

**THE
NO B.S. GUIDE
TO**

**THE LAW
SCHOOL
APPLICATION
TIMELINE**

PEG CHENG
PRELAW GURU

The No B.S. Guide to the Law School Application Timeline

Copyright © 2013 Peggy “Peg” Cheng

www.prelaw-guru.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the author; except in the case of brief quotations in a review.

The information in this book is true and complete to the best of the author’s knowledge. The author disclaims any liability in connection with the use of this information. Each reader is responsible for his or her own choices, actions, and results.

Cover design by Marcus Donner.

You are welcome to use a short excerpt of this book for review purposes. For other queries, contact books@prelaw-guru.com.

GRATITUDE

Many thanks to my editors Mike Ullmann and Caroline Young Ullmann, and my readers Brenda Olson, Mary Bell, Alisa Penttila, and Chanira Reang Sperry. Thank you for your support, encouragement, insights, edits, and suggestions.

Special thanks to Marcus Donner for being my first reader, webmaster, videographer, tech wiz, mobile encyclopedia, cheerleader, and all-round amazing husband.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the prelaw students that I worked with at the University of Washington from 2004 to 2010, and through Prelaw Guru from 2010-2016. I learned so much from all of you! Thank you for trusting me, challenging me, and helping me to grow as a human being and as an adviser.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Wait, One Minute Here	6
The Big Picture: the Application Timeline	7
Getting Ready	9
The To-Do List	10
1. Study for the LSAT	10
2. Apply for the LSAC fee waiver	13
3. Register for the LSAT	14
4. Apply for LSAT accommodations	15
5. Research law schools	16
6. Register with the CAS	17
7. Send transcript(s) to the CAS	18
8. Write resume	19
9. Secure letters of recommendation	20
10. Write personal statement	22
11. Write addenda and supplemental essays	26
12. Take the LSAT	28
13. Finalize list of law schools	29
14. Tailor materials to schools' requirements	30
15. Apply to law schools	31
16. Thank your recommenders	32
17. Receive admissions decisions	33
18. File taxes	33
19. Complete the FAFSA	33
20. Complete financial aid applications	33
21. Respond to wait lists	34
22. Visit law schools	35
23. Send first deposit	36
24. Celebrate!	36
25. Send second deposit	36
26. Enter law school	36
Resources	37
Thank You	38
Need More Help?	39
About the Author	40

INTRODUCTION

Do you want to apply to law school?

Are you overwhelmed by all the things you have to do in the application process?

Are you worried that you might forget something?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, please know that *you are not alone*.

I wrote *The No B.S. Guide to the Law School Application Timeline* just for YOU.

I’ve advised thousands of law school applicants over the past 10 years, including six years as a prelaw adviser at the University of Washington, so I understand how much stress and anxiety you will go through when applying to law school. Some of my clients say it’s the worst stress they’ve ever been through.

I believe most prelaw stress is due to fear of the unknown, fear of failure, and a lack of clear, concise information.

Put your mind at rest.

In this book, I’ve laid out all the steps you need to take to successfully apply to law school.

Follow these steps and you *will* complete your law school application successfully, on time, and with confidence.

Sound good?

Then, let’s get started!

WAIT, ONE MINUTE HERE

Before we go on, I'm assuming you've taken the time to figure out if being a lawyer is right for you. You have done this, right?

This is the *No B.S. Guide* so we get right to the nitty-gritty of applying. There are no chapters for going over why you should, or should not, become a lawyer.

If you haven't done this crucial career research, then please read the rest of this guide but then *do the smart thing* and take time to thoroughly research the legal field to decide whether going to law school is the right career path for you.

Postpone applying to law school for at least a year, maybe more.

Why?

Because there are a lot of unhappy lawyers in the world.

Lawyers are unhappy for all sorts of reasons, but I know for sure that a good number are unhappy because lawyering is absolutely the wrong career for them. To make things worse, many feel they must stay in the profession because they have too much debt to pay off.

Don't become one of these sad sacks.

Take the time to do your research.

Take all the time you need.

Law schools are not going anywhere. Believe me, they'll be ready to collect your tuition money whenever you're ready to go.

And no, being 20-something (or 30-something or even 40-something) is not too old to go to law school!

THE BIG PICTURE: the Application Timeline

You apply to law school the year *before* you will enter. For example, if you want to attend law school in the fall of 2015, you would apply in the fall of 2014.

But, the application process begins earlier than that. See the **following table** for the overall timeline for applying to law school.

In the first column of the table, I've listed all the tasks you need to do.

In the second column, I've listed the "Ideal Deadline" to complete each task. If you are taking the *June or September/October LSAT* (Law School Admissions Test), follow these deadlines.

In the third column, I've listed the "Drop-dead Deadline" for each task. If you are taking the *December LSAT*, follow these deadlines.

When is the best time to apply to law school?

I believe that the ideal deadline for applying to law school is by **Thanksgiving** (the fourth Thursday in November). Applying in November gives you the advantage of having your application reviewed when fewer people have applied.

But, you do not have to wait until November to apply. If you took an earlier LSAT and will have your score by July, then bump up your timeline and apply when applications open in September and October.

Why don't you list a deadline for taking the February LSAT?

Because I do not recommend taking the February LSAT.

The February LSAT is an *undisclosed test*. That means you will receive your score and percentile rank, but you will not receive your answer sheet, score conversion chart, and test book.

