Dos and Don’ts of a good law school application

SCHOOL of LAW

DO apply to schools with a reason - Yes; law schools do look at your choices NOT to avoid admitting you, but to understand your priorities, goals, etc. It is hard to understand why you pick a particular school if the others to which you apply don’t match.

DO be forthcoming to “reach schools” - Tell the school why you picked them, and why attending makes sense for your plans - no platitudes, just the facts.

DO highlight your positives - Combine like achievements to showcase your abilities, talents and avocations – don’t retell your resume!

DO turn negatives into positives - If you have a semester to forget, explain what you learned from it rather than the excuses you gave your parents. If you have an “indiscretion (criminal record)” – Again, put the best foot forward, but always disclose.

DO explain the LSAT problem - Only if you can really prove the standardized test problem with an SAT or ACT score that has the same national percentile as your LSAT. While the people who take the LSAT are not as numerous as the ones who took the SAT/ACT, the competition is the same.

DO proof, proof, proof - Mistakes, misspellings, omissions, etc. confirm some perceived “weaker” applications; you are trying to impress the committee with your serious, diligent, and competent approach to your application.

DO have someone help you - All personal statements, application forms, and any extra materials should be proofed for spelling, content, and “do they reflect YOU!!!” - and should be read by at least two people - advisor and a friend.

DO show your advocacy skills - Make your application stand out by not only being perfect but being engaging. The faculty is looking for people who will be interesting in class - showcase you, your abilities, and unique qualities that will make you unforgettable - the good way.

DO make an appearance - If at all possible, visit the law school. You don’t need to meet the Dean of Admission or the Dean of the law school to leave a good impression. Do have good questions (especially if the answer is on the website). Do try to reinforce your interest in the law school more than trying to push yourself.

DO send a follow-up - Either a note thanking the person you met; or if put on the waitlist - a follow-up letter confirming your interest and reiterating why you and the school are good matches.
Don’ts

DON'T leave blanks in your app - This includes missing time periods in your education or work experiences to leaving blanks on the application form that should have an answer. If you have a break in your studies or employment tell the committee why and what you did for that time period. Don't let us speculate about bad grades or one bad semester - let us know.

DON'T apply after Christmas - One of the biggest mistakes is waiting until we have too many applications, and the class is taking form. The Faculty Committee is more generous before Valentines Day, and becomes more strident in their choices in March. If you aren’t taking the LSAT until February, make sure you have applied by the date of the test, and your CAS report is complete.

DON'T think you are the only one - Unfortunately, but good for everyone - we all have experiences that we regret; classes we wish we had never taken; and life choices that aren’t the best. Don't belabor the point - be concise.

DON'T be cute in your approach - This is not the time to be clever, poetic, or cute in your personal statement. You need to be serious, concise - don't use quotations, don't mention ANY TV shows, movies or other cultural reasons for applying. And above all don't tell us about the law.

DON'T be upset if you are wait listed - This means the committee likes your file, but can't finalize the decision. Usually it is because the law schools have goals for the year, or situations over which they have no control - so hang in there and be patient! DON'T call the office about your status. They will let you know.

DON'T conclude that one size fits all - If you are waitlisted or denied by several schools early in the process, regroup, rework, and recreate your list. Calling other schools to get a sense of the application volume is a good way to determine if the problem is with the year, rather than your application.

DON'T give up! Every year is unique in the volume, the quality and the type of student who applies to each school. Try again for your reach school, and reevaluate your application. DON'T reuse the same application, essay, letters, etc.