

Pre-law Guide



Center for
CAREER
Development

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



How to use this guide

This guide covers reflection, preparation tips and advice for the law school application process. It is not intended to serve as a substitute for working with our pre-law adviser to get individualized advice and discuss the more nuanced decisions you will make throughout your pre-law journey. To do this, [make an appointment in Handshake](#).

	page
Exploring Your Interest in Law School	2
Application Timeline	4
Researching Law Schools	8
Law School Comparison Worksheet	9
Application Components	11
Making a Decision	14

Exploring Your Interest in Law School

The pursuit of a law degree involves a significant commitment of time, energy and money. It's important to consider the degree carefully. This guide covers the Juris Doctor, or J.D., which is the most common degree conferred by law schools. All American Bar Association-approved law schools usually require three years of full-time study to earn a J.D., though there are many part-time and joint-degree options. Here are some questions to keep in mind as you explore law school as a post-graduate option.

Why are you considering law school?

- Why do you find law school interesting or compelling?
 - » Is law school uniquely compelling as a degree option, or could other degrees, such as an MPA, MPP, MBA, Ph.D. or other master's programs also help you to achieve your goals?
- What do you value most?
 - » How would your pursuit of a law degree support these values?
 - » How would your values impact the law schools you decide to apply to?
- Are you applying to law school because you want to make a high salary?
 - » Law school graduates usually incur substantial debt. Not all types of lawyers make the same [salary](#) and work hours can be long for the highest salaries. [Conduct informational interviews](#) with attorneys across practice areas to learn more about each practice area.
- Have you validated and confirmed your interest in a law career compared with other career paths?
 - » See the "How can you learn about potential law career paths?" section below.
- Are you interested in practicing law?
 - » If so, which law practice settings appeal to you most and why?
 - » Are you interested in career areas for which a J.D. may be an asset (e.g., politics, government public policy)?
- Are you willing to invest the time, energy and money associated with going to law school?
 - » Have you thoroughly investigated these costs? If you aren't sure, might you consider applying later when you are more certain?

How can you learn about potential law career paths?

Law Career Possibilities

Consult [Vault law career guides](#), the prelaw portal built by the [National Association for Law Placement](#) and the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#).

Learn more about common law practice areas on [legal profession association](#) sites. Here are common areas you may want to explore:

- Academia
- Business and industry
- Government
- Judicial clerkship
- Private practice
- Public interest

Law School and the Application Process

Consult the [LSAC Discover Law](#) site, the [American Bar Association](#) pre-law site and websites of law schools that interest you.

Current Law Students and Program Alumni

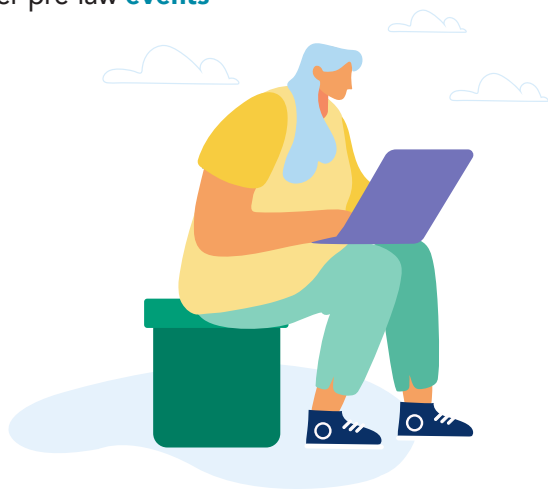
Use [LinkedIn](#), [TigerNet](#) and other tools to identify current students and graduates of law school programs you're considering or alumni who have gone into legal roles that interest you. You can:

- Conduct informational interviews with [practicing lawyers](#) to learn about the rewarding and challenging aspects of their careers
- Observe or shadow a lawyer on the job
- Intern at an organization to help build skills for law school

Relevant Programs and Resources from the Center for Career Development

Meet with our pre-law adviser and attend relevant programs including:

- Experiential programs such as [Princeternships](#) and [City Treks](#)
- Law school information sessions on campus, which are open to students and local alumni
- Other pre-law [events](#)



What do law schools value most in an applicant?