Most test-takers I know want to receive all their test materials after taking the LSAT so they can go over what they got right and what they got wrong. This is especially helpful if you are thinking of taking the test again. But, if you sit for the February LSAT, you will not be able to analyze your answers. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that I advise applicants not to take the February LSAT.

The Law School Application Timeline

Task	Ideal Deadline	Drop-dead Deadline
<input type="checkbox"/> Study for the LSAT †	4-5 months prior to the test date	3 months prior to the test date
<input type="checkbox"/> Apply for LSAC ◇ fee waiver, if needed	As soon as possible	As soon as possible
<input type="checkbox"/> Register for the LSAT	June test: by March Sept./Oct.: by June Dec.: by August	1 month prior to the test date
<input type="checkbox"/> Apply for LSAT accommodations, if needed	After LSAT registration	After LSAT registration
<input type="checkbox"/> Research law schools	Ongoing	Ongoing
<input type="checkbox"/> Register with the CAS Δ	August 1	October 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Send transcript(s) to the CAS	August 31	October 15
<input type="checkbox"/> Write resume	September 15	November 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Secure letters of recommendation	September 30	December 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Write personal statement	October 15	January 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Write addenda and supplemental essays	October 30	January 4
<input type="checkbox"/> Take the LSAT	June or Sept./Oct.	December
<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize list of law schools	November 10	January 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Tailor materials to schools' requirements	November 19	January 9
<input type="checkbox"/> Apply to law schools	November 20–30	January 10–20
<input type="checkbox"/> Thank your recommenders	December 10	January 31
<input type="checkbox"/> Receive admissions decisions	December - August	February - August
<input type="checkbox"/> File taxes	February 10	February 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete the FAFSA *	February 15	February 15
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete financial aid applications	February 28	February 28
<input type="checkbox"/> Respond to wait lists	As needed	As needed
<input type="checkbox"/> Visit law schools	February - April	February - April
<input type="checkbox"/> Send first deposit	March - May	March - May
<input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate!	Summer	Summer
<input type="checkbox"/> Send second deposit	May - July	May - July
<input type="checkbox"/> Enter law school	August or September	August or September

† Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)

The LSAT is a standardized test that law schools use to evaluate applicants for admission.

◇ Law School Admissions Council (LSAC)

The LSAC administers the LSAT and the online services that you use to apply to law schools.

Δ Credential Assembly Service (CAS)

The CAS is part of the LSAC. This service stores your letters of recommendation and transcripts.

* Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

This is the application you fill out to apply for financial aid from the U.S. government.

GETTING READY

Now that you've seen the overall timeline and have read it at least three times and have committed it to memory (just kidding . . . sort of), it's time for you to *get ready*.

How to Get Ready for the To-Do List:

- 1) **Take time to read** through the whole To-Do List in the following chapter. Not part of the list, the *whole* list. Don't be afraid. Reading it is the easy part.
- 2) **Take out your calendar and enter dates for when you want to *finish* each task.** For example, if you want to finish your resume by September 15, then write "FINISH RESUME" on that date. Enter finish dates for all your tasks.
- 3) **Now, enter dates for when you will *start* each task.** For example, if you want to finish your resume by September 15, that means you will need at least three to four weeks to update it, get feedback, and do revisions. Thus, write "DRAFT RESUME" on August 15. Enter start dates for all your tasks.

REGARDING DEADLINES:

In my experience working with law school applicants, I have found that it usually takes *three times longer* than you think it will take to finish something. So, if you think it will take one week to finish your resume, it will likely take three weeks. Take this into account when setting your deadlines.

If you have time on your side, try to space out your tasks so you're not taking on too much at once.

On the other hand, if you are reading this book *after* you've taken the September/October LSAT and you want to apply *this* year, you will need to fast-track it. That means finishing everything in the To-Do List in about five weeks. That means working on your application nearly every single day in November.

- 4) **Let your friends and family know that you will not have significant free time until *after* you take the LSAT and apply to law school.** Tell them you're sorry you won't see them as much this year but your future career depends on it.
- 5) **You might feel some anxiety at this point.** This is normal. If you feel your shoulders tensing up, stand up and slowly stretch your arms up to the sky. Take a slow, deep breath. Then breathe out slowly and let your arms drift slowly back down to your sides. Repeat until you feel less anxious.

Are you calm now? Good. There are some things you need to do.

THE TO-DO LIST

1. Study for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)

Ideal deadline: June test: January to May. September/October test: May to September.

Drop-dead deadline: December test: July to November.

According to the LSAC, the people who invented the test, the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) is a “half-day standardized test administered four times a year” that “provides a standard measure of acquired reading and verbal reasoning skills that law schools can use as one of several factors in assessing applicants.”

Many law schools say the three factors that carry the most weight in admissions are an applicant’s **GPA, LSAT score, and personal statement**. In other words, your LSAT score is a *crucial and important* part of your law school application.

When do I take the LSAT?

The LSAT is given in **February, June, September/October, and December**.

If you are not a morning person, seriously consider taking the *June test*, which is given at 12:30 p.m. You will have your score by July and can apply when applications open in September/October. This is a *great* advantage to taking the June test.

If you can actually think clearly in the morning, take the *September/October test*.

I only recommend the *December test* for people who don’t do well on a previous test and need to retake. And if you’ve been reading carefully, you know *I don’t recommend the February test*.

