



SCHOOL OF  
LIBERAL ARTS

## **Advice for Getting Into Law School**

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Admission to law school is competitive. Of all people who apply to law school, about 55 to 60 percent are accepted at one or more schools. In other words, about 40 percent of all applicants to law school aren't able to go because they aren't admitted anywhere.

Here is an example of what happens at law schools generally, using Fordham Law School in New York to illustrate. Fordham is ranked 36th in the nation (out of 197 law schools). Each year, Fordham has an entering class of about 500 law students. For those 500 seats, Fordham receives over 7,000 applications. About 1,400 (20%) of the 7,000 applicants will be admitted, since some people will be accepted at many law schools and will turn down Fordham's offer of admission.

Imagine that I'm a member of the Admissions Committee at Fordham Law School. What information about an applicant will most reliably tell me he or she will succeed in law school?

Most personal statements will try to convince me that a given applicant will be the best law student anyone could ever want. So it's highly unlikely a personal statement will reveal anything about an applicant except the most flattering information. And the same can be said about letters of recommendation.

So after looking at personal statements and letters of recommendation, I'm still left with the same 7,000 applications with which I began. How do I weed out all but the most promising 1,400?

Suppose I look at college grade point averages. How a person has performed academically in the past might predict how he or she will do in the future. But here's the problem. The 7,000 applicants have attended more than 250 different colleges and universities. One college might have high academic standards, while another might not. So an "A" at one school is not the same as an "A" somewhere else. Also, one student with a 4.0 GPA might have majored in basket weaving, while another 4.0 student from the same college majored in a more difficult field. So, two 4.0 GPAs of students from the same school may not represent comparable academic

achievements. Thus, even using GPA, I can't be sure about selecting the incoming law-school class.

What else is left? The Law School Admissions Test (LSAT). Scores on the LSAT range from a low of 120 to a high of 180. In other words, a person can get all the questions wrong but still receive a score of 120. A person getting all the questions right receives a 180.

In theory, the LSAT is a consistent measure to compare all 7,000 applicants with each other. The information below represents the LSAT scores for those applicants to Fordham recently who had a 3.5 GPA or better.

<u>LSAT Score</u>	<u>Percent Admitted</u>
168-180	100%
164-167	99%
160-163	71%
156-159	15%
148-155	12%
120-147	4%

These statistics reveal how important the LSAT is to law-school admissions. Earning a high GPA isn't enough. As the Fordham Law School statistics indicate, even those with a 3.5 GPA or better who don't do well on the LSAT have only about a four-percent chance of admission.

How can students prepare for it? The LSAT doesn't measure knowledge about the law or other legal matters. So taking law-related classes (like constitutional law) doesn't necessarily prepare students better for the LSAT than other courses. Rather, the test is designed to measure people's ability to think critically and analytically, because that's what a successful career in law school and in the practice of law requires.

Some years ago, a survey was sent to law-school deans. One of the questions on the survey was what majors the deans recommended students have in order to prepare effectively for law school. The four majors most frequently recommended by law-school deans were Politics, English, History, and Philosophy. Thus, my recommendation to students wanting to go to law school is to major in one of those fields. (Whatever the major selected, writing well is absolutely essential to success in the law.)

More generally, I advise students to *take the most demanding courses with the most demanding professors*, because they are the ones who will help develop the analytical thinking skills so necessary for success on the LSAT.

There's no way to prepare for the substance of the LSAT. But one can develop familiarity with its format through taking practice exams based on actual questions

asked in past LSATs. The general type of questions asked can be familiar to you by taking an LSAT-preparation course or by the practice books available at bookstores.

LSAT-prep courses may improve exam performance – although some scholars question if there's a reliable connection between coaching and test results. And the classes are expensive, costing up to \$1,000 or more. People who teach the courses think the coaching is particularly helpful to students who need the structure of a class. Students who are focused may do just as well with practice books (*Cracking the LSAT* by the Princeton Review is highly regarded) and the official LSAT tests that include the explanations of answers to questions. Often, taking timed practice exams isn't enough. Students should also understand how and why they make mistakes on the test. Effective studying for the LSAT usually takes at least 50 hours.

Equally important is your psychological and emotional preparation for the exam. Take it at a time when other stresses in your life are at a minimum. If you walk into the LSAT with the attitude, "What I do today will affect the rest of my life! Oh, my God!" then you'll not do as well as when you're cool and collected.

Some people who take the LSAT and don't do as well as they would like decide to take it again. Applicants can retake the LSAT an unlimited number of times. Unlimited testing means that admissions committees adjust how they evaluate the LSAT. Law schools will inevitably evaluate 1 or 2 scores differently than 5 or 6. Beware of over testing. You dilute the impact of your score with every exam you take. Wait until you feel ready to perform your best before taking the LSAT.

Law schools have increasingly turned to interviews to evaluate candidates. Most schools that conduct interviews do so by invitation only. That means you need to shine in your application materials to secure an opportunity to interview.

If you interview with a school, be prepared to discuss your professional ambitions and showcase your interviewing skills. Emphasize the substance of any employment or community-based learning in your resume, with an eye toward lawyering skills like research, writing and advocacy. Explain your legal career objectives and how you will leverage your current professional and academic experiences to reach those goals. Demonstrate that you understand law school will not give you merely a lofty education on how to make the world a better place, but practical training to work in the legal sector. Prepare also for technology to feature in your interview. The favored format of interviews is Skype and recorded responses. In-person and telephone interviews are increasingly rare.

Other helpful sources:

[American Bar Association](#)

[Association of American Law Schools](#)

[Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute](#)

[Internet Legal Resource Guide](#)

[Law School Admission Council](#) (includes LSAT registration information)