In determining who will be admitted, admissions committees try to predict how successful a candidate will be academically and professionally. Your application is viewed holistically and most law schools value the following factors most:

- Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and/or Graduate Record Examination (GRE) score
 - » The LSAT in particular is a key factor for most top law schools
- Undergraduate GPA
 - » This is a key factor for most top law schools
 - » Law schools also consider improvement of grades over time and the rigor of your academic plan
 - » GPA remains a determining factor for applicants who apply several years after graduation from college
- Rigor of undergraduate course of study and motivation demonstrated
- Personal statement and other essays or statements
- Work experience or other postgraduate experience (including graduate work)
- College curricular and extracurricular activities and community activities
- Letters of recommendation
- Difficulties (financial, personal and physical) overcome
- Each student's unique character and background - how will this applicant enhance the learning community? Law schools are particularly interested in students who have been traditionally underrepresented in the legal profession.

Admissions officers seek the following qualities:

- Excellent verbal and written communication, able to effectively articulate and argue both sides of a question clearly, concisely and enthusiastically
- Strong research and writing skills
- Capacity to quickly work through complex problems, organizing material and drawing thoughtful conclusions
- Strong work ethic
- Passion for legal thought
- Precision
- Ability to accept criticism
- Ability to cope with ambiguity

Traditionally Underrepresented Students

Law schools encourage traditionally underrepresented applicants to consider their programs. Additional resources are available with more information about career opportunities and, in some cases, experiential options and programs to encourage underrepresented applicants to consider law.

The links below provide a starting point for exploration in these areas, however, it is best to consult law schools' websites for programs that interest you and speak with the pre-law adviser for more guidance in this area.

- General diversity information: [LSAC - Discover Law initiative](#)
- Information for specific applicants
 - » [LGBTQIA Applicants](#)
 - » [Racial and Ethnic Minority Applicants](#)
 - » [Female Applicants](#)



Application Timeline

Although the application process varies by program, a common timeline applies to many law schools and there are helpful actions to take to explore law during your first few years of college. The law school application process is very different from the undergraduate admission process. Many students find it to be more time-consuming and stressful than they think it will be, so it is important to plan ahead and to build in time for thoughtful reflection.

Suggestions for Your First Few Years at Princeton

- **Build a solid academic foundation.** Although law school does not require you to take specific coursework, admissions committees will consider the rigor of your academic program and pay attention to whether you took advantage of opportunities to challenge yourself, excel in your coursework and build relationships with professors.
- **Choose a concentration that you enjoy and can do well in, regardless of whether it is law-related.** Princeton does not have a pre-law major or curriculum. Law schools welcome all academic majors and do not favor one over another, so select a course of study that both challenges you and allows you to excel.
- **Get involved in activities that interest you.** These do not have to be pre-law or legal clubs or organizations, but they should demonstrate leadership and commitment to activities outside of your coursework. You do not have to pursue summer jobs and internships that directly relate to the law as long as you are building relevant skills and experience and following your interests.
- **Explore law school.** Consider the questions and recommendations in the Exploring Your Interest in Law School section above to confirm your interest in the field.
- **Begin to reflect on your unique interests and skills and keep an open mind about what comes after graduation.** Preparing for law school is one of the many career possibilities that you could pursue.
- **Establish a credit history and use credit responsibly.** Many law students rely on private loans to finance their legal education.

Determine When to Apply

Applying Early

The Harvard Law School Junior Deferral Program (JDP) allows students to apply as college juniors. If admitted, students defer their admission for at least two years after graduation before matriculating to Harvard Law School.

Application requirements for JDP applicants are the same as for regular JD applicants. The JDP application opens in the spring and does not have rolling admissions. Admission decisions are released at the same time and will be made after students' spring grades become available. It is a highly selective program. Successful applicants from Princeton and other schools have outstanding community engagement experience and high grades. For more information about the JDP application and deadline, visit the [JDP admissions page](#).

