

Pre-Law at USC?

Frequently Asked Questions for Pre-Law Students From the Office of Pre-Professional Advising (OPPA) University of South Carolina

[Is pre-law a major? Are there required courses for law school?](#)

There is no pre-law major at USC (and, honestly, very few anywhere in the country). When a student says they are “pre-law,” they are declaring an intention to attend law school. It is helpful to let your academic advisor know you are considering applying to law school. Law schools do not require pre-requisites to apply to law school, but there are courses that may help with the logical and reasoning section of the LSAT and develop skills necessary for law school and the legal profession.

[Are there specific courses I should take?](#)

No. There are no specific classes you need to take for law school admission. Students should choose a variety of courses that challenge them to write and think clearly, and expand their knowledge of different cultures, social and religious philosophies. Strong writing and analytical skills are necessary while you are in law school, so developing these areas while you are an undergraduate will help you while you are in law school.

[What major should I choose?](#)

Law school admissions committees do not have “preferred” majors. Students may choose any of a variety of majors at USC to obtain the communication, writing, and analytical skills necessary for law school. It is most important for students to select a major in which they are truly interested and, consequently, have the opportunity to attain academic success. USC has had students from more than 25 different majors accepted to law schools.

[Will a double major increase my chances of getting into law school?](#)

No. A double major is fine if a student wants to complete one, but in and of itself, it will not increase your likelihood of admission to law school.

What factors are considered in admission to law school?

The two primary factors are:

- a student's cumulative grade point average (from ALL colleges/universities) and
- a student's score on the LSAT (Law School Admission Test)

Other factors that law schools will consider include Letters of Recommendation, your Personal Statement, your Resume, the rigor of your academic coursework, and your extracurricular activities. Thus, it is important to maintain a strong academic record and establish professional relationships with your professors and instructors early in your undergraduate studies.

Are foreign languages required for admission to law school?

No. However, learning a foreign language can sharpen analytical skills and increase understanding of the English language, which are both important skills for law school.

What types of questions are on the LSAT?

The LSAT is comprised of five 35 minute multiple-choice sections, and one 35 minute Writing Sample, which is not scored, but is sent to the law schools to which an applicant submits an application.

The question types are:

- Reading Comprehension
- Analytical Reasoning
- Logical Reasoning

For further information about the LSAT, please visit the Law School Admission Council website at <http://lsac.org>

How do I prepare for the LSAT? How is it scored?

The LSAT is not a test for which you can cram. It tests aptitudes as opposed to specific knowledge. Preparing for it should be a process of familiarizing yourself with the format of the test, the types of questions that will be asked, and the pace of the exam. This is a process that often spans several months.

A variety of study guides, preparation materials and courses are available to help you get ready for the LSAT. In particular, the Law School Admission Council publishes complete, authentic, recently administered LSAT exams that are available for purchase in book form. They also make a previous test available for free (PDF). Visit the Office of Pre-Professional Advising for a sampling of materials and more information on commercial prep courses.

The LSAT is scored on a scale from 120 to 180. Although you will answer a total of about 120-130 questions, your score is determined by the number of correct answers on the four scored sections, usually covering a total of about 96-104 questions. (There are five sections on the test, but one isn't included in your score). The writing sample is also not included as part of your score, but it is copied and sent directly to the law schools to which you are applying. While

individual questions do vary in difficulty, each correct answer makes the same contribution to your score, regardless of how difficult or easy it may be. Thus, no question is worth more than any other. Within each section of the test, questions may not be arranged in order of difficulty (except for the logical reasoning/logic games section of the LSAT, which generally increases in difficulty as you progress).

LSAT scores are not absolutes; a 180 does not necessarily mean that every question was answered correctly. (You could have as many as two or three questions incorrect and still receive a 180). Nor does a 120 necessarily mean that you scored every question incorrectly. Generally, you will need approximately 15-17 correct answers before your score moves above a 120. Once you reach that threshold, your score will increase roughly two points for every three additional correct answers.