What exactly is the LSAT?

The LSAT is comprised of

- One **Reading Comprehension** section
- One **Analytical Reasoning (aka Logic Games)** section
- Two **Logical Reasoning** sections
- One more of any of the above sections that is unscored (used to test new questions)
- One **Writing Sample** section

Each section lasts **35 minutes**.

You don't know which of your sections is the unscored one, so try to do well on *all* of them. The writing section is unscored but a copy of your writing sample is sent to all the law schools you apply to.

How much should I prep for the LSAT?

I believe that learning the LSAT is like learning a foreign language.

If you want to be fluent or conversational, you need to immerse yourself in the language **nearly every day**. That said, I recommend spending **five months** prepping for the LSAT. If you can't do five months, do four.

Try your best to study for **15–20 hours per week**. For example, you could study two hours on Monday through Thursday, take Friday night off, and then study for 4–6 hours on Saturday and Sunday.

Should I take a LSAT prep course or self-study?

About half of the applicants I meet take an LSAT prep course and about half study on their own. If you cannot discipline yourself to study every week, take a prep course. Note that even if you do take a prep course, you still need to study many hours on your own.

How do I choose a prep course?

There are many. Just do a search for “LSAT prep class” on the Web.

Most prep companies will allow you to sit in on a sample class to check it out. Make sure you observe the teacher who will be teaching *your* class. You need to evaluate whether you think you can learn from this person.

If you don't check out your teacher ahead of time, you are taking a crapshoot on whether the fee you're paying for the class is going to be money well spent or a complete rip-off.

How do I self-study for the LSAT?

Here's a study strategy that my clients have tried that usually results in a great score on the LSAT.

First, spend about two months learning the three areas — **Reading Comprehension**, **Analytical Reasoning (aka Logic Games)** and **Logical Reasoning**.

There are many LSAT study guides out there to choose from. Do a search for “LSAT prep” on the Web to find a whole slew of different guides. Many applicants have told me that they learned a lot from *The PowerScore LSAT Bibles*. They especially love *The PowerScore LSAT Logic Games Bible*.

Once you’ve *learned and mastered* the three areas at your own speed, start timing yourself. Time yourself for 35 minutes per section, just like the real test.

NOTE: Use *previously administered LSATs* to practice on in order to simulate the actual LSAT test experience as much as possible. You can buy previously administered LSATs from www.lsac.org and other online bookstores and sites. LSAC bundles 10 LSATs into books for **\$24 each** and individual LSATs usually go for **\$8–\$10**. Shop around!

After your timing is decent, take whole practice tests. I recommend taking **20 practice tests**. For example, you could take two tests a week for 10 weeks.

When taking practice tests, treat them like the real LSATs and take a 10–15 minute break after the third section. Then take the fourth and fifth sections. It’s a good idea to take a few days off between each test so that you have time to rest and recover.

Now comes a **crucial step**. After you score your test, analyze what you got right and what you got wrong. You must analyze each question you got wrong to figure out how to get it right. You must also understand why you got certain answers right so you can continue doing so.

How do I know when I’m ready to take the LSAT?

You’ll know when you are *hitting above the score you want by 2–3 points, four or more consecutive times* leading up to test day.

If you are not hitting this range of scores, you are *not* ready to take the LSAT.

In all my years, I know of only a handful of people who scored *better* on test day than on their practice tests. Trust me. If you are not hitting your range *consistently* during your last four practice tests, it is best to postpone the test.

2. Apply for the LSAC fee waiver, if needed

Deadline: As soon as possible

The LSAC established the fee waiver program in 1986 to assure that no person is denied access to taking the LSAT and applying to law school.

If you are granted the fee waiver, you will not need to pay for the LSAT registration, the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), and up to four Law School Reports. You also usually will not need to pay law school application fees.

That said, getting the fee waiver can be *very difficult*. Still, if you are in a low-income situation, I recommend that you *try*.

Go to www.lsac.org and type “fee waivers” in the search box at the top of the screen. Click on the link that gives information on fee waivers. (Because LSAC changes their site all the time, I find using the search box to be the best way to find things.)

NOTE: Even if LSAC rejects your request, you should apply for application fee waivers from law schools you want to attend. Review the admissions websites for your schools and look for their application fee. They will usually post information on how to apply for a fee waiver. Application fees are usually \$60–\$90 per school. If you apply to 10 schools and get fee waivers from all of them, that’s a savings of \$600–\$900!

3. Register for the LSAT

Ideal deadline: June test: by March. September/October test: by June. December test: by August.

Drop-dead deadline: One month prior to the test date.

Register as *early as possible* so you can pick the test location that you want. For example, in Seattle, many people prefer Seattle University because you get a nice, big table.

I recommend visiting the testing centers in your area to find out which ones suit you. Have a first and second choice.

Go to www.lsac.org and click on the link to create an account. Fill out your information and pay your fee (**\$170** at time of publication) and you are good to go.

4. Apply for LSAT accommodations, if needed

Deadline: After registering for the LSAT

If you have a physical, mental, or learning disability, you should consider requesting accommodations from LSAC.

That said, it *can* be difficult to get accommodations.

You must register for the LSAT prior to applying for accommodations.

After you register for the LSAT, stay at www.lsac.org and type “accommodations” in the search box at the top of the screen. Click on the link that gives more information on how to apply for accommodations. (Because LSAC changes their site all the time, I find that using the search box is the fastest way to find things.)

