

ENLIGHTENMENT: HOW TO WRITE/TYPE A LAW SCHOOL EXAM

I. Utilizing Your Cheat Sheets/Checklists

During each academic semester, you are given an exorbitant amount of material to learn. Not only must you learn this material, but because most law school examinations are “closed-book,” you must memorize this material as well. We have specifically designed our cheat sheets to serve as checklists to help you write great exam answers.

II. Taking the Exam (step-by-step)

A. Pre-Reading Drills

As soon as you are prompted to begin your examination, immediately jot down the headings of our cheat sheets to make sure you do not miss any issues. For example, if you are taking