

# I applied to law school. What happens now?



Center for Pre-Law Advising  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## General process overview

### 1. What happens now?

When you submit an application on the LSAC website, LSAC time stamps the application and prepares it for the school to download. LSAC may also send a paper copy if the school still maintains paper files for applicants. This process may take anywhere from 1 day to several weeks in certain circumstances. For example, some law schools may request LSAC not to forward completed applications until the Law School Report for the applicant is ready. (Unsure what a Law School Report is? See Credential Assembly Service handout.) Once a law school has received an application through LSAC, it will begin a process of review to ensure that all requisite components are included in the application file. This initial review process may conclude relatively quickly, or in some cases it may take several weeks, depending to a great extent on the volume of applications being processed by the school at that time. To give applicants some insight into the seeming black box of the admissions process, many law schools offer an Online Status Check website. For example, the University of Wisconsin's Status Checker website informs applicants when an application is received from LSAC, when an application is placed in the queue for review by the admissions committee, when the committee begins its review, and when a decision has been reached. If you are accepted, most schools will communicate that information to you by phone call or e-mail. If you are placed on hold, placed on a wait list, or rejected, you will receive an e-mail and/or letter at your address on record.

### 2. How soon before I hear back?

There is, unfortunately, no specific answer to this question. In rare cases, some applicants may receive an answer within a few weeks, but the process typically takes 2–4 months. If your application is placed on hold or if you are placed on a wait list then it may take several additional months to receive a final decision. In the meantime, continue to check the online status check for each school, and check your LSAC account to confirm that each school has requested a Law School Report from LSAC within a few weeks after you submitted your application.

## What do the different statuses mean?

### 1. What is a wait list?

A wait list (or reserve list as some schools refer to it) is comprised of applicants who the admissions committee has determined are academically qualified to attend the school, but the admissions committee is not yet prepared to offer the applicants a spot in the incoming class for various reasons. The manner in which law schools use wait lists varies significantly school-by-school and year-by-year. Some schools admit applicants off the wait list even before the deadline to apply has passed. Others wait until after the first seat deposit deadline (the deadline for admitted students to pay a fee to hold their seat in the incoming class) has passed to admit applicants from the wait list. In more competitive years, law schools may not admit anyone from the wait list. In the 2013 admissions cycle, for example, law schools admitted a significant number of applicants from their wait lists, while in more competitive years they have admitted a smaller number of applicants from wait lists. The proportions can vary greatly.

In general, law schools tend not to rank or order the applicants on their wait lists. Even those schools that do rank wait list applicants tend to do so using general quartiles or broad categories of priority. It varies school-by-school as to whether the school will inform an applicant where he/she stands on the wait list.

### 2. What is a hold?

A law school's decision to place a student on hold is not really a decision at all. Think of it more as a notification that there will be a delay in the school's processing of your application. The school might later decide to admit you, reject you, or place you on a wait list. It is difficult to read any meaning into the use of a hold on an application.

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## How to increase your wait list odds

When you are placed on a wait list, most law schools will request you to return a form confirming your desire to remain on the wait list. While it is important that you take this step, merely returning the form is not sufficient in order to be admitted from the wait list at many schools. Law schools often will not admit someone from the wait list unless the applicant has advocated for his or her admission in some way. Note, however, that some law schools specifically instruct applicants placed on the wait list not to submit any supplementary materials or take any steps in an effort to gain admission. If you are placed on a wait list, it will be your responsibility to determine what a school permits from wait-listed applicants. If you are allowed, consider taking one of the following steps:

### 1. Submit One or More Letters of Continuing Interest

Letters of continuing interest are one-page business-style letters in which you may (1) update the school on relevant information post-dating your application (new academic awards, employment promotions, fall semester grades, etc.) and (2) explain in greater detail why you want to attend this particular law school. It is probably intuitive that updating the school on relevant, recent developments of note may help you stand out in comparison to others on the wait list. The importance of talking about why you want to attend that particular law school or, phrased differently, why the law school is a good fit for you, may be less intuitive. In most cases, law schools want to extend an offer of admission only to wait list applicants who are very likely to accept that offer. By articulating the basis for your desire to attend the school, you are evidencing that you have devoted thought and research in your decision to apply to this particular school and are therefore more likely to accept an offer. Even more useful, if you are sure that you would accept an offer from the school, say so explicitly in the LOCI. It is appropriate to send multiple LOCIs if you remain on the wait list for an extended period. Sending one per month is not unreasonable and allows you to assure the school that nothing has occurred in the interim that impacts your desire to attend.

### 2. Submit an Additional Letter of Recommendation

Many schools will accept one or more additional letters of recommendation from applicants placed on the wait list. If your school does accept them, remember that academic letters are more helpful to admissions committees.

### 3. Submit Any Optional Essays Suggested By the School

If a law school allows you to submit an optional essay, you should take the time to write a strong essay. It helps to convey the seriousness of your interest and gives the admissions committee another writing sample to evaluate.

### 4. Set Up a Formal Visit

Visiting a school conveys the seriousness of your interest in the school. In many cases, it may also lead to face time with an admissions representative, which can be helpful.

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## Wait list logistics

Applicants usually remain on a wait list long after the seat deposit deadlines have passed at the other schools where the applicants were accepted. If you are wait listed at School A, you will need to decide whether there is a School B you would be willing to attend if you aren't admitted at School A or whether you will wait and apply again to School A the following application cycle. If you are sure that you want to attend law school the upcoming fall regardless of whether you are admitted from the wait list at School A, then submit a seat deposit at School B. This is a common practice, and it raises no ethical issues if you get off the wait list at School A and decide to attend there instead. The only drawback to placing a seat deposit at School B is that you may lose the deposit if you get off the wait list at School A; not all schools refund seat deposits.

The second logistical issue arises if Schools A and B are in different cities. If you are still on the wait list at School A in August, you will likely need to sign a contract for housing near School B. If you do so, be conscious of any penalty clauses for breaking that contract, a necessary step if you are later admitted off the wait list at School A. You would also need to arrange to move your belongings quickly.