Apply for accommodations **as soon as possible**.

It can take up to 14 *working* days to get a response from LSAC, and you might need to file an appeal if your request is rejected.

For tips from people who have been there, go to the Resources page of the National Association for Law Students with Disabilities (fantastic resource!) at <http://www.nalswd.org/> and click on the *LSAT Accommodations Guide*.

5. Research law schools

Deadline: Ongoing

When you feel like procrastinating, research schools!

Then at least you know you're doing something productive with your procrastination time.

It's fine to bookmark all the school sites on your computer, but take the time to write down *why* the school appeals to you. This will come in handy when you start making your final list of schools.

6. Register with the CAS

Ideal deadline: August 1

Drop-dead deadline: October 1

The Credential Assembly Service (CAS) is part of LSAC. This is the online service that stores your college transcript(s) and letters of recommendation. CAS will send these important parts of your application to law schools when you apply.

It will cost you yet another fee (**\$165** at time of publication). Log in to your account at www.lsac.org to register.

Sign up for the CAS *before* you request transcripts and letters of recommendation.

Your file with the CAS is good for **five years**. If you aren't planning on applying now, you can request your letters of recommendation from your professors while you're still in college and have them sent to CAS. They will be there when you want to apply.

7. Send transcript(s) to the CAS

Ideal deadline: August 31

Drop-dead deadline: October 15

After you're signed up for the CAS and *after* your spring (or summer if you are taking summer classes) grades are posted, have your college transcript(s) sent.

You must send transcripts from **all schools** where you received college credit. That includes community colleges too.

Log in to your account at www.lsac.org and print out the **Transcript Request Form** and then deliver, fax, or mail the form to your school's Registrar. Your school must send your Transcript Request Form with your official transcript.

Allow LSAC two weeks from the time of receipt to process your transcript(s).

After that, log into your LSAC account and look for your **Academic Summary Report**. Here you will find your **LSAC GPA**—the GPA that includes *all* of your college grades.

WARNING: If you received an **NP** (no pass), **NS** (non-satisfactory), **NC** (no credit), or some other non-passing grade, it will be converted to a **0.0**. Sucks, I know.

NOTE: Even if you are not applying to schools until December or January, **do not wait** until your autumn grades are posted. Just send the transcript(s) you have by October.

What about international transcripts?

You must have international transcripts sent directly from the issuing institution if:

- You received your bachelor's degree from an institution outside of the United States, its territories, or Canada, and you are applying to a law school that requires the authentication and evaluation feature of the Credential Assembly Service (CAS); or
- You were directly enrolled at one or more institutions outside of the United States, its territories, or Canada, and the total amount of work you completed at all of these institutions combined is the equivalent of *more than one year* of undergraduate study in the United States, its territories, or Canada.

Copies of all international educational records must be submitted in the original language. If the transcript is not in English, a translation must be included.

Questions? Call **215-968-1001 and press 0** to speak to an LSAC representative.

8. Write resume

Ideal deadline: September 15

Drop-dead deadline: November 1

So many applicants turn in generic, lazily written resumes. This is a *big* mistake.

Take as much time with your law school resume as you would for applying to your dream job.

Describe your college education, jobs, internships, study abroad experiences, research positions, volunteer positions, leadership positions, awards, skills and more.

At the very least, you must have two main sections: **Education** and **Experience**.

You should include all jobs and internships *after* high school graduation. If you graduated college many years ago and can't fit all your jobs and internships into your resume, consider describing your experiences in the last 8–10 years and listing the other experiences without descriptions.

Many admissions officers want to see the **number of hours worked per week** for *all* jobs and activities. If it changed from week to week, list a range (e.g., 5–8 hours/week).

Keep your resume legible with at least ½-inch margins and a 10–12 point font.

NOTE: The law school resume does not have to fit all on one page. Many schools accept a resume that is two or even three pages. *Follow the school's requirements.*

Also, avoid half-pages (e.g., 1 ½ pages, 2 ½ pages, etc.). I think half-pages make it look like you either could have added more or cut more.

After you've updated your resume, ask two trusted colleagues to proofread it.

Revise, revise, revise until your resume is perfect. No errors, typos, etc.

MORE HELP: For detailed resume tips (including four sample resumes), check out *The No B.S. Guide to the Law School Resume* at <http://books.prelaw-guru.com>.

9. Secure letters of recommendation (LORs)

Ideal deadline: September 30

Drop-dead deadline: December 10

Choose three professors, teaching assistants (TAs), supervisors, or mentors who know your work and still like you, and ask them for letters of recommendation (LORs).

If you are a *current student*, focus on securing all your LORs from professors and/or TAs.

If you *graduated college two or more years ago*, and are no longer in touch with your professors, ask for LORs from your supervisors and/or professional mentors.

Meet with each recommender in person to ask if he or she would be willing to write you a *good* LOR. Pay attention to the person's reaction. Make sure they *really* want to write you the letter. Also, ask the person what he or she might write about.

If the person's reaction is not positive, thank them for their time and leave. *Never* insist that someone write you a LOR if they aren't up to the task.

