

# Writing the Personal Statement: Suggestions from TN Law School Admissions Directors

## Content:

Best strategy: Tell a story of some kind. (Remember, stories have a beginning, middle, and end.)

Offer memorable insight into who you are. This is your chance to make yourself “come alive” in the admissions committee’s minds.

Be genuine--be sure your story shows you as a person. That “speaks to us,” one admissions committee member said; it lets them know you beyond your technical merits.

If your reader finishes the essay thinking “I’d like to pick up the phone and have a conversation with this person,” that’s a success.

Somehow, show the committee that you’re someone they believe will succeed. Communicate uniqueness, boldness—without being arrogant or offensive.

Tell your readers why you’re pursuing law school. Show where your passion to practice law comes from. (But don’t make anything up.)

It’s obvious you want to go to law school, since you’re applying. But go deeper. Has something happened in your life that made you want to go to law school? (If so, consider talking about that.)

If possible, try to mention something specific about “why” this school—but be sure to tailor each statement for each school you apply to if you do that. The readers know the other law schools, and they can tell if you’re referring to them or another school.

If you profess interest in a particular area of law, the committee will look to see if it matches with anything you’ve done. So, connect the dots for them. If there’s no connection to your experience, explain where your interest comes from.

“The ones that catch my eye start from the heart” make a genuine emotional appeal of some kind.

You could use an analogy that works—something you or your situation can be compared to, for example. To start, ask your friends what they think makes you different or memorable.

Referring to religion is tricky. Handle with great care if you do it.

Always be positive—never include any negatives.

## Process:

Start early!

If you need help getting started, ask your friends what they think makes you different or memorable.

Plan on getting feedback from others and revising multiple times.

## Conventions:

Be sure to follow the prompt and directions.

Use all the space you have (usually no more than 2 pages, though), but still be concise at the sentence level. Your readers want to see that you can write using a clear, concise, consistent style.

The essay should be polished.

Edit out unnecessary adjectives and “flowery” language.

## Some Don'ts:

Don't put the wrong institution's name in your essay.

Don't address “bad stuff” in the personal statement essay. It's okay to add an addendum to do this, if there's something you wish to explain. If so, include your feelings of remorse (if genuine).

Don't merely repeat information that is already available in the rest of your application. Again, this is your chance to make yourself “come alive” in the readers' minds.

Don't start with a quote from a book. Usually, this is too much of a cliché.

Don't refer to “cringe-worthy” biological functions.

Don't make any sentence-level mistakes. Be sure to proofread multiple times. Not paying attention to this type of detail is a genuine negative. Errors may not lead to the committee deny admission to an otherwise superior candidate, but errors could knock out a less strong candidate.