Deciding Whether to Apply as a College Senior or After Graduation

Law schools encourage applicants to take time off between undergraduate study and law school, and most applicants choose to do this. Here are some of the reasons they decide to wait:

- It's helpful for law schools to see all four years of GPA data, and in the case of Princeton alumni, for the law school to learn more about the completion of their senior thesis or project.
- Students welcome a break from school — particularly after a final year of thesis completion — before throwing themselves into three years of intense study.
- Students find it helpful to gain professional and life experience before going to law school. Law schools value professional experience and it may make you a more competitive applicant at many top schools while also helping you feel more certain about what you want to do.
- Students may choose to build up savings before enrolling. Consider whether you have a source of funds for educational and living expenses.

If you feel prepared and ready to submit strong materials that demonstrate the skills that law schools seek, you may decide to apply as a senior. If you aren't admitted to the school of your choice, you can always reapply in the future, describing your additional experiences since your last application.

What to Do if You Take Time Off Before Applying

Consider what you would do if law school were not an option and spend a few years exploring that field, regardless of whether it relates to law. Although working in a law-related capacity may give you valuable insight into what lawyers do, it will not increase your chances of being admitted into law school any more than a "non-legal" full-time job. In fact, spending time in a non-legal environment can give you a different perspective. Princeton alumni do a wide variety of things during this time, including pursuing jobs, volunteer opportunities or post-grad academic or work fellowships.

Additional Timeline Considerations

If you decide to pursue a joint degree program or to apply to multiple degree programs simultaneously, more timeline considerations and standardized tests or application components may apply.

Some students choose to apply to a law school Early Decision or Early Action. Early Decision is binding and applications are due earlier than the timeline described in this guide; applicants should only apply this way if the school is their first choice and they would accept admission regardless of the financial aid package offered by the school. Early Action also requires an earlier application due date but is not binding and allows applicants to receive an admission decision much earlier, usually by mid-December.

Detailed Timeline Recommendations

12-18 months before you apply:

- Explore careers in law and learn what law school is like. If you are in school at this time, continue to do as well as possible academically and take a normal-to-heavy course load each semester with graded courses when possible. Continue your involvement in extracurricular, community or civic activities.
- Check out [upcoming events](#) for law school programs to attend.
- Meet [with the pre-law adviser to discuss](#) your initial thoughts and plan.

9-12 months before you apply:

- Build or strengthen relationships with faculty members who later may write you letters of recommendation.
- Consider attending a LSAC Law School Forum, a free opportunity to meet representatives from a wide variety of law schools.
- Open a Credential Assembly Service (CAS) account to electronically compile the documents and information that most American Bar Association-approved law schools require.
- If you are a current student, pursue a job, internship or shadowing experience for the summer.
- Begin preparing for the LSAT or GRE.

6-9 months before you apply:

- Register to take the [LSAT](#) and possibly the [GRE](#) at least six weeks before your planned test date to secure a convenient testing location and ensure that you are adequately prepared.
- Research law schools and create a list of schools to which you will apply.
- Discuss your application process and school choices based on your interests and other personal considerations with [the pre-law adviser](#).
- Write your law school resume. Most law schools accept two-page resumes, so you can add more detail to your academic achievements, extracurricular activities, leadership, awards and professional experience. Please see page 15 of this guide for an example of a law school resume.
- Begin drafting your personal statement, considering your narrative and major themes to highlight throughout your application materials.

Summer the year before you apply:

- Register to take the LSAT or GRE by October if necessary. If you have already taken the LSAT and are unsure about whether to retake it, please [consult the pre-law adviser](#).
- Take the LSAT or GRE if you feel you are adequately prepared.
- Early in the semester, select writers for your letters of recommendation and ask each person by phone or in-person meeting if they would be willing to serve as a recommender.
- Begin to consider your options for financing law school.

Fall the year you apply:

- Finalize your list of schools and make sure you have double-checked the application requirements for each school. [Meet with the pre-law adviser](#) to review your list.
- Request financial aid information from law schools.
- Obtain a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).
- View the applications for the schools to which you plan to apply online on the Law School Admission Council's [CAS Electronic Application System](#). Do this at least six weeks before your first application deadline.
- Complete your personal statement, diversity statements, supplemental essays and addenda, ensuring that several readers have reviewed each statement and they are tailored to each school before they are finalized.
- Complete and begin submitting digital applications for each school before the end of November.
- Pay your application fees for each law school.
- When you confirm that a recommendation has been received by LSAC, send a thank you note to the person who wrote it.
- [Request official transcripts from the registrar](#). You also likely need to submit a transcript to LSAC for coursework from Princeton University and any other college or graduate-level coursework since many law schools require it. Some study abroad transcripts can take significantly longer for LSAC to obtain.
- Arrange a visit to each school you're applying to if possible. Contact the admissions office to arrange a tour of the school, get connected with a current student or ask to sit in on a law school course.