If the person says "yes," then put together a packet for him or her that includes your

- **Unofficial transcript** (if the person is a professor or TA)
- **Resume**
- **Relevant materials** (some professors may want copies of your essays from class)
- **A cover letter** that states your gratitude to the recommender, why you want to go to law school, and your agreed-upon deadline for completing your LOR

NOTE: If your recommender wants to send a paper LOR, give him or her a **completed LSAC LOR form** (print out from lsac.org) to be sent with his or her letter. Your other recommenders will be sent an email from LSAC requesting that they complete and upload a LOR for you.

Make sure the deadline that you and your recommender agree upon is one that is actually **four to six weeks earlier** than when you actually need the LOR, but please don't let your recommender know that.

No offense to recommenders but I've seen too many cases where recommenders put off writing the LOR for so long that she/he actually made the applicant late in applying. Don't let that happen! For example, if you want your LOR at LSAC by September 30, then ask your recommender to mail it by September 1.

If your recommender is new to writing LORs, forward them this link to a very helpful article on how to write LORs for law school written by Diane Curtis, prelaw adviser at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst: http://prelaw.umass.edu/topics/rec_tips.

As usual, allow two weeks from the time of receipt for LSAC to process your LORs and confirm their arrival on your online LSAC account.

NOTE: Most schools require two LORs but I recommend getting *three*. First, it is possible one of your recommenders may not follow through. Second, you may need that third LOR for some schools. Third, for schools that place you on the wait list, you might be able to send that last LOR as further evidence that you are a great candidate.

ONLINE EVALUATIONS:

LSAC started online evaluations in 2010 to complement LORs. I've talked to a good number of admissions officers since then and the majority said they would rather have well-written LORs than evaluations.

Because many recommenders did not write anything on the evaluation; they just ranked the applicant in response to the questions (i.e., Below Average, Average, Good, etc.), many law school admissions officers found evaluations were *less* helpful than a LOR.

If your law school *requires* an evaluation, ask two of your recommenders to write a LOR and the third to fill out the online evaluation. Make sure to ask your third recommender to write about your strengths and attributes in the online evaluation.

10. Write personal statement

Ideal deadline: October 15

Drop-dead deadline: January 1

Every person has a story to tell. Many stories, in fact. The personal statement for law school is a vehicle for you to tell one of your stories to a committee of strangers.

No biggie, right?

Wrong. It takes a lot of time, introspection, and hard work to write a great personal statement. Not a mediocre or good statement, but a *great* one.

In the application process, you are nothing but ink on paper.

When your GPA and LSAT score are equal with hundreds or thousands of other applicants, *a memorable and authentic personal statement* can help your application rise to the top.

It can mean the difference between getting into a *good* school versus a J.D. mill, between getting into a *great* school versus a good school, and between *getting a scholarship* versus no money at all.

I have no idea how to start my personal statement. What should I do?

I think the best way to start is to read good examples. Go to <http://tips.prelaw-guru.com>. Click on “How do I write a law school personal statement?”

OPEN AND PRINT OUT the **one-page tip sheet** and the **16-page packet**.

You will gain a more thorough understanding of how to write a personal statement if you read these documents on paper and take notes.

So again, *print them out*.

The packet contains seven sample personal statements and four sample diversity statements. These are all *real* essays by *real* students, the majority of whom I advised when I was a prelaw adviser at the University of Washington.

Read through the packet and tips sheet at least twice.

Notice how each statement is *very personal*. You are not writing a statement of intent, you are writing a *personal* statement. You are telling the admissions committee a story from your life that changed you, your life, and/or your way of thinking.

For each personal statement, write down your answers to the following.

- What did this person learn about himself or herself?
- What lesson(s) did this person learn?
- What strengths, skills or values does this person have?

How is a personal statement structured?

Each statement begins with an **introductory paragraph that “hooks” you** into the story. You must get your reader’s attention right away.

The **second paragraph usually goes over the history** of what led up to this major situation, event, or realization.

The paragraphs that follow detail how you dealt with the situation, event or realization. What did you learn? How did you learn it? How did you change your outlook, philosophy, and/or your actions? *How did you change?*

Last but not least, **your conclusion should have an uplifting feeling to it**. Also, make sure some part of the conclusion alludes back to the introduction. All good stories come full circle. As one of my favorite writing teachers said, **“The DNA of your conclusion is in your introduction.”**

For more help, watch the video tips posted at <http://tips.prelaw-guru.com>.

After you’ve thoroughly analyzed each statement and have watched my video tips, take a crack at writing your first draft. It’s ok if your first draft is longer than two pages. You can cut it down later. Set it aside for a day or two, then write your next draft.

I have writer’s block. I’m stuck. I’m lost. Help!

Don’t fret. Help is available. If you are having writers block, feel stuck or lost, or just want a more structured approach to writing your personal statement, I recommend taking my online class, **Write Your Personal Statement in 7 Days**. Find out more at <http://classes.prelaw-guru.com>.

Who should critique my personal statement?

After you’ve written several drafts of your personal statement and feel that it’s ready for human consumption, pick **three objective individuals** to review it.

I highly recommend that you choose readers who are not your mom, your dad, your sibling, your boyfriend or girlfriend, or your wife or husband. I’ve seen too many people

change their statements for the worse because someone close to them “did not like it” or said, “it doesn’t sound like you.”

Many times, the people closest to you think you should sound a certain way. They may not agree with how you have portrayed yourself and your story, even if it is the truth.

As my aforementioned writing teacher said, “**We need to write as if we have no relatives.**”

Do not expect objective criticism from loved ones.

