

Quotes from Law School Admissions Deans on Addendums

1. How much of a difference can an addendum make?

“An addendum can be very helpful if there are special circumstances that explain a low LSAT score or weak undergraduate performance. Applicants must provide detailed explanations for certain things (such as criminal charges and convictions, academic probations or suspensions, etc.)”

“The function of the addendum is to answer the questions in mind of the admissions committee. It is never going to be the thing that admits you but it’s probably the thing that shows us that something is nagging, or they want to explain their “W” grade, or their low LSAT. It is what might answer questions so they are more inclined to focus on more positive things. An addendum just clarifies, it is not our focus.”

“It can make all the difference in the world. Our application is very open. If you want to explain something, or convey it, then submit one.”

2. What should students include in an addendum?

“Any explanatory information the student wants the admissions committee to know.”

“They should look at their application material objectively. They should ask themselves, “If a stranger looked at my grades and LSAT score, what would they think? Would they question it?” If the answer is yes, then address it.”

3. How long should an addendum be?

“A paragraph that’s effectively written if they want to inform us of their situation.”

“I think it should be as long as necessary. Don’t over-explain the situation, one to two pages is sufficient.”

“Make it short. It’s not a personal statement. One page should be okay.”

4. What should a student with criminal history do to improve his chances of admission and how much of a factor will that criminal history be?

“Youthful indiscretions such as speeding tickets or underage drinking do not have a major impact on application decisions. However, a pattern of criminal conduct, or activities that illustrate that an applicant has poor judgment or cannot be placed in a position of trust will have a negative effect. A criminal conviction will not, in and of itself, preclude an individual from being admitted to law school. We have admitted a number of students who had DUI’s and other criminal convictions (even felonies). What is absolutely critical is that the applicant disclose fully all criminal charges and convictions. In some cases in which we are going to admit an applicant who has a criminal record, we may encourage that applicant to consult with the bar of the state in which he or she wishes to practice to get information about the impact that a particular criminal conviction may have upon bar admission down the road.”

“Of course it depends on the level of criminal history, they need to show that they’ve changed their ways and should check with the local bar association to see how that would affect their licensing to become an attorney, but you need to add an explanation and indicates that you’ve learned from your mistakes. The most important thing for a criminal history case is to be as descriptive and forthcoming as possible. If there is any ambiguity we might not admit the applicant. Be descriptive, candid and forthcoming and don’t leave us with questions. Answer everything truthfully.”

“It depends on the nature of it. Youthful indiscretions have become a routine part of the application process. It also depends on school. Some may have curfew violation. Some may have a MIP (minor in possession of alcohol). There are not all good things and we don’t minimize the importance of a minor infraction of school violations. But a pattern of them is what we don’t want to see.”

“It depends on crime. If it is a serious felony, then it’s a very significant role. If it’s something like fraud or cheating, it may also be very detrimental in the admission process. Other than that, it’s important for the applicant to tell all. It is something a lot of people don’t do but should do. They should talk about the circumstances. They should talk about what they learned. They should mention any service or rehabilitation they did and if they are not going to do it again.”

5. What should a student with an honor code violation (e.g. morality issues, drinking alcohol, etc.) do to improve his chances of admission and how much of a factor will that honor code violation be?

“A student with an honor code violation should explain the circumstances and the violation fully. The student should also be sure to indicate that he or she understands the severity of the violation and has learned from the mistake. An attorney must have integrity and be trustworthy. Therefore, it is important that a student who has an honor code violation convince the admissions committee that he or she has taken steps to correct his or her ways.”

“Well in all honesty, we are dealing with students around the entire nation, so something such as an alcohol violation is fairly minor to us, unless there’s a series of such offenses. If we see pattern then we worry. If it’s a one-time offense, then it doesn’t affect our decision at all. I wouldn’t worry about that kind of offense. But if it has been a pattern, then address it and explain how you received help and broke the pattern. Now for something such as academic honesty, my committee is not very tolerant of people who cheat or plagiarize. We don’t want those students here.”

“We’d want to see a good explanation of the situation and we don’t want to see many violations or else that will raise some red flags.”

“BYU is unique in that sense. It is tighter than it is anywhere else. But it is important that they tell us what it is they did. Some just say, “I just violated a religious rule”, and when we see something like that we have to assume the worst. In other cases, when they do tell us what they did and we see it’s not a violation here, then it doesn’t have any effect on the applicant’s chances. That is why they have to disclose it and say what it was.”

6. What do you think about a student including multiple addendums?

“If multiple addendums are necessary to explain multiple circumstances, then it is fine.”

“We think nothing of it. You can write as many addendums are allowed and are relative to your circumstances. We expect you to give us significant information; you don’t want the admissions committee to draw their own conclusions. At least frame your circumstances.”