Winter and early spring after applying:

- Contact law school admissions offices if they have not confirmed they received your application and files within two weeks after you submitted your application.
- Complete and submit financial aid application materials.
- If you are applying as a senior, have an updated transcript with your fall term grades sent directly to CAS.
- Some schools may also request that you share a Dean's Certification to confirm that applicants have not had academic or disciplinary problems. This is usually requested the spring after you apply.
- If you apply to a school that conducts interviews, prepare adequately and [consult the pre-law adviser](#) at the Center for Career Development for more preparation tips.
- Evaluate offers of acceptance, deferrals and financial aid. Accept the offer from the school you will attend and pay your seat deposit before their deadline.
- Thank your recommenders and inform them about your plans.



Apply Early

It is always a good idea to complete your applications long before each school's deadline. This gives you time to address any problems that may arise and will give you an advantage if the schools use rolling admissions, meaning that they review the applications as they are received.

Researching Law Schools

Applying to law school is not the same as applying to college. Although a school's ranking may be important, we recommend you apply to a wide range of schools, not just the top programs. Each school is unique and has specific areas of focus. If you are most interested in working at a large corporate law firm, you may not be interested in applying to a "Top 15" school that focuses on public interest law because their programs and courses might not cover the content that would best prepare you for other types of practice. Use the Law School Comparison Worksheet in the next section to help you narrow down options.

Many applicants find it helpful to create a spreadsheet which includes your notes about the admissions criteria and application process for each university. Although the number of schools to which you apply may be based on your individual circumstances, Princeton applicants typically apply to 8-11 schools. If you have questions about average scores and grades for Princeton applicants admitted to various schools, you can [meet with the pre-law adviser to learn more](#).

Peruse Guides and Rankings

[U.S. News](#), [Gradschools.com](#) and [Peterson's](#) offer insights into locale, campus life, specialties and overall reputations. Give more weight to the ranking of the specific program than the ranking of the institution as a whole. Also, you can search for schools by LSAT score and GPA on [this LSAC](#) site, which could help give you some ideas but could be misleading when used as the only factor for building a list of schools.

Attend Law School Information Sessions and Events

Regularly check [upcoming Center for Career Development events](#) for law school information sessions offered on the Princeton campus in the fall. Representatives from law schools will cover the distinguishing qualities of each school and share broader context about law school and legal professions. If you are an alum, you can either attend these sessions on campus or go to other sessions offered by each school. Attend an LSAC-sponsored [Law School Forum](#) to learn about a variety of law schools, the application process, the LSAT, financial aid, diversity and the legal profession.

Browse Law School Program Websites

When you visit the sites, read through required/elective courses and review other unique program attributes.

Be Aware of Financial Considerations

Law school can be expensive and financial aid is not guaranteed, nor always sufficient to cover costs. For more information, study this [infographic](#) for an overview of options for paying for law school and [read this information from LSAC about paying for law school](#), which includes links to information about Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAP) many law schools offer for students who choose to pursue public interest law. Although United States law schools welcome applications from international students financial aid can be limited because they are not eligible for federal financial aid programs. If you are an international student, review law school websites, prioritize contacting the admissions departments for top choice schools to get information directly from them and [consult with the pre-law adviser](#).

Law School Comparison Worksheet

Gather the information you need to determine whether a particular law program is right for you. This is a comprehensive list and not every item will apply to you or your specific considerations, interests or values.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER	INFORMATION TO FIND
Program Attributes	
Degrees granted (if applicable)	Are joint (J.D./masters, J.D./MBA, J.D./Ph.D.) degrees an option?
Time to degree completion	What is the minimum, maximum and average time commitment? Are there caps on funding/years of study?
Course timing and sequencing	Are part-time study and/or online or evening course options if you're interested in these?
Graduation requirements	Beyond coursework, are there internship, thesis or comprehensive exam requirements to earn a degree?
Program size	Consider how you like to work and interact and whether a larger class size/cohort is preferable to a smaller one.
Classes	Do classes look interesting and aligned with your likely legal focus areas? Are the classes that interest you easy to get into?
Extracurricular academics	If you are interested in specific activities, such as Law Review, law clinics, moot court or specific student clubs, does the school have active groups that are accessible to most interested students?
Graduate student community	Is graduate student campus housing available? Are there religious or cultural groups for graduate students who want to make friends outside of class? Are there opportunities to socialize with other graduate students on campus?

