

Morehead State University

How to Take the LSAT
and
Go to Law School

Third Edition
2005

Societas Pro Legibus

Preface

How to Take the LSAT and Go to Law School, third edition, is designed to provide law school-bound juniors and seniors with basic information about five subjects related to their interest in a legal career: taking the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), gaining admission to law school, enrolling in law school preparation programs, financing a law school education, and acquiring advice and information about these matters.

First, this handbook provides you with information on the LSAT: how to register for it, when to take it, and how to study for it. In studying for the LSAT, the handbook provides you with information on self-study materials and commercial test preparation courses.

Second, this handbook provides you with information on the law school admissions process: how to select law schools and acquire information about them, what kinds of law schools and how many you should select, when to apply, how to write your personal statement, how to select the persons to write your letters of recommendation, and how to monitor your applications after you have mailed them to the law schools. Then, it tells you how law schools review your applications and decide to admit you or put you on a wait list and what you need to do if you are wait listed.

Third, this handbook provides information on law school preparation programs which help you make the transition to law school. Fourth, it outlines the financial aid available from law schools, the federal government, and a wide variety of private sources. Fifth, it reminds you that when you have questions related to your legal career, you should consult with one of MSU's pre-law advisors.

How to Take the LSAT and Go to Law School, third edition, was written by Professor William Green, published by Societas Pro Legibus, and printed by MSU Printing Services. The third edition benefits from twenty years of pre-law advising and adds new print and Internet information and new web site addresses and updated phone numbers. This edition is available online at www.morehead-st.edu/ggh/prelaw.

William Green
Morehead State University
April 7, 2005

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An Overview

Your preparation for attending law school will begin during the second semester of your junior year. From then until you graduate, you will need to work with the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), law schools, and your pre-law advisor to maximize your opportunity to attend the law school of your choice. The LSAC administers the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and provides Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) reports of your LSAT score and undergraduate grades to law schools. Law schools will send you catalogs and application materials, process your application, and decide whether to admit you. Your pre-law advisor will assist you in the law school-related activities in which you will be involved.

In the second semester of your junior year, you should attend a Spring semester meeting at which you will receive information and advice about the LSAT application and test taking processes. As a first semester senior, you should attend a Fall semester meeting at which you will receive information and advice about the law school application process. You should meet with your pre-law advisor during the Fall semester to discuss your law school applications, personal statement, recommendations, and financial assistance. Then you should select the law schools you wish to attend, request law school catalogs and admission information, complete and send the application forms, and contact persons to write your recommendation letters.

The Law School Admission Test

How to Prepare for the LSAT

Begin your LSAT preparation by obtaining a copy of the *LSAT/ LSDAS Information Book* from your pre-law advisor or from LSAC. This book contains the LSAT registration and test calendar and fees; information on LSAT and LSDAS policies, online account creation, fee waivers and refunds, a sample LSAT, and a catalog of LSAC's test preparation and legal education books.

When to Take the LSAT

The LSAT is given four times a year: June, October, December, and February. The test dates and deadlines are listed in the *LSAT/LSDAS Information Book* and online at www.lsac.org. It is best to take the LSAT in the June between your junior and senior year, because it will allow you time to study for the test unhindered by courses, papers, and exams and to devote the fall semester to your law school applications. October and December are two backup test dates. If you choose either of these dates, you will have to study for the LSAT while you are taking courses, writing papers, and applying to law school. Under few, if any, circumstances should you delay taking the LSAT until February of your senior year, because you will receive your score too near to law school application deadlines to receive any meaningful consideration.

How to Register for the LSAT

LSAC prefers that you register online at www.lsac.org. All the forms you will need to register are at the LSAC web site, including the LSAT and LSDAS registration forms, transcript request forms, and recommendation forms. If you prefer to register on paper, or must register on paper, because you are applying for a fee waiver or an unpublished test site, you must obtain a forms packet at 215-968-1001.

Once you register online, you must download and complete a transcript request form. This form will be available only after you register for the LSDAS and enter your school information. Take the transcript request form to the MSU registrar's office and send it to all other colleges or universities you have attended, and request that an official copy of transcript be sent to LSAC. You will download and submit transcript request forms two more times: at the end of the Fall Semester of your senior year and following your graduation.

How to Study for the LSAT

You must prepare for the LSAT. When you register for the LSAT, begin your LSAT preparation by realistically assessing your individual study habits, class schedule, academic course load and requirements, family and social commitments, and other activities or responsibilities which consume your time. Then draw up a study schedule and commit yourself to it. Make sure to set aside one or two four-hour time blocks so that you can work through timed, simulated LSATs. Studying will familiarize you with the LSAT's format and questions, but it will not increase your substantive knowledge.