Instead, take your draft to your prelaw adviser, career counselor, mentor or classmate—to someone who you know will give you honest and objective feedback.

Notice that I did not mention taking the statement to your professor. Unless your professor is also your school’s prelaw adviser, I advise you not to have him or her critique your statement. Too many professors think the personal statement should be a *statement of intent* and will steer you away from all the personal elements of your essay.

Once you get feedback from all three of your readers, see if there are any patterns. Do two or more people suggest the same thing to change? If yes, pay attention to that and follow their suggestions if they ring true to you.

Can I use the same personal statement for every law school?

Generally, you can use the same personal statement for all your schools, but it will likely need to be **adjusted** for each school. Read carefully what each law school lists for their personal statement prompt and adjust your statement for each one.

How long should my personal statement be?

Many schools require two pages, double-spaced, with 11- or 12-point font, and one-inch margins. Some schools want three or four pages and some don’t have a page limit at all.

Follow the directions.

You may not know all the schools you want to apply to at this point because you might not have your LSAT score yet. But you should have an idea of a few schools that you want to apply to and thus, you can use their statement requirements as a starting point.

Revise, revise, revise! It often takes **3–10 drafts** to craft a *stellar* personal statement. Don’t settle for mediocre or good. Keep at it and go for *great*.

When will I know my personal statement is ready to send out?

You know your statement is ready to send out when you read it and feel that it tells one of the best stories about YOU that you can tell at this point in your life. Of course, it should also be completely free of errors, typos, etc.

When you reach this point, give yourself a BIG pat on the back.

You just completed one of the *hardest* parts of the law school application process!

11. Write addenda and supplemental essays

Ideal deadline: October 30

Drop-dead deadline: January 4

You should write an addendum for any weaknesses in your application including

- **Low grades** (generally, below a 2.0)
- **Low LSAT score**
- **Withdrawals from classes** (usually indicated by a “W” on your transcript)
- **Leave of absence in college** (not including summer)
- **Disciplinary actions** or **student conduct issues** while in college
- **Criminal record** (even if it’s been “expunged”)
- **Large gaps** in your resume that aren’t explained anywhere else
- **Anything else** you need to explain to the admissions committee

Do not explain these issues in your personal statement.

Weaknesses in your application must be explained in a separate addendum.

Read each law school’s application directions and make sure to address any issues that apply to you.

Stick to the facts, and make sure to cite dates and specifics.

Try to keep each addendum to one page, double-spaced, 11- or 12-point font, with one-inch margins.

If you have several transcript issues to explain, you can put them all into one addendum. For example, if you have a low grade, a withdrawal, *and* a leave of absence, explain them in separate paragraphs, but put them all in one “Transcript Addendum.”

A low LSAT score should be explained in a separate “LSAT Addendum” and a criminal record or disciplinary action should each be explained in their own separate addendum.

For more tips visit <http://tips.prelaw-guru.com> and watch the videos, “*How do I write a law school addendum?*” and if applicable, “*How do I write a criminal record addendum?*”

Just like your personal statement, you will want to have several objective people read your essay(s) and give you feedback. If they are up for it, ask the same people who reviewed your personal statement. Then revise, revise, revise!

MORE HELP: For more tips on law school addenda (including nine samples), check out *The No B.S. Guide to the Law School Addendum* at <http://books.prelaw-guru.com>.

What about optional or supplemental essays?

In most cases, “optional essays” are not optional unless you don’t want to be accepted by that school.

If you *can* write it, then write it!

If a school gives you the option to write about why you want to attend that particular school, you should write the essay.

If a school poses a hypothetical question to answer, answer it.

ABOUT DIVERSITY:

Diversity factors include being an ethnic minority, low-income, first generation to go to college, an immigrant, an older student, having disabilities, and more.

If given the option to write about diversity factors in your background and you have diversity factors, absolutely do it.

Even if the law school does not specifically ask for a **diversity statement**, I highly recommend that you think *hard* about whether you have *any* diversity factors, and if you do, write a diversity statement.

Diversity is important to all law schools.

Do not skip this step. Do not think you are getting any “favors.” *Just write it.*

For examples of diversity statements, revisit the **personal statement packet** that you printed out earlier. Read and analyze the four excellent samples in there.

Also, visit <http://tips.prelaw-guru.com> and watch “*How do I write a law school diversity statement?*”

Just like your personal statement and addenda, you will want to have several objective people review your supplemental essays and give you feedback. Then you know the drill—revise, revise, revise!

12. Take the LSAT

Ideal deadline: June or September/October

Drop-dead deadline: December

See www.lsac.org for exact test dates.

At least one week prior to your test date, go to www.lsac.org and read about what you need to prepare for and bring on test day. Policies change all the time, so it's best to get the most up-to-date information right from LSAC.

Follow the directions. If it says do not wear a hooded sweatshirt, then *do not* wear one.

Again, *follow the directions*.

Good luck and kick ass on the test!

13. Finalize list of law schools

Ideal deadline: November 10

Drop-dead deadline: January 5

It takes 3-4 weeks after taking the LSAT to receive your score by email. Once you have your score, you can view your answer sheet, score conversion chart, and test book (for disclosed June, September/October, and December tests) in your lsac.org account.

Now that you have your score, you can finalize your list of schools. Yes! I recommend applying to **six to eight schools**.