Quality and Reputation	
Institution and program accreditations	Attending a nationally accredited law school allows you to sit for the bar exam in any state and allows for the most geographic mobility. American Bar Association (ABA) is the most widely respected accreditor in the U.S. ABA-accredited schools can be found here . The California Bar Association (CBA) is the most powerful state accreditor in the U.S. but may not allow for as much geographic mobility outside of California.
Your likely fit with the school	Review profiles of the typically admitted student to assess realistic appraisal of your chances of admission and your fit with the institution. What characteristics and skills describe the successful applicant?
Faculty reputation	Are faculty well-trained in the law? Are faculty accessible? Do faculty have research areas that interest you?
Alumni satisfaction	How do graduates of the program rate the support and guidance they received for both their studies and their future career plans?



FACTORS TO CONSIDER**INFORMATION TO FIND**

Institutional Demographics	
Diversity of faculty and student body	Which traits/characteristics are important to you in finding a sense of belonging at the institution?
Faculty-to-Student ratio	How large are the classes?
Geography/Local region	What is the area like? Are housing and transportation available? Do you need a car? Can you find work/volunteer roles? If it is a regional school, would you enjoy working in this region after graduation?

Cost and Financial Assistance	
Fellowships/Assistantships/Scholarships	Is funding included (typically this is not the case)? Where and when can you apply for consideration? Are there caveats or stipulations for using funds? If you are interested in pursuing public interest law, does the school offer funding or Loan Repayment Assistance Programs?
Cost of living	Do law school students typically live on campus? What's the average rent off-campus? How much is public transit? What's the cost to park a car? How expensive are groceries and other necessities?

Career Planning	
Summer options	What do most students do during their summers? Is funding available or provided if students pursue public interest internships? Is research an option? The post-graduate employment process is highly structured for law students in their second and third years and many times summer positions may lead into full-time post graduation offers.
Common post-graduation roles	What type of work do most recent graduates of the program pursue (e.g. Big Law - top corporate law firms, public interest law, etc)? How many clerkships are typically available for alumni and in which disciplines? What are the long-term marketability and job prospects for alumni? What percent of alumni pass the bar?
Career services offered to law school students	Are there career advisers dedicated to law school students? Can alumni use the law school's career center?

Application Components

This section includes information about more detailed parts of the application.

Standardized Tests

LSAT

What it is

Most ABA-accredited law schools required students to take the LSAT. This digital exam lasts approximately four hours and assesses key skills for success in law school: reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, logical reasoning and writing. Many law schools regard the LSAT score as the best indicator of your performance in law school.

When it's offered

See dates, sites, registration forms, fees and deadlines on the [LSAC website](#). Note that LSAT test sites fill quickly, so it is advisable to six weeks before a test date so you can ensure that you get a convenient location and time.

Score range

Your score is computed on a scale of 120 to 180, based on the number of questions you answer correctly. Generally, a score of 165 or higher is a competitive score for the top 15 law schools.

How long scores last

All scores will become part of your record for five years. Although some schools will average the scores from multiple testing dates, most schools only consider the highest total score.

How to prepare

The [LSAC site](#) and [Khan Academy](#) both offer free diagnostic tests and preparation. Taking a full, timed LSAT to see how you do can serve as a good starting point for your preparation. Taking multiple preparation tests and practicing over time tends to be the best way to get an optimal LSAT score. Retaking the LSAT is not generally recommended, so build in ample time for preparation.

GRE

What it is

Some law schools have recently added the GRE General Test as an option in lieu of the LSAT. This test takes approximately four hours and covers verbal and quantitative reasoning and analytical writing. Not all law schools accept GRE scores. Therefore, if you are thinking of applying to multiple law schools or if you are considering other graduate programs, you will want to consider which exam would be the best option for you. Check which law schools [accept the GRE](#).