How you approach LSAT test preparation is up to you. If you are a well-disciplined person, a self-study

method of preparation will usually work well. If you need someone to provide you with structure and order, then you should consider a commercial preparation program. The self-study and commercial course preparation information listed below is provided for your assistance. Neither Morehead State University, nor its faculty endorse these test preparation materials.

LSAT Self-Study Materials. The Law School Admissions Council, the organization which writes the LSAT, provides two self-study ways to prepare for the LSAT. First, the *LSAT/LSDAS Registration and Information Book* contains samples of the three types of LSAT questions, a sample test, answer key, a sample LSAT writing topic, and a form for calculating your grade. Second, the LSAC's *Official LSAT SuperPrep*, *The Official LSAT Prep Test Series*, and *the Official LSAT Prep Tests* contain actual LSATs with answer key, writing sample and score conversion table. To order these online at www.lsac.org. Private firms publish self-study LSAT test preparation materials available in paperback, on computer disk, and on CD-ROM. These materials are available at the MSU Bookstore and Joseph-Beth Booksellers in Lexington and online at www.amazon.com and at www.barnesandnoble.com.

LSAT Test Preparation Courses. Kaplan Educational Center offers courses in Lexington, Louisville, Cincinnati prior to each LSAT and also online courses and private tutoring. Visit www.kaplan.com. The Princeton Review offers courses prior to each LSAT in Lexington and also online courses and private tutoring. Visit <http://www.princetonreview.com>. The PrepMaster LSAT Intensive Review is a three day immersion program in Lexington and in major cities nationwide the weekend prior to each LSAT Visit www.prepmaster.com.

MILE for Minority Students. Minority students may enroll in MILE, Minorities Interested in Legal Education, and receive information about LSAT preparation, E-mail access to advice on the law school admission process, and the MILE Markers newsletter. Enroll online at www.lsac.org.

Law School Admission Process

When you return for the fall semester of your senior year, you should select the law schools you wish to attend, request their catalogs and admission information, complete and mail the application forms, and contact persons to write recommendation letters.

How to Prepare for the Admissions Process

The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools, published annually by Law Services in paper, allows you to examine all ABA-approved law schools and decide the best ones for you. The introductory chapters describe how to choose law schools and the two page descriptions of each law school provide uniform information on curriculum, student body, special programs, admission criteria, cost, and financial aid. Most descriptions contain a chart which reports the number of applications and acceptances for the previous year within a particular LSAT/GPA range. You may order *The Official Guide* online at www.lsac.org. A useful companion is LSAC's *So You Want to Be a Lawyer*: This guide explains how to apply to law school by showing you what to look for in a law school and which schools may be looking for someone like you. Order this booklet online at www.lsac.org.

How to Select Law Schools

Begin your evaluation of the law schools by evaluating your own credentials. Compare your own LSAT score and GPA with the profiles of the student body of the law schools you wish to attend. The single most serious error committed by prospective law students is their failure to realistically evaluate their own credentials. If your grades and LSAT score are far from being a match with the school to which you are applying, the odds are slim that you will be accepted. When the profile of the law school student body and your credentials closely match, the odds are high that you will be accepted.

Law School Rankings. *The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* does not rank law schools, because law schools object to rankings. See "Law School Rankings" at www.lsac.org. So you may wish to consult one publication which does rank law schools. The *U.S. News and World Report* provides yearly law school rankings of all ABA-approved schools. The first tier is the top twenty-five and the next twenty-five, then all other schools are grouped into the second, third, and fourth tiers. *U.S. News* also ranks the top ten programs in clinical training, dispute resolution, trial advocacy, and in environmental, international, intellectual property, and tax law. The *U.S. News* law school rankings are available at www.usnews.com.

Law School Guides. *The Official Guide* will help you evaluate your credentials and its law schools profiles will allow you to evaluate a law school's reputation, curriculum, size, faculty, student body, and cost. *The Official Guide* will tell you if the law school has special, joint degree, and clinical programs and if it has part-

time and evening programs. Since *The Official Guide* provides only factual information, visit the Princeton Review at www.princetonreview.com/law for a more broadly based evaluation of law schools.

