

## APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL

There are a number of steps to take in order to practice law, and an even greater number of steps to become a successful attorney. Prior to taking on the challenge that is law school, one must be prepared for years of hard work and dedication, beyond their undergraduate studies. For those interested in the process of becoming an attorney, the following is an outline to the academic, skill building, and licensing steps required to start this career path.

### **Step 1: Complete Undergraduate Education**

In order to even begin considering a law degree, a bachelor's degree is required from an undergraduate university. However, there is no required undergraduate degree in order to get accepted into law school. The American Bar Association (ABA) does not have a recommended area of study, but common majors for students include English, political science, economics, history, business, and journalism. These areas strengthen students' abilities to research, write, and deliberate, all skills that will be used frequently in the field of law. Whatever area of study is chosen, it is important to have a strong Grade Point Average, as the undergraduate GPA is a major deciding factor in the law school admission process.

### **Step 2: Study for and Pass the LSAT**

One other requirement for admission into law school is the completion of the Law School Admission Test, or the LSAT. This is the primary focus on a student's application, along with an undergraduate GPA. The test score is used as an objective measure in assessing and determining the students' ability to succeed in law school. The test includes five portions of multiple-choice questions, as well as an unscored writing section. Along with giving the admissions committee a sample of your writing abilities, the LSAT evaluates the candidate's strength levels in reading comprehension, analysis and critical thinking, reasoning and argumentation, among other skills. The exams are scored on a point scale of 120-180, with a 180 being a near-perfect or perfect, score.<sup>1</sup>

Students often fear the LSAT as the most dreadful exam, and although it is not fun, it is manageable. Many companies offer test prep materials, and even online classes. These include Testmasters, Kaplan, Kahn Academy, and many more. Attached is a guide to several online options for LSAT preparation materials, as well as a comparison of what the companies offer.<sup>2</sup> With the right amount of dedication and preparation, a student will not fear taking the test, but rather be excited to demonstrate their dedication to getting into law school.

### **Step 3: Applying to Law Schools**

Many students will choose to go directly from undergraduate studies to law schools, while some will decide to work for some time first. For example, I took one year off after college to save some money and work as a paralegal. Many students, however, do not wish to take time off school, as they worry it might remove them from the student mindset. Whichever route is

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lsac.org/lsat/lsat-prep/practice-test/computing-your-score>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.test-guide.com/best-lsat-prep-courses.html>

taken, it is important to do ample research as to which schools to apply to. Certain schools will have special programs of interest, such as Intellectual Property Law or Sports and Entertainment Law, while other schools are ranked high in every area. After receiving LSAT scores, the likelihood of acceptance to a certain school can be found using this tool.<sup>3</sup> If a student finds that a school (s)he was interested in will have a low likelihood of acceptance, they can either take the LSAT again in hopes of earning a higher score, or choosing different schools to apply to. Although, a student should not feel discouraged because of their likelihood based on their score or GPA, as admission committee's look at many factors in deciding the students' application, including community involvement, organization affiliations, and strong recommendation letters from professors, alumni, or legal professionals.

More information on the application process for law schools can be found on the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) website.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Step 4:** So, you've gotten into law school . . . now what?

The days leading up to the first day of law school can be a roller coaster of emotions. It is different than college, with more anxiety than excitement. However, deep breaths and a firm handshake will get you through it. Many schools will host first year students a day or two before the rest of the law school, preparing them for this new way of learning in an exclusive environment. However, this does not help calm first year's down, as they are made aware of the competitive grading scale. With a few tips and tricks, a student's dread will falter:

- Get involved. Students will be offered an opportunity to join societies and clubs in the first part of the fall semester. Some of these clubs will be what drew the student to that particular law school, and some may be fun and exciting clubs that no one knew existed, such as Space Law Society. Either way, getting involved early is a good way for students to meet and greet other first year students, and older students with experience with what they are going through. Additionally, student involvement will look good on resumé's.
- Be prepared for class. There is nothing that a professor dislikes more than a student unprepared for class. After a syllabus is released per class, it is crucial to follow the readings for each class, and to have the proper notes (outlines, briefs, etc.) ready to go, so when the professor blindly calls on you, the questions will not be a challenge. This is one of the most nerve-wrecking facets first year students face, as they are surrounded by 60 students or more, many of whom they have not met.
- Network! The legal field is one of relationships. Putting yourself out there and giving off a strong impression can be more impressive than students with a 4.0 GPA who does not know how to present themselves. Attorneys that have honed their craft started in the same position as you. They were once a nervous 1L with little experience, so they will do nothing but try to help you. Do not be afraid to

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<sup>3</sup> <https://officialguide.lsac.org/Release/UGPALSAT/UGPALSAT.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lsac.org>

reach out to alumni often, not only for following up after meeting, but also to inquire about job opportunities or advice in the future. No one ever complains about the connections they made, only that they did not make enough!

### **Step 5: Graduate and Pass the Bar**

Three years of law school—or more if studying part time—will go quickly, and the coffee and sleep deprivation will soon pay off. Upon completing the Juris Doctor (J.D.), students must pass the bar examination. Each state has its own exam guidelines, evaluated by the state's board of bar examiners. The exam analyzes a student's comprehension of the materials learned in law school, as well as competence, character and fitness, and ability to represent clients in legal matters. This is the last—and most challenging—step of becoming a licensed attorney.

Upon graduating and passing a certain state's bar exam, a law student is no longer a student, but a practicing attorney. At this point, it is on the fresh attorney to use the skills from the classroom and the cocktail parties to find a job, hopefully in their preferred area of law. Career interest paths may change throughout law school, but finding your calling and excelling are important goals in the legal field.

Law school should not be taken lightly; it is not for the faint of heart. But the results are worth it, as attorneys may have one of the most rewarding careers. If you have the calling for the profession, follow it, and make the most of it.

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