When it's offered

You can take the GRE at flexible times at various testing centers, although you should plan ahead to secure the location that works best for you. Detailed GRE test information including dates, sites, registration forms, fees, deadlines and registration information is available on the [Educational Testing Service website](#).

Score range

Your score is computed on a scale of 130-170 for the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning sections and the score scale for the Analytical Writing section is 0-6.

How long scores last

All scores will become part of your record for five years. Although some schools will average the scores from multiple testing dates, most schools only consider the highest total score.

How to prepare for it

The [ETS site](#) and [Khan Academy](#) both offer free diagnostic tests and preparation. This can serve as a good starting point for your preparation. Also, review these [GRE Prep Resources](#).

Additional Exam-related Notes

- If you take both the LSAT and GRE, expect to submit both scores.
- Your LSAT score is automatically reported to schools as part of your application. Your GRE test fee entitles you to request scores be sent to up to four graduate institutions on the day of the exam. Additional reports and reports sent after the exam date are subject to additional fees.
- Accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please see the [Accommodated Testing](#) section of the LSAC website and/or the [GRE website](#).



Extracurricular Activities and Work Experience

Although not a primary factor in law school admissions decisions, experiences outside of the classroom can be distinguishing factors among many highly qualified applicants, particularly at highly selective law schools, and for candidates whose GPA and/or LSAT score make them borderline applicants. These can include extracurricular collegiate experiences, internships, jobs, volunteer work, community service, research and gap year experiences. Schools value depth of involvement and leadership roles over whether the activities directly align with law or the quantity of activities.



Letters of Recommendation

Law school applications typically require at least two letters of recommendation with a strong preference for academic letters. Although your letters of recommendation don't factor into the process as much as grades or exam scores, they could be the deciding factor in the admission process. So dedicate time to securing genuine, quality recommendations. Although recommendations are confidential, there are steps you can take to help your letter writers help you.

Consider who to ask

Academic references (JP and thesis advisers, for example) tend to be emphasized, although other professors are also good choices. Pick recommenders that know you well enough to provide concrete examples of your intellectual strength, judgment, motivation, leadership and an assessment of your communication skills. In some cases, non-academic references could be helpful if they hold advanced degrees and know your work well. If a law school accepts more than two letters, consider getting a third letter from a supervisor, especially if you are in the workforce.

Give them something to work with

Arrange an in-person conversation with each recommender to share an overview of your goals, why you are interested in law school and ask whether they would write a recommendation and why you would like this person to write it. Provide a copy of your resume, your personal statement and additional points to which they might refer when writing your letter — such as work from their class — to help them frame their letter.

Be respectful

Provide sufficient lead time, generally four to six weeks, for your recommenders to draft and submit their letters. Remember, students typically seek recommendations during what is often the busiest time of the year for faculty.

Save copies

If you might defer your application, stay in contact with potential recommenders. If you request a recommendation before applying, you may save it through the CAS site to keep on file for when you apply to law school in the future.

Application Essays & Personal Statements

Law schools require a personal statement and optional statements. Optional statements may include additional essays requested by the law school and a diversity statement. 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. Through all components of your application — particularly your statements — you should share consistent themes and tailor the writing to each school.

What to Do in Your Personal Statement

- **Start by freewriting.** Brainstorm your motivation for a career in law. Think of what can help shape your statement. Examples may be the influences of your family and life experiences, instances when you creatively solved a problem or demonstrated leadership, your unique traits and interests, experiences that changed you and adjectives that describe you.
- **Write a concise narrative with one or two points that demonstrate your ability to craft an argument.** You can write up to two pages, but go for quality over quantity and don't feel the need to capture your life story.
- **Bring in multiple stories and themes about yourself.** Focus on a concrete experience (or related series of experiences) from your life and the impact it has had upon you that tells more about your unique background and interest in the law. Use stories to demonstrate your qualities.
- **Write well.** 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 proofread carefully. Pay attention to syntax, grammar, spelling and possible autocorrect errors.
- **Follow directions.** Read the law school application carefully. Most law schools allow you to choose a topic, but some may require you to address a specific question.
- **Be honest and be yourself.** It is essential that you be absolutely truthful and candid on your law school application, including revealing such matters as disciplinary actions and criminal convictions if asked. A criminal conviction may not disqualify you from attending law school or becoming a lawyer, but lawyers are held to high standards of honesty and lying on an application may hurt your chances of being admitted to the bar.
- **Consider your audience.** Your readers have significant context about the law and are likely to be professors and law school admissions officers. Assume they have this context rather than explaining details of legal professions.