Law School Catalogs and Application Materials. Early in the fall semester of your senior year, you should request the law schools in which you are interested to send you their catalogs and application materials. You may also visit them on line at www.lsac.org. Catalogs and application materials for the three Kentucky law schools may be acquired from your pre-law advisor and the law schools' admissions offices.

University of Kentucky College of Law, 606-257-1678, www.uky.edu/law

Salmon P. Chase College of Law, Northern Kentucky University, 606-572-6476, www.nku.edu/~chase

Louis D. Brandeis School of Law, University of Louisville, 502-852-6358, www.louisville.edu/brandeislaw

Catalogs and application materials for out-of-state law schools may be acquired by writing or calling these law schools. Consult *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools* for their addresses and phone numbers or visit them online at www.lsac.org.

Kentucky Law School Visits to MSU. To evaluate the Kentucky law schools, talk with their admissions officers. Every Fall semester, Societas Pro Legibus, MSU's pre-law society, hosts a visit by the admissions officers from the UK College of Law, the UofL Brandeis School of Law, and NKU's Chase College of Law.

Kentucky Law School Open Houses and Visits. You may also evaluate the Kentucky law schools by visiting their campuses and attending their open houses. All three schools hold open houses every year. UK and UofL also host open houses for minorities. Pre-registration is required for the open houses. Call the law schools or visit their web sites.

How Many Law Schools to Select

Once you have acquired the information on law schools that you may want to attend, you will have to choose. Never apply to only one law school. One method is to choose four or five schools using the following method. 1) one "dream school" which you would attend if you had your top choice; 2) one school with less high GPA/LSAT standards, but still one at the upper end of your credentials; 3) one/two schools which are both good fits with your credentials; and 4) one "sure thing" school where you would be happy and where there is little doubt you will be accepted. You may, of course, choose more than four or five bearing in mind that application fees are in the range of \$50.

When to Apply to Law Schools

You should apply during the Fall semester of your senior year for three reasons. First, it will take you a long time to complete the application paperwork, to write a personal statement, and request recommendations. If you take the June LSAT, as recommended, you should be able to complete all the application paperwork before the end of October. If you take the October LSAT, you should acquire the application materials ahead of time so that you can send your applications as soon as you receive your LSAT scores.

Second, apply during the mid-fall semester to receive the most favorable consideration. According to *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools*, the ideal time is from mid-October through mid-November, because law schools, using a rolling admissions process, will have more seats available earlier in the application process. State law schools accept out-of-state applicants until they fill their out-of-state quota. The longer you wait the greater risk you run that exams and papers will delay your applying until Christmas break. You will still meet most application deadlines, but rolling admissions will lessen your chances of being admitted.

Third, apply early in the fall semester, because you can catch and remedy errors and forgetfulness. Sometimes LSDAS will make a mistake in an applicant's transcript. Occasionally, professors will neglect to send a recommendation. It is easier to correct these mistakes earlier than after Christmas break when law schools are making decisions on other applicants' files. In any event, try to complete all your applications by January 1 of the year in which you are applying for admission to law school.

How to Complete Application Materials

Law school application materials include the application form, the personal statement, and recommendation letters. Make a file for each law school. In the front of each file, make a checklist for each law school's applicant information requirements and the deadlines. Allow yourself enough time to obtain and send each application item by each law school's deadlines.

Application forms are tedious to fill out. LSAC has made the process easier for students with LSAC online accounts, because they will have free access to electronic JD applications for all ABA-approved law

schools. This will allow applicants to electronically package their applications with the transcripts, letters of recommendation, and LSDAS law school reports which LSAC processes and sends to law schools. If you complete your applications electronically, you should still contact admissions offices for an application packet, because this is the only way you can be sure you have all the information and materials you need.

If you need to explain any course names or grades which are not self-explanatory, you should attach a supplement to your application. Whether you use send your application electronically or by U.S. Mail, save a final completed copy of your application for yourself.

How to Write a Personal Statement

Law schools request personal statements, because they want to evaluate your writing ability and judge your personal commitment and motivation for legal studies. Write your personal statement carefully giving attention to neatness, grammar, syntax, and proper spelling. Since admissions committees do not interview applicants, all they have before them is your LSAT score, LSDAS report, personal statement, and recommendations. So you have to take the opportunity in your personal statement to speak directly to the admissions committee about yourself. Since you will be competing against many other applicants, you need to use your personal statement to separate yourself from others and tell the committee why you are special.

