10 Tips on Writing Your Law School Personal Statement

1. **Start early.** Don’t wait until the last minute. Take time to consider your motivations for attending law school. Also, effective personal statements require several drafts.

2. **Avoid clichés.** Let them meet you and hear your voice. What makes you unique?
   Example: Describe a specific volunteer experience rather than saying you like to help people.

3. **Be entertaining.** Your purpose is to show that you are a confident, mature, ethical person, but the reader needs to want to keep reading.
   Example: You could begin the statement with a captivating snapshot. Notice how this blunt, jarring sentence creates intrigue and keeps the reader’s interest: “I was six years old, the eldest of six children in the Bronx, when my father was murdered.”

4. **Stay focused.** Don’t wander. Address the prompts the school provides, and narrow the focus of your topic. Research the school, and tailor your statement to their program. Your goal: a clear, concise and gracefully organic whole statement.

5. **Details, details, details.** Show. Don’t tell.
   Example: (Before) If it were not for a strong support system, which instilled into me strong family values and morals, I would not be where I am today.
   (After) Although my grandmother and I didn't have a car or running water, we still lived far more comfortably than did the other families I knew. I learned an important lesson: My grandmother made the most of what little she had, and she was known and respected for her generosity. Even at that age, I recognized the value she placed on maximizing her resources and helping those around her.

6. **Be concise, and stick to their page or word limit.** Avoid wasting space and confusing your reader.
   Example: (Before) My recognition of the fact that we had finally completed the research project was a deeply satisfying moment that will forever linger in my memory.
   (After) Completing the research project gave me an enduring sense of fulfillment.
7. **Vary your sentences and use effective transitions.**
   Example: Longer sentences can be used when building a specific image while shorter sentences can draw attention to important ideas.

8. **Use action verbs; avoid passive voice.**
   Passive voice: verb phrases in which the subject receives the action expressed in the verb. Passive voice employs a form of the word to be, such as was or were.
   Example: (Passive) The lessons that have prepared me for my career as a lawyer were taught to me by my mother.
   (Active) My mother taught me lessons that will prove invaluable in my career as a lawyer.

9. **Seek multiple opinions.** Find trusted, knowledgeable readers. Avoid overwhelming yourself with too many opinions. I suggest three: one to read for content, one for organization, and one for grammar/mechanics – in that order.

10. **End your statement with your goal(s).** What do you plan to do with your law degree? (Do this as long as it fits within the prompt.)

**Avoid**

- writing a narrative of your resume and transcripts
- relying too heavily on spell check
- telling the school what you think they want to hear
- using quotes
- giving your statement a title
- using your statement to explain something negative
- rambling.

**Persuading Your Reader**

- Ethos – credibility. If you show the reader you are trustworthy within your statement, it helps persuade them.
- Pathos – appealing to emotion (use with caution and restraint). You can show how you care deeply about something.
- Logos – facts, figures, syllogisms... Logical appeals can be persuasive
- Mythos – appealing to beliefs/values of the audience. This approach can add subtle power and wider significance to your argument.