What Not to Do in Your Personal Statement

- **Do not write about what you hope to study.** The most common mistake that applicants make on the personal statement is to write about a topic instead of sharing about themselves. Don't write about the field of law you want to study or the school. Write about you.
- **Do not address low grades or scores in your statement.** Your personal statement is not an apology; rather, it is an opportunity to highlight strengths. If you struggled with a debilitating illness during college, or worked twice as hard as your classmates because English is not your first language, you might tell those stories in your personal statement to demonstrate resilience. If those experiences negatively affected your GPA, save that explanation for an addendum. Emphasize the positive in your personal statement.
- **Do not be gimmicky or humorous.** Avoid cliches, beginning with a famous quote or writing in a way that could be viewed as unprofessional.
- **Do not focus on another person or borrow others' words.** Use the statements to share more about yourself and focus a story about working with or helping others on your role in solving the problem or meeting a goal.

Diversity Statement

The diversity statement is an optional component of the application that asks applicants how their perspective and presence will enrich the law school. A diversity statement is one or two pages long depending on the school. In the context of this essay, diversity is any personal characteristic or experience that gives you a unique perspective and is not limited to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation or sexual orientation. Some applicants write about significant experiences or positions they have held that have shaped their perspective or values. We recommend each applicant submit this statement.

Additional Optional Essays

If a law school gives you the opportunity to submit additional essays, you should take it, so long as you genuinely believe you have something important to say. Consider these essays an opportunity to demonstrate your writing skills and particular interest in a school. One common topic is, “Why X Law School?”, which gives you the opportunity to picture yourself in the school and think about which programs and extracurriculars most appeal to you and how you might contribute in those areas if admitted.

Addenda

An addendum is an optional separate letter that you submit along with your application materials which provides additional information about an element of

your application that could raise concern. It may be helpful to use an addendum if you feel your grades do not reflect your true abilities, if you feel your LSAT score does not accurately reflect your potential for success in law school, if you opted to retake the LSAT or if you have a criminal or disciplinary record including an offense that may seem very minor. It is not necessary to write an addendum if doing so will unnecessarily highlight a minor flaw, such as receiving your only “B” in college. An addendum should be factual and brief, describe the concerning issue, explain how you resolved it and tell the reader how the lessons you learned will make you a successful law school student. If you include an addendum, do not also mention the same information in a personal statement. We recommend that the pre-law adviser review your addendum before it is submitted.

Making a Decision

Law school applicants may learn about their admission status as early as December or as late as August (if from a waitlist). If admitted, schools ask you to make a final decision by early April and that is typically a firm deadline even if you are awaiting information about a waitlist status at another school. Applicants are informed around March or April if they are placed on a waitlist, and will receive a notification between that time and up to a few days before the term starts if you are accepted.

Waitlist

If you are placed on a waitlist, submit a letter of intent to the admissions dean confirming your strong interest in attending the school (and possibly that it is your first choice, if true), sharing new information and gathering information from the law school.

You can share an update on your GPA accompanied by an updated transcript, an additional letter of recommendation and/or other updates on what you have done or achieved since your original application submission. In addition to writing the letter, you might also want to contact the admissions office with questions about the number of people on the waitlist, whether the waitlist is ranked and historical information about how many applicants were called from the waitlist in previous years.

Deferrals

You may want to consider deferring for a variety of reasons, including financial factors, uncertainty about committing to law school or interest in reapplying to other programs in a future cycle before committing to a program. Deferrals are not granted automatically.

It is a privilege offered to you by the law school. The policy for applying for deferrals varies greatly from school to school and is likely to include you writing a statement about why their deferral for one year would be beneficial. Please be sure to research this thoroughly if you plan on asking for a deferral.