In writing your personal statement, answer the question of who you are and why you want to go to law school in the most straightforward manner. Be personal and emphasize your best qualities. The most effective personal statement is a thoughtful, impressionistic explanation of the crucial events that have shaped you into the person you are. Give attention to the growth and change in your intellectual development. If certain books, events, or people have been influential in your life, a comment on these will be more valuable than a list of high school and college activities. Avoid a mere factual chronological outline. Hopefully your personal statement will be interesting enough to make the admissions committee members read it all.

Do not be tempted to use your personal statement to explain your LSAT score and GPA. The LSAT speaks for itself; a transcript speaks for itself; and admissions committees are good listeners. So let your personal statement focus on your strengths. If you feel the need to explain why you have a high GPA and low LSAT score or a low GPA during your freshman year, include a separate statement.

How to Solicit Recommendation Letters

Law schools usually request that you submit two or three recommendation letters. Request letters from professors who know you personally, have had you in class, have been able to examine a great deal of your work, and can provide a specific analysis of the breadth and depth of your knowledge, your critical and analytical abilities, and your writing and problem solving abilities. These letters are most helpful when your professors evaluate your likely performance as a law student.

Letters from practicing attorneys and judges are acceptable if you have worked for or interned with them and they are in a position to evaluate your legal aptitude. Letters from other non-academic persons are almost always useless, because their letters usually do not address your intellectual ability or aptitude for law school. If the writer is not a professor, the comments will undoubtedly be confined to your personality and industry. Do not submit letters from politicians and public officials who have merely known you and your family. Law schools will disregard these letters.

Provide all persons who write recommendations for you with your resume, academic check sheet, and personal statement along with the names and addresses of law schools to which you are applying. Waive your right to see the recommendation letters, because an admissions committee will be likely to conclude that the letter writers gave more candid appraisals, because you do not see the letters.

Your recommenders may send their letters directly to each law school; or write one letter and send it to LSAC, accompanied by a LSAC Letter of Recommendation Form. The recommendation forms are available online www.lsac.org. You may request that up to three letters be sent to LSAC which will send these letters, as part of your LSDAS file, to each law school to which you have applied.

Give your recommenders ample time to write their letters. At least a month before you actually need the letters would be a good time to ask people to write them. At least a week before the letters are due, you should visit, call, or write each of your recommenders to thank them. This is not merely a courtesy, it will remind them to write and send your letter if they have not yet done so.

Call the law school admissions offices to which you are applying at least one week before the deadline for completing your file to be certain that all of your recommendation letters have arrived. As a matter of courtesy, notify the persons who have written you recommendations when you have been admitted to a law school.

How to Monitor Your Applications

You should realize that mailing your application materials does not complete the process. You must monitor your application. Many law schools do not automatically notify applicants about the status of their files. If a law school does not notify you within a reasonable time after you have mailed your application materials that your file is complete, you should contact the school about the status of your application.

At the beginning of the spring semester of your senior year, you should complete another transcript request form, take it to the MSU registrar's office, and request an updated transcript which includes your fall semester grades be sent to LSAC. Now you will have to wait to hear from the law schools. This normally happens around the end of March and can take until late April.

How Law Schools Review Your Application

Law schools use a rolling admissions policy which means that they do not wait until a set date to decide whether to accept or reject applicants. Instead, law schools evaluate applications and inform applicants of their decision beginning in the late fall through mid-summer. The rolling admissions policy means that you should complete and mail your applications during the fall of your senior year. According to *The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools*, the ideal time to apply is from mid-October through mid-November, because law schools will have more seats available earlier than later in the application process.

The Law School Admissions Council and law school admissions personnel emphasize that your file will not be reviewed until it is complete. A complete file contains the application forms, the LSDAS Report, letters of recommendation, personal statement, and application fee. Your file should be complete by January 1.

How Law School Decide to Admit You

Law schools are inundated with applications. If law school admissions officers and committees do not have time to thoroughly read all applicant folders, they will be almost totally objective and select the applicants with the highest LSATs and GPAs.

Many law schools admissions officers and committees use a formula designed by their school to predict first year grade point averages (or index) of their students. To the extent that law schools rely on these objective criteria, they will give little or no consideration to subjective evidence such as personal statements and recommendation letters except in marginal cases.

If a law school's admissions committee agrees that you should be accepted, you will receive an official letter of acceptance from the dean or director of admissions. The letter will usually include a date by which you are expected to submit your seat deposit fee. This deposit is used by the school to track their incoming class and is normally credited toward your first semester's tuition/ fees if you attend. If you send your fee and then decide not to attend, do not be surprised if the fee is forfeited or subject to only a partial refund.

