

Pre-Law Guide

Introduction

Law is built on language, argument, and analysis. Your transcript and academic experiences should reflect that. Unlike pre-med or engineering pathways, there is no “pre-law” major or checklist of courses in high school or college. Law schools will admit students from every academic background. What matters most is whether you have developed the mindset/critical thinking skills that strong lawyers rely on. These include deep critical reading, clear writing, logical reasoning, persuasive argument and ability to look at an issue from different angles.

From an admissions perspective, students who later succeed in law school often share certain academic traits in high school:

- They selected rigorous humanities and social science courses (e.g., AP, IB, DE).
- They sought opportunities to challenge and defend ideas with evidence rather than just memorize content (e.g., NSDA, MUN, Mock Trial).
- They built strong relationships with teachers who can speak to the depth of their thinking and writing.

AOs are looking for intellectually curious students who can engage deeply with texts, build structured arguments, and communicate clearly. While exposure to law in high school can be a meaningful “plus”, the foundation (particularly the educational discipline) is far more important at this point. This means reading challenging, dense material, writing frequently and well, and participating in class discussions thoughtfully. Ultimately, these foundational skills are what best prepare students for college and law school.

Academics

English (Most Important)

- AP English Language/Literature or IB English HL

Social Sciences

Minimum Progression: Honors World History to Honors US History (or equivalent country history) to Honors Government.

- If available at your high school, consider: AP World History, AP US History, AP U.S. Government & Politics, AP Comparative Government, or AP Macroeconomics/AP Microeconomics. You do not need to take them all, but AP World History, AP US History, and AP US Government are cornerstones (1 each year of high school).
- IB students: IB History HL, IB Geography HL, IB Global Politics HL
- Electives: Journalism, Newspaper, Yearbook. Government electives are particularly valuable because they expose you to constitutional interpretation, federalism, civil liberties, and policy analysis.

Math

- Pre-law students do not need advanced math beyond what is appropriate for their ability level, but they should demonstrate quantitative competence. AP Calculus AB or AP Statistics by senior year is ideal.

Extracurriculars

Competitions: National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA), Mock Trial, Model UN, Ethics Bowl, International Linguistics Olympiad, Teen Court

Leadership-oriented Teams/Clubs: Girl Scouts, Scouts of America, YMCA Youth & Government, UNICEF, United Way, Boys & Girls Club, Academic Decathlon

Politically-based: High School Democrats of America, Young Americans for Freedom, High School Democrats of America

Experience and Exposure (helpful, but not required): shadowing attorneys, interning with a nonprofit or local government office, volunteering in legal aid organizations, civic engagement work, community organizing

Helpful Note: Reflection matters more than prestige with the national and international competitions. AOs want to understand why you chose to participate in this specific activity, and what lessons you took away from the experience, particularly any challenges you overcame.

Recommendation Letters

Best: (1) AP English Language/Literature, (2) AP US History or AP US Government (or equivalent in your curriculum), and (3) AP Spanish/French/Latin/German (highest level of foreign language)

- **Helpful Note:** AOs want to see specific examples from your teachers that speak to your writing strengths, critical thinking skills, intellectual curiosity, analytical reasoning, integrity, and thoughtfulness.