How to Decide on Schools to Which You Are Admitted

Consider visiting the school to talk with faculty, students and their career services office to learn more about factors you aren't as certain about from the [Law School Comparison Worksheet](#) in this guide, to see the location and what it feels like to be part of the campus community. You may also want to revisit the factors on the Law School Comparison Worksheet that matter most to you. Don't forget to [discuss your thoughts with the pre-law adviser](#).

Example Resume

Jaiden Johnson

jjohnson@princeton.edu | (609) 900-0000

EDUCATION

Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

June 2019

- A.B. in *Race and Public Policy*, African American Studies Department, Certificate in American Studies
- GPA: 3.91

HONORS

- Arthur J. Liman Public Interest Fellow, Princeton University Program in Law and Public Affairs 2018
- Oscar S. Strauss II Fellow in Criminal Justice (Guggenheim Fellowship) 2017

WORK EXPERIENCE

Correctional Association of New York, Prison Visiting Project Intern

June 2017 – August 2017

- Visited and monitored New York State prisons, wrote detailed reports based on qualitative and quantitative data from visits.
- Corresponded regularly with incarcerated individuals concerning abuses and conditions in NYS prisons.

Harlem Community Justice Center, Youth Justice Fellow

June 2016 – August 2016

- Offered job search assistance, researched effective strategies for successful post-incarceration reentry.
- Organized community events for young adult justice programs.
- Co-facilitated Speakers Bureau program for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Princeton Politics Department, Research Assistant

December 2015 – August 2017

- Collected & coded data from newspaper archives on indigenous & rural protest in Argentina from 1990-2015, in Spanish.
- Managed and coordinated research team of three other research assistants.

ProWorld Peru, Community Health Intern

September 2014 – June 2015

- Gained a broadened perspective and cross-cultural fluency through year-long Princeton Bridge Year program.
- Worked to bring sustainable clean water to rural communities.
- Taught English and designed literacy program for students ages 6-15.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Students for Prison Education and Reform (SPEAR), Co-President

December 2016 – present

- Lead SPEAR's committees in advocacy & activism on prison conditions, sentencing policy, and prison education.
- Promote public awareness of mass incarceration through public events and original research.
- Spearhead campaign calling for University divestiture from private prisons.
- Organized and directed SPEAR's 2017 and 2018 spring conferences:
 - April 2018: *Shadows of the Prison*, \$40,000 budget, 30 speakers.
 - April 2017: *Toward Abolition: Dismantling the Carceral State*, \$15,000 budget, 30 speakers.

Princeton LGBT Center, Peer Educator

Fall 2016 – Spring 2017

- Supported students with questions relating to being LGBTQ on campus to promote safe, accepting environment.
- Collaborate on initiatives to inform the larger University community on issues of homophobia and transphobia.
- Specialized in intersection of faith and sexuality.

Jericho Road Community Health Center, Volunteer

September 2010 – June 2014

- Volunteered weekly renovating homes to provide safe, clean housing for incoming refugees.
- Co-instructed citizenship classes for cohort of refugees from Burma, all of whom now are citizens.

Orchard Park Youth Court, Member September 2009 – June 2014

- Acted as judge, defense, and prosecutor on cases for minors as confidential alternative to Family Court.

LEADERSHIP

Progressive Christians at Princeton, Co-founder and Leader

Fall 2017 – present

- Founded and lead on-campus group for students who identify as progressive and Christian.
- Foster safe space for Christians who identify as LGBTQ+.
- Collaborate with other progressive student groups of faith to build inclusive faith community on campus.

Princeton University Breakout Program, Trip Leader

Fall 2016

- Led 10 students on week-long trip to Buffalo, NY on refugee resettlement; met with community partners and advocates to understand resettlement and post-resettlement process, and challenges faced by incoming refugees.

Princeton University Honor Committee, Senior Member

Feb 2015 – Dec 2016

- Acted as University agent to investigate and adjudicate alleged academic integrity violations.
- Led referendum effort to amend Honor Code to include mental health considerations and reduce standard penalty.

LANGUAGE AND TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

Proficient in Spanish, Competent in French, Proficient in R Statistical Software & Microsoft Office