It is critical to note that your test score is based on the number of questions answered correctly, and that there is no deduction for incorrect answers. Thus, you are not penalized for guessing and should never leave a question unanswered. The LSAT is a deliberately "speeded" test, and you will probably find yourself quite pressed for time during the exam. This fact makes it imperative that you practice taking the LSAT under timed conditions so as to familiarize yourself with the pace that you will need to keep on the day of the exam. Even with such preparation, it is not unusual to find that you are not able to finish each section of the test without a certain amount of guessing. Please note: If utilizing previous LSATs for exam preparation, the exams since 2007 tend to more closely mirror the current level of difficulty for the reading comprehension section. The answer choices are written in such a way that more than one answer may seem correct. Logical reasoning is effectively half of your LSAT score.

When should I take the LSAT?

The LSAT should be taken either in June after the junior year or in early fall of the senior year. In general, students tend to perform better after their junior year, and since there is no advantage to taking it before this time, one should not plan to take it earlier.

Because the fall test date is usually within the first couple weeks of class, many students find that taking the LSAT in June after their junior year is preferable. Also, if students take the exam in late fall and something goes wrong (you get sick the day of the exam, make a mistake on your answer sheet), retaking the exam may negatively impact your chances for admission at schools with rolling admissions (there may be fewer spots available later in the admissions cycle) or financial aid (there may be less money available later in the cycle).

Should I plan to take the LSAT more than once? Should I take a practice test first?

That depends on a number of factors, including the school(s) to which you are applying. Whenever a candidate's LSAT scores are sent to a school via CAS, all scores are sent. However, the ABA only requires law schools to report the highest LSAT scores of admitted students, so most schools only look consider the highest score. But other schools still average the scores or look at all of the scores earned when considering a student for admission. At the end of the day, remember that law schools in which you are interested *see all of your scores*.

Why is the LSAT important?

Many law schools view the LSAT as a good indicator of future performance (i.e. the better you do on the LSAT, the better you will do in law school). Law schools send end-of-first-year grades to the LSAC and they are correlated to LSAT scores. Data indicate there is a relationship between higher scores and better performance as a 1L. This is important because undergraduate studies are often quite different from what you will be doing in law school. The amount of material you study, the type of material you study and how you study it will differ, so admissions offices rely on the LSAT to tell them something about your readiness for law school. The LSAT also provides a common yardstick by which law schools can compare different students from different schools with different majors. It is also relied upon by many schools to help determine amounts of scholarship aid awarded to particular candidates.

When do I apply to law school?

In September, a year before a student plans to enter law school, the student should:

- start investigating law schools
- sign up for the September/October LSAT (if he or she did not already take the June test)
- consult the pre-law advisor

Applications should be completed and sent to the schools to which the student is applying as early as possible in the fall. Some schools make the first round of admissions decisions in November, so it is important to know the admissions cycle of the school(s) to which you are applying.

Are letters of recommendation required?

The majority of law schools require at least one letter of recommendation and may ask for up to three. The strongest letters of recommendation come from faculty who are familiar with a candidate's intellectual abilities, leadership potential, and other skills relevant to a law school admissions committee. Avoid seeking out a recommender who has a fancy title but does not know you well enough to speak to your relevant attributes. Letters from Congressmen, judges, ministers and family members do not carry any weight and can have a negative impact on the committee.

A student does not need to prepare a file of recommendation letters until shortly before applying to law school. However, it is helpful to begin building rapport with instructors or faculty advisors early in your undergraduate career.

Are there particular things that law school admissions offices generally look for in a candidate?

Many law school admissions offices ask the following threshold questions:

- Does this candidate have the ability to succeed academically at our law school?
- What qualities, skills and/or experience does this applicant possess that we consider important to the study/practice of law?
- How does this candidate compare to other candidates?

Is the personal statement important?

Yes. You should treat it as your interview with the admissions committee. Most law schools don't require an actual interview. Try to write a compelling opening paragraph, something that could help your statement stand out from the crowd. This is important given how many applications the committee reads. Make sure your statement is error-free. Students should have the pre-law advisor review their personal statements.