

# Quotes from Law School Admissions Deans on Personal Statements

## **1. What is your general advice on personal statements?**

“The personal statement gives the applicant an opportunity to provide additional information about himself or herself, above and beyond what is reflected in the other parts of the application. An applicant should use the personal statement to show the admissions committee the special qualities, experiences and talents that he or she will bring to law school. The personal statement also allows admissions committees to evaluate an applicant’s writing ability. It is very important that the personal statement be well-written.”

“Extremely well written, it stands in for you, it is your opportunity to present yourself to the committee. Please read the instructions and answer the question you are being asked. Feel free to be thorough as you can, and discuss a topic you want to address with the committee. Follow directions, if it specifies a font size, do that. You are competing with a number of other applicants, therefore, you need to task the best statement to convey aspects of personality, character, development, achievement, and make it as compelling as possible. It’s the most persuasive subjective component of you application. Through this, you have the greatest ability to influence the committee. Please don’t write your entire statement on someone who motivated you or inspired you, because we might as well admit the person you are writing about.”

“Applicants need to write about themselves, and not about the wonderful things lawyers do, or the law school and how great it is. We have many applicants who write about the important roles of lawyers in society. When it comes to making decisions, there is a ton of applicants who have similar scores. We have to differentiate among them and we are going to go with the one we got to know better.”

## **2. What kind of writing format do you like to see? Personal narrative? Formal essay? Etc.**

“Well, it depends on the writing style and how it is structured. Very personal informal styles are good. Whatever is comfortable for the writer. Formal essays are good too. Don’t write it too colloquial. It’s ok for it to be informal, but not so informal that is unprofessional.”

“A formal statement is preferred. But then again, one candidate can tell their story by telling a particular event, others by telling their history, either one is perfectly acceptable and demonstrates how much of a picture you want to paint. We receive many mission stories and that’s fine too. It often is a turning point in their lives, and thinking and picking a subject that illustrate it is not a bad idea. Stories that tell us about your family background are acceptable too.”

“I’ve seen good ones on any topic. I don’t want to see creative writing or anything in the form of a complaint. The personal statement has two roles. The first role is for the student to make a case about themselves so we can get to know them better. The second role of it is to demonstrate the student’s writing. It’s a writing sample and we get to see how the student can carry a theme or idea through a statement as opposed to scattered thoughts. Many students verbalize their resume and we are not impressed with that. A narrative format is good.”

## **3. What personal statements have stood out to you over the years for being very good or very bad?**

“Very good personal statements are those that allow us to see into the character and values of applicants. Also, personal statements that are grammatically correct and free of mechanical errors can speak volumes. Conversely, a poorly written statement can have very negative consequences.”

“Good ones: simply honest and sincere stories that tell us about their lives, their thinking, and their future dreams. As for bad ones: those that try to be clever. Those that are written like an obituary, or like a brief filed before court arguing why they should be admitted. By doing that, you’re not communicating who you are. We want to know who this person is and what they are bringing to our school.”

“Well the very poor ones stand out more, and these are usually from people who think their admission is assured. They write one page or a paragraph. It’s sophomoric, when it should be a development in subject matter; it’s a poor decision to take that part of application for granted. I am not the biggest fan of colloquial speech, but I appreciate a very deliberate attempt. Don’t save it for last. The very good ones, we ask applicants to use their personal statement for students to see.”

“One professor created a couple of categories of personal statements that we don’t like. The first one is those that write that they want to go to law school and fight for justice. The second one is one on how the applicant cares about people and wants to fight for people. We don’t want anything that sounds cliché. If it does, then don’t write it. We get students who want to help a particular group or the underdog in society, and if they haven’t done anything for that cause or community then it means nothing. We look at the resume to check these things. When you do get person who certain beliefs and fights for a specific cause, you can tell by their volunteer or work experience, and the organizations they have been a part of.”

## **4. How much weight do you give to a personal statement either positively or negatively?**

“There is no objective way to score it, but it depends upon applicant. For some it is what will carry them and may tip the balance of scale in their favor. For others their may have other stronger parts of application, such as their LSAT score or GPA.”

“Personal statements can make or break an application. They are very important.”

“We give a lot of weight to the personal statement. It can become all these things and create a picture, and become a difference when being admitted and not being admitted. Numbers can look alike, but the personal statement can help and make you unique.”