

The Personal Statement for Law School

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What does a strong personal statement look like?

- Go to [George Mason University Personal Statement Collection](#) (QR Code).
- Quickly skim #11.
- What do you notice?



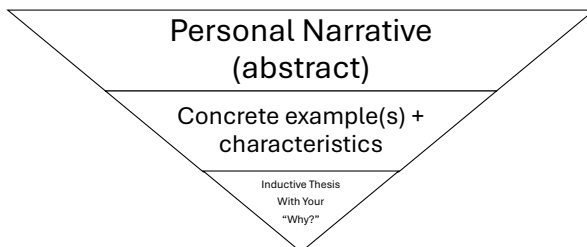
What Is It?

- Unique, Hybrid Writing:
- 1. A Personal Narrative (story) + 2. Specific, Purpose-Driven Essay
 - Demonstrates
 - Growth
 - Reflection
 - Argument supported by *lived* experience
- Showcases Your:
 - Character
 - Motivation
 - Interest in law
 - Aptitude for law school
 - Ability to organize information
 - Ability to write with complexity

Planning Process

- Instructions?
- Prompt or no prompt? Length?
- What's your "Why?" or "Purpose?"
- Brainstorm
 - Goal=formulate your personal narrative portion

Personal Statement Funnel Method



Part 1: Personal Narrative

- Abstract portion of a personal statement
- Catchy Introduction /Hook
- Immediately grabs reader's attention
- Anecdote &/or Vivid Scene
- Have a clear beginning, middle, and end to the story
- 5 W's: Who was involved? What happened? When did it take place? Where was it? Why it was significant?
- Include dialogue, if possible
- Tell a story (show, don't tell).
 - Show: I'll never forget my first day as a student intern at the DA's office. I walked into an interview room and was shocked by what I saw—a disheveled young mother not much older than me and three young children. They had just caught the bus from the domestic violence shelter. She took one look at me and asked, "Are you my lawyer?"
 - Tell: During my internship in the DA's office, I learned how to interview domestic violence victims with trauma-informed techniques that focuses on facts.
- Avoid, "I've always known I wanted to be a lawyer..."

Part 2: Examples + Characteristics

- Provide a concrete example or two of
 - What you have done
 - What you have learned
 - How you have grown

since what happened in your personal anecdote.

- Example: After I completed my internship, I applied what I learned in the DA's office to my college projects. For example, in my Innocence Project class, I wrote an amicus brief. The brief encouraged the court to release Thomas James, who has been falsely accused of murder in Texas. In drafting the brief, I approached the record the same way I had learned to approach witnesses. Rather than immediately searching for inconsistencies, I asked what the record revealed about context, gaps, and credibility. This method that I initially learned in the DA's office forced me to look at arguments in a new way: I had to ground them in facts rather than in emotion.

3. Inductive Thesis Statement/Conclusion

- Final section that leads to your "why?"
- Reflection on how you have grown and why you are a strong candidate.
- Revise for different application prompts.
- Example: My experience confirmed that I am drawn to the intellectual discipline and ethical responsibility that legal work demands. I learned to approach facts with patience, to question assumptions, and to build arguments grounded in evidence rather than impulse. Law school requires analytical rigor, precision in writing, and the ability to hold competing narratives in tension. My work in the District Attorney's office and on the amicus brief strengthened those skills and clarified my commitment to pursuing justice through careful, methodical advocacy. These experiences have prepared me not only to succeed in law school, but to contribute meaningfully to its academic community.

Dr. Kelley's 4-Step Prewrite

- Why do you want to go to law school (thesis)?
- List characteristics that make you a strong candidate for law school.
- List experiences (concrete examples) you have had in the legal field:
 - School projects?
 - Internships?
 - Personal experiences?
- Brainstorm ideas for the personal narrative (abstract):
 - List details in 5 W's: How? Who? When? Where? Why?
 - Invoke the 5 senses, if applicable: (see, hear, feel, touch, taste?)

Tips

- Understand that a personal statement is not easy to write
- Be patient, give yourself time, and avoid self-criticism
- Maintain your own unique writing voice
- Be wary of childhood stories
- Avoid famous quotes
- Do NOT write your life story
- Do NOT summarize your resume
- Do NOT wait until last minute to write your personal statement
- Do NOT use AI to revise your writing
- DO NOT forget to add an engaging title to your work

Revision: Your Best Friend

- **The Personal Statement Is Hard — And That's the Point**
- **1. It requires precision.**
You must compress years of experience into 2–3 focused pages.
- **2. It demands reflection, not just storytelling.**
You are not narrating events. You are demonstrating judgment.
- **3. It tests your thinking.**
Law school requires clarity, structure, and disciplined reasoning. Your essay must model those skills.
- **4. First drafts are usually descriptive.**
Strong statements emerge through cutting, sharpening, and re-framing.
- **5. Revision reveals maturity.**
The ability to rethink, refine, and strengthen an argument is a legal skill.

Wrap Up

- The best personal statements are not written. They are re-written.
- More materials www.drerinkelley.com
 - Student Resources Tab
 - The Personal Statement for Law School folder
- Questions?