You could apply to fewer or more, but in most cases, if you're applying to more than 10 schools, you should take a hard look at whether you are serious about attending every one of your schools or if you're just applying for the sake of applying. **Don't be a karmic thief.** Don't apply to a school you don't care much about and take that acceptance away from someone who really wanted to go to that school. Don't apply to a school just because they sent you a fee waiver. Apply only if you seriously want to go to that school.

Speaking of **application fee waivers**, if you are in a low-income situation, you should have applied for them already. If not, apply for them *now*. (NOTE: Receiving a fee waiver does not mean that you have a higher chance of being admitted.)

I recommend applying to **a diverse set of schools** to ensure your success in admissions. Here's the breakdown that I recommend.

- **10% Safety:** your LSAT/GPA are at, or a little higher, than the schools' 75th percentile
- **50% Solid:** your LSAT/GPA are at, or very near, the schools' median
- **40% Stretch:** your LSAT/GPA are at the schools' 25th percentile

For example, if you apply to eight schools, you'd choose one safety, four solids, and three stretches.

To see a school's 25th percentile, median, and 75th percentile for GPA and LSAT, visit the school's website and/or consult the ABA's Standard 509 Information Reports at <http://www.abarequireddisclosures.org/>.

What if I have a high GPA and low LSAT? Or high LSAT and low GPA?

You're what they call a "**splitter**." It's not an exact science, but I recommend giving slightly more weight to the LSAT and choosing schools based on your LSAT score. It's hard to know how each school will assess your numbers; thus, I recommend applying to *9-15 schools*. Also, choose *two* safeties, rather than just one.

14. Tailor materials to schools' requirements

Ideal deadline: November 19

Drop-dead deadline: January 9

This should be a given but you'd be *amazed* how many people don't read directions and don't follow them. It drives me absolutely crazy!

Do you want to make sure you receive more acceptances than rejections?

Then you *must* go back through all your written materials and tailor them to meet your schools' specific requirements!

For example, if a school wants a two-page, double-spaced personal statement with one-inch margins and 12-point font, but your statement is exactly two pages with an *11-point font*, guess what? You are going to have to edit that personal statement so that it fits on two pages with a 12-point font.

DEAN'S LETTERS OR CERTIFICATIONS:

A few law schools require a "dean's letter" or "dean's certification" as part of your application. The dean's letter explains if you had any student conduct issues in college.

If any of your law schools require it, contact the dean's office for your major/department or your college's Community Standards & Student Conduct office as soon as possible.

15. Apply to law schools

Ideal deadline: November 20–30

Drop-dead deadline: January 10–20

Finally, the day is here when you can apply to your schools! Yes!

Now, before you get too excited, hear me out.

I want you to apply to one school per day.

Why?

Because I want you to avoid making stupid mistakes. I want you to keep your attention focused *on one school* for the whole day.

Don't make a mistake such as attaching a personal statement for Georgetown to the application for Berkeley.

You think it won't happen?

It happens. A mistake like this will piss off any admissions officer and could jeopardize your admissions.

You will apply to schools electronically right from your lsac.org account. Fill out the application and then save it. Come back to it a few hours later. *Check everything again.*

When you are sure you filled out everything correctly, then and only then, hit SUBMIT.

Your law schools will receive notice that you applied. They will request your Law School Report (which includes your LSAT score, LSAT writing sample, LORs, online evaluations, academic summary report, transcripts, etc.) from LSAC.

You pay for one Law School Report per law school (**\$28** at time of publication), as well as the application fee for each law school (usually **\$60–\$90**).

CONGRATULATIONS! You just applied to law school!

16. Thank your recommenders

Ideal deadline: December 10

Drop-dead deadline: January 31

A hand-written thank you card is a great way to thank your recommenders.

It's so rare these days to receive a thoughtful and sincere hand-written card. Take your time picking out nice cards and writing your thoughts in them as clearly as you can.

If you can afford it, add a small gift like flowers, a potted plant, cookies, nuts, or chocolates.

Thanking people who do you favors is a habit to cultivate for the rest of your life. People remember the people who thank them. It can make a big difference to your career and your life.

17. Receive admissions decisions

Ideal deadline: December to August

Drop-dead deadline: February to August

You could hear as early as December or as late as August (for getting off a wait list). If you applied by November, you should hear from most of your schools by March.

18. File taxes

Deadline: February 10

Once you have your W-2 and other tax information, file your income taxes.

Why? Because once your taxes are filed, it is a lot easier to fill out your FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Once your FAFSA is filed, law schools can then send you offers for scholarships and other financial resources.

19. Complete the FAFSA

Deadline: February 15

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) allows you to apply for financial aid from the U.S. government. Once your taxes are filed, fill out the FAFSA at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/>. Filing your FAFSA early allows law schools to see your financial profile as soon as possible, which means they can offer you scholarship money as soon as possible.

20. Complete financial aid applications

Deadline: February 28

In addition to the FAFSA, many schools have a separate process for receiving financial aid. For example, some schools require that you fill out the Need Access form at <http://www.needaccess.org>. Go to each of your law schools' sites and click on *Financial Aid*. Make sure you complete all required materials by their deadline.

21. Respond to wait lists

Deadline: As needed

If you get on the wait list for any schools, they will send you an email or letter indicating if you need to do anything.

Further action can include

- **Sending an email** saying, “I’m interested in being on the wait list”
- **Writing a letter of interest** describing why you want to attend that particular school and if you have any recent accomplishments (article published, award, etc.)
- **Writing another essay**

Follow their directions.

If they don’t want anything extra, then just an email stating whether you want to stay on the wait list will do it.

If they offer you the chance to write an optional essay, and it’s something you can speak to, then *write the essay*. It can mean the difference between getting in or not.

If you have an **extra LOR** that you haven’t used, contact the school’s admissions office to see if it would benefit you to send that with your letter of interest. Also, if you are currently in school, many law schools will want you to send your latest transcript so they can see your **fall grades**.

22. Visit law schools

Deadline: February to April

This is the most *fun* part of the whole application process: visiting your schools!

Most applicants I know wait until they've been accepted at a good number of their schools before they make travel plans. They then try to group the visits together into one or two trips if the schools are out-of-state.

Many schools hold an **Open House** or official visiting week in order to roll out the red carpet for prospective students. During this time, you get a chance to take a guided tour of the school, sit in on a class or two, learn more about the school's clinics and student services, and meet with professors and current students.

If the Open House doesn't fit your schedule, that's ok. Contact the admissions officers to let them know when you'll be visiting and find out how to meet with faculty and current students. They should do their best to make your visit as informative as possible.

23. Send first deposit

Deadline: March to May

Most schools want you to send a deposit of several hundred dollars to save your seat. Make sure your deposit meets their deadline.

24. Celebrate!

Deadline: None

Go ahead. You deserve it.

25. Send second deposit

Deadline: May to July

As if one deposit isn't enough . . . yes, most schools require that you send a second deposit to confirm that you are indeed going to attend that school.

26. Enter law school

Deadline: August or September (although some schools offer a summer start)

The time has finally come for you to do what you set out to do: attend law school!

The law school application process is hard work and YOU DID IT. It's wonderful to work hard toward a goal and to finally achieve it.

CONGRATULATIONS! Now, get to law school and kick some ass!

RESOURCES

Prelaw Guru

Visit Prelaw Guru for awesome law school admissions tips, videos, books and more. We are dedicated to helping you kick ass on your law school applications. To receive a helpful law school admissions article once a week, subscribe to our Prelaw Guru Blog.

www.prelaw-guru.com

Law School Admissions Council (LSAC)

Go here to register for the LSAT and the CAS, print out required forms, fill out applications for law schools, and more. Bookmark it. You'll be coming back often. This site can change often so the best way to find things is to use the *search box*.

www.lsac.org

U.S. News & World Report Law School Rankings

I don't agree with a lot of the methodology used by U.S. News to rank law schools, but this site is helpful to use when initially researching and comparing schools.

<http://www.usnews.com/education>

Equal Justice Works Guide to Law Schools

This is a great guide for researching law schools with public interest programs. Click on the following link and then click on "Visit the Guide" on the right-hand side.

<http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/pre-law>

National Association of Law Students with Disabilities (NALSWD)

If you have physical, mental, or learning disabilities, go here for helpful tips on how to apply for accommodations for the LSAT, for the bar later on, and much more.

<http://www.nalswd.org/>

Federal Student Aid

Learn about different types of financial aid, who gets it, how to apply for it, and how to pay it off. Includes a link to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

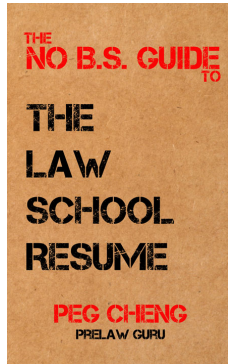
<http://studentaid.ed.gov/>

THANK YOU

You didn't have to read this book, but you did. For this, I am grateful. I hope this guide helped you apply to law school successfully, on time, and with confidence. It's extremely hard work to put together a great law school application. Be kind to yourself throughout the process, and take time to celebrate all your wins, no matter how small.

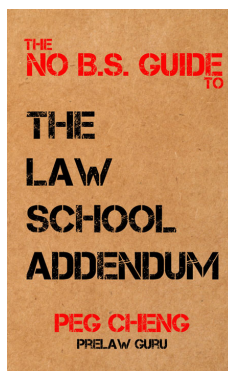
NEED MORE HELP?

You might be interested in my other books.



The No B.S. Guide to the Law School Resume

Many people turn in generic, lazily written resumes with their law school applications. Don't be one of those people! Law school admissions expert Peg Cheng has more than 20 years of experience working on resumes. With Peg's help, you'll create a stellar resume that admissions officers will LOVE to read. Includes four sample resumes.



The No B.S. Guide to the Law School Addendum

Applying to law school with some low grades? A low LSAT score? A withdrawal on your transcript? A leave of absence? A disciplinary action in college? A criminal record? Law school admissions expert Peg Cheng has more than 10 years of experience helping people explain weaknesses in their law school applications. Follow Peg's tips and you will write a concise, engaging addendum that will greatly benefit your law school application rather than hinder it. Includes nine sample addenda.

To download these guides for FREE, visit <http://books.prelaw-guru.com>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peg Cheng is the founder of Prelaw Guru, a law school application consulting company that helped people kick ass on their law school applications from 2010-2016. She is now an author, artist, and career adviser. You can connect with her at pegcheng.com.

While Peg no longer answers prelaw or law school questions, you can still read her prelaw tips and watch her application videos at <http://prelaw-guru.com/>.