Chair of IUB's admission committee, and the following reflects his thoughts:

The personal statement has two primary functions:

1. It is a writing sample--it *must* be a well-crafted, interesting piece of English prose.
2. It is your personal introduction to the committee--a substitute for an interview.

Often, someone in the admissions process acts as a "filter" and screens the applications. Sometimes a single person reads them all; sometimes each member of the committee is assigned a portion of the total number of applications. Based on the initial reading they will select applicant files they believe the whole committee should see. The personal statement can motivate the initial reader to put your file in that select pile. It must give the admissions person a reason to want to admit YOU as opposed to the literally hundreds and hundreds of other applicants who have acceptable credentials.

Most applicants write about how they have been inspired to go to law school, how they love the law, how they have wanted to be a lawyer for many years, how they will work hard and do well in law school, how wonderful law school will be, etc. *Most are pretty much the same.* It is quite tedious for committee persons to read these by the hundreds. You must wake them up and keep their attention. Often a "story" format is recommended; that is, an essay with a beginning, middle, and conclusion.

They want to know something special about YOU as a real person--what makes you unique, e.g., some life, academic, job, etc., experience(s) [either good or bad] that gives you a perspective different from all the other students in class. People on these committees are professors, and they are choosing students who will be in their classes. You should try to give them a reason to want you to be there--a reason for them to expect that you would have something interesting and unique to contribute to a discussion. The person we spoke to likes statements where writers "take risks"-- meaning they reveal something personal about themselves. Don't necessarily focus on why law school will be good for you or your future career—they assume it will be or you wouldn't be applying. Tell them what you will bring to the school. Do show your statement to as many different types of people as possible—including people who know you well, and those who do not. Do NOT try to impress with a large, artificial vocabulary or legalese. Use clear, accessible, normal prose. See the sections of the HPPLC website that deal with prelaw personal statements: <http://hpplc.indiana.edu/law/law-ps.shtml>.

**[Note that HPPLC has a folder of personal statements by former IU applicants—ask for it at the front desk]

II. Here are some remarks from U of Richmond's Prelaw Handbook appendix on statement writing [See, <http://www.richmond.edu/~polisci/prelaw/state.html>]:

"You, as a unique person, bring something different and interesting to the conversation. [What you have to say] involves information that only you can provide to someone else. It is information that will hold someone's interest and make you a memorable acquaintance. Your personal statement must reflect this in order to be effective.

Do not spend your time discussing your concept of justice or the greatness of the Bill of Rights or the problems of the legal system or your desire to change the world. Also avoid talking about your "keen interest in the law" or how the law "is so fascinating". Most applicants write about those things, so your writing about them makes you just like everybody else.

You should not talk about your activities in various organizations and leadership positions. Because most people applying to law school will have undertaken the same kinds of activities, there is nothing distinctive about that. However, if there is a specific organization or activity or experience which has sincerely shaped you or been particularly important to you, you should certainly discuss it.

All this is not easy to do in two pages, but that is precisely the point. The reason law schools ask you to write this short statement is because your ability to do so effectively will indicate your capacity to handle the difficult mental challenges of a legal education.”

III. The following is from the *The CLEO Edge* , vol. 1, number 6 [Fall 2000 Edition] at p. 32:

“A good personal statement gives insight into your personality that the other parts of your application cannot offer. It tells the admissions officers who you are *beyond* grades, scores, awards, work experience and internships.

The best approach to writing the personal statement is to choose an interesting story to tell—an event that helped teach you humility, independence, or self-confidence—that changed the way you think about yourself or about the world, or that shows your motivation or personal style. Write a story of about 500 words about this event. Then, explain the events in this story by reference to the background information that you want to present about yourself: ‘Having grown up in West Philadelphia’s ghettos, mountains were new experiences to me.’ ‘Until I got to college, I had never needed to study.’ The finished essay should have the story as its central theme, but it should also show how elements of your background affected your personal development.”

This document has been prepared for Indiana University - Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. Please note that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice. Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, schools, and programs in which they have an interest.