

Getting Started On Your Personal Statement

WRITE A TIMELINE OF YOUR LIFE (starting after high school)

Taking the time to write out a timeline gives you a starting point for your personal statement. Include anything that was meaningful to you, like running a marathon, taking a road trip, breaking off an engagement, volunteering, quitting a job, etc. This is a quick, easy way to get you thinking about the most important theme of your essay: you! If you're still at the beginning of your college career, try to keep a timeline as you go along—it's a lot simpler than trying to remember everything right before you apply to law school.

TALK TO FRIENDS & FAMILY

Your personal statement is about you—you're selling yourself to the admissions committee. It can be tough to identify your best qualities on your own, so take the time to talk to your friends and family. These are the people that know you best, so get their opinion. Don't tell them that this is for law school—otherwise you may get some cliché answers like how you negotiated a later curfew or a better grade. Instead, ask them, "What are my best qualities?" (Remember, you're trying to sell yourself) You may be surprised at what they say, and their answers can help spark ideas you never would have considered on your own.

BRAINSTORM

After identifying your best qualities, brainstorm. How did you develop these qualities? Why do others know you have these qualities? What experiences have you had that demonstrate these qualities? This is where going back to your timeline becomes useful—you can start going through all the milestones you wrote down and identify the experiences that emphasize these qualities.

FREE-WRITE

Often students obsess about writing their personal statement in a two-hour chunk of time they have set aside. This can lead to frustration and writer's block. Instead, using all the information you have from your timeline, conversations with friends and family, and brainstorming, sit down and free-write for a few minutes about one theme or idea that you find interesting. Sometimes ideas or stories you think are great just don't translate well to paper. Free-writing in small time increments will help you find which stories work best for you.

FIND A THEME

Once you've gone through the free-write process, look at what worked best and ask yourself, "What is my theme?" What exactly do I want the admissions committee to know about me and do these experiences illustrate that? You may want to choose several stories that all showcase the same strength; you could also focus on different aspects of the same story. Either way, choosing a specific theme will help keep the essay unified and focused.

POLISH, POLISH, POLISH

Although you are not writing this paper for a "grade," the basics of good writing are still important. Does every paragraph have a topic sentence? Do your paragraphs flow smoothly and include appropriate transitions? Have you checked and rechecked the spelling, grammar, and punctuation? Be willing to work through multiple drafts before you are ready to submit the finished product.