How to Accept an Offer of Admission

Once you receive a letter of acceptance, make a decision and forward your seat deposit fee to the school. Do not forget to write to the other schools which have accepted you and tell them of your decision to accept admission at the other school. This is only fair to other candidates anxious to gain admission.

If you receive more than one offer of admission, make a prompt decision and forward your seat deposit to the school of your choice. If you find yourself squeezed by one school which demands an acceptance deposit before you hear from another school, you should let the first school know about your dilemma. Law schools are generally understanding and will probably honor your request for a month's extension.

After graduation from Morehead State, complete your last transcript request form, take it to the MSU registrar's office, and request that the registrar send to the law school you will be attending an official transcript, including your spring semester grades and a statement that MSU has granted you a baccalaureate degree. Without this information, the law school you have selected will cancel your admission.

How to Endure Life on the Wait List

If a law school decides not to admit you, it may place you on a wait list. Law schools create wait lists of students whose academic credentials and LSAT scores do not quite meet those of the students they are currently admitting. If you are wait listed, it is not an automatic guarantee that you will be accepted or rejected. Vacancies occur as students withdraw from law schools to accept an offer elsewhere. You will have to wait

until a vacancy occurs. You will be accepted when enough vacancies occur to reach your name on their list. If you are placed on a wait list, you should not expect to be accepted, if at all, until July, or August.

Your life on the wait list is an applicant's purgatory. You should not approach the wait list as a passive experience. First, inquire about your position on the wait list. Some law schools furnish this information, so do not hesitate to ask. If the law school does not provide this information, you might ask how many students have been placed on the wait list and how many wait listed students were admitted the previous year. The answers should give you a good indication of the possibility of being admitted from the wait list.

Second, inform law schools if you have had an academically impressive spring semester and follow this up with an official transcript. Also inform law schools of honors or awards you did not include in your original application. Third, consider requesting an additional faculty recommendation, especially if you were enrolled in a seminar or wrote a major paper during the spring semester.

Never bypass an attractive offer in hopes of acceptance at a school where you are wait listed. If you have been wait listed, ask yourself how committed you are to attending the law school which has wait listed you. Answering this question can be very important if another law school you want to attend has admitted you unconditionally and given you a scholarship, and you are only waiting to see if you can have a choice.

Law School Preparation, Financing, And Advising

How to Prepare for Law School

After you have taken the LSAT and been admitted to law school, you may want to take advantage of two summer programs which provide undergraduates with the opportunity to make the transition to law school. The National Institute for Legal Education (NILE) offers overview of the courses taught in the first year of law school and workshop on study skills, case analysis skills, legal writing and research skills, and exam writing skills. For information, visit www.nilelaw.org. The Council on Legal Education Opportunity operates summer institutes which provide minority students with a preview of the law school experience. For information visit www.abanet.org/cleo and <http://cleoscholars.com>.

How to Finance Law School

You may finance law school with a law school scholarship and by borrowing money from the federal government and private sources. Law schools provide scholarships. Examine their catalogs, visit them at www.isac.org, and then contact law school financial aid offices.

Since law schools have limited monies, you may have to consider two federal government loans which rely on information in the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): the Stafford and Ford loans. The application is available at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Complete the FAFSA and other financial aid applications at the same time you submit your law school applications.

Private financial sources to finance your law school education are usually available through law school financial aid offices. Law Access offers the Law Access Loan. Visit www.accessgrp.org. Key Education Resources offers the Law Achiever Loan and Law Achiever Bar Loan. Visit www.key.com/educate. Minority students may contact the Council on Legal Education Opportunity at <http://cleoscholars.com>.

How to Obtain Pre-Law Advice and Information

When you have questions about the LSAT and law school admissions process, contact your pre-law advisor. The following MSU faculty are the Law School Admission Council's designated pre-law advisors.

Professor William Green, J. D., Ph.D., 316 Rader Hall, 783-2128, w.green@morehead-st.edu

Professor Steve Herzog, J.D., 319 Rader Hall, 783-2219, s.herzog@morehead-st.edu

Professor Dianna Murphy, J.D., 342 Rader Hall, 783-2720, d.murphy@morehead-st.edu

These pre-law advisors can provide you with the *LSAT/LSDAS Information Book*. Professor Green can provide you with information and materials on the LSAT, law school application process, and Societas Pro Legibus, MSU's pre-law society. You may address general inquiries about the pre-law program to Department of Geography, Government, and History, 350 Rader Hall, Morehead State University, Morehead, KY 40351, (606)783-2655.

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