Applying to Law School

Law schools are looking for smart, interesting students to fill their classrooms. They are going to search through your application file for evidence of what you will be like as a student and as a member of their student body. Admission committees will examine your undergraduate and/or graduate school performance (though only your undergraduate grades will be used to calculate your cumulative GPA) and LSAT score as predictors of your success in law school. If your grades or scores are not predictive (personal or family health issues, work hours, care of dependents or loved ones, or simple immaturity at the beginning of your college career), consider including an addendum explaining why your grades or LSAT score are not indicative of your true ability or who you are now. Admissions committees will also evaluate your letters of recommendation, your personal statement and your resume to see how you will fit into their community: Are you able to engage in respectful and intelligent classroom discussion? Do you show initiative? Are you a leader? Are you someone who takes advantage of all resources available to them? Do you make an impact?

Application Components

- Application fee or fee waiver
- LSAC Applicant Report (sent directly from LSAC to law schools)
  - LSAT Score
  - Transcripts from every higher education institution you have attended
  - Letters of recommendation
- Personal statement, optional essays, and addenda
- Resume
- Dean’s Certification (only for a few law schools)

Fee Waivers

The Law School Admission Council recognizes that applying to law school is an expensive process. To ensure access to the process for everyone, regardless of income, they instituted the Fee Waiver program. Students may apply for a fee waiver, which will cover the cost of two LSAT administrations, the Credential Assembly Service, four Academic Summary Reports and an LSAT prep book. While an LSAC fee waiver does not waive application fees, many law schools will automatically waive their application fee if you have been granted an LSAC fee waiver. Still other schools offer need-based fee waivers through a school-specific application process. Be aware that one should submit fee waiver applications at least six weeks before his desired LSAT administration date.

Many schools also offer merit-based fee waivers to students whose academic profiles (released through the Candidate Referral System) indicate they might be successful applicants. Although receiving a merit-based fee waiver is sometimes predictive of success in the application process, it is not a guarantee of admission. To receive merit fee waivers, you must sign up for the Candidate Referral Service.
The Credential Assembly Service (CAS)

Almost all law schools require the use of the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). The CAS will take your transcripts (from each and every higher education institution you attended), analyze them and provide standardized statistical information about your academic record to all of the law schools to which you are applying. The CAS can also serve as a distribution center for your letters of recommendation, allowing your recommenders to only have to write and send one letter. Once you sign up for CAS and send in your transcripts and letters, you can monitor your account's status on LSAC's website.

Transcripts

Transcripts must be sent directly from every school where you attended or earned college credit to LSAC (this includes dual-enrollment classes in high school but excludes AP or CLEP credit). You can print a transcript request form from your LSAC account or, if you are requesting your transcript from UTD online, have the transcript sent to:

Law School Admission Council  
662 Penn Street  
PO BOX 2000-M  
Newtown PA 18940-0993

Letters of Recommendation and Evaluations

Law schools use letters of recommendation to get some idea of your academic skills, work habits, analytical ability, public speaking skills, and character. For applicants who have been out of college for fewer than five years, academic recommendations are strongly encouraged. Seek out recommenders who have had the opportunity to observe and evaluate your work and, ideally, have taught you in at least one upper-level class. Give them plenty of time to write the letters of recommendation and give them plenty of information about you so they can write the strongest possible letter. Recommendations from alumni, elected officials or personal friends who have not taught you in a classroom or interacted with you in a professional setting will not be helpful on their own but can serve as a supplementary letter if you have space.

Ideally, you should meet with the recommender in person to ask if they would feel comfortable writing a strong letter of recommendation for you. If he or she agrees, enter their information on the LSAC site and print your waiver form, which must be included with the recommender's letter or send the recommender a link to upload their letter directly to LSAC. Consider giving your recommenders a packet with your personal statement (or at the very least an outline or abstract), a copy of your unofficial transcript, your resume and, if possible, a copy of your best work in his or her class. For non-academic recommenders, you can follow the same format for the packet, but with the classwork omitted. Professional recommendations can highlight your analytical and problem solving skills, work habits and character. They can also showcase your leadership and organizational skills. If your recommender is mailing the letter, include stamped, addressed envelopes (addressed to LSAC) and your signed LSAC waiver form, as a courtesy. Give them a timeframe in which the letter should be sent (ideally at least two weeks before you apply), and then politely follow up as the deadline approaches.

Once your letters are received by CAS or the law schools, be sure to thank your recommenders in writing, and as another courtesy, let them know where you got into law school.

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Personal Statements, Optional Essays, and Addenda

The personal statement is the most important part of your application. It is your chance to show the admissions committee who you are and a chance to inject some personality (your actual personality, not what you believe an admissions committee wants to see) into your application; don’t simply rewrite your resume into prose form or reiterate everything that is already in your application. Your personal statement should illustrate to admissions committees what you will bring to their student body. It should also demonstrate that you are able to convey your thoughts intelligently, maturely, persuasively and most of all, concisely.

The best personal statements are those that are genuine, personal and specific. Don’t use vague generalizations about "want[ing] to help people" or "know[ing] you can succeed in law school." Instead, show how you have a history of helping others or mastering difficult material by describing particular situations in which you have done so. Instead of listing your every success, try focusing on a particular situation or experience in your life and illustrating what you learned from it. Your goal is to have the reader walk away from your essay with the impression that you are intelligent and that you have a perspective that is, if not unique, than at least mature and thoughtful.

Do not use your personal statement to discuss poor grades or LSAT scores. While schools are not interested in excuses, they are always interested in the proper context in which to consider your grades and scores. Use a grade or LSAT addendum to show why your grades or LSAT score may not be predictive of your success in law school.

Resume

While you should never answer questions about your work experience or extracurricular activities with “see resume,” most schools will accept a resume as an addendum if they do not require one outright. It can be a useful tool to showcase your work experience or extracurricular activities and to highlight any special honors or scholarships you have received. Consider creating a resume your freshman or sophomore year and then adding your accomplishments and experience to it as needed. Relevant coursework, your GPA, and LSAT score can be left off the resume as reviewers will already have that information from your Law School Report.

Resumes for law school are not limited to one page. Instead, use the opportunity to detail your contributions and responsibilities in your jobs or extracurricular activities. Show your growth or highlight how you were consistently promoted or given more responsibility. Note how many hours per week you spent on each activity, especially employment. Schools will note how much you were balancing in addition to your academic workload.

Law School Application Dean’s Certifications Requirements

Some law schools require a copy of your undergraduate disciplinary record from the Dean of Students. Please send all requests and forms for Dean’s Certifications to the Dean of Students, not the undergraduate dean or the assistant deans of various programs.

The Law School Application Process

✓ Create free LSAC Account
✓ Give prelaw advisor access to your information
✓ Register for the LSAT
✓ Spend – at a minimum – 200 hours studying, practicing questions, and taking timed practice tests
✓ Register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS)
  • Send transcripts from all undergraduate institutions attended
  • Request letters of recommendation and have them sent directly to LSAC
✓ Write personal statement, optional essays, and any necessary addenda
✓ Write resume
✓ Submit applications through LSAC.org, uploading documents to each individual application
✓ Pay for Law School Reports to be sent to each school

There is unfortunately no way to predict when you will receive a decision (unless you applied under an early action or early decision program) and calling over and over to check your file's status is only going to serve to frustrate you and annoy the schools that you are calling. If you are up against a deposit deadline for another school and still haven't heard from your top choice, you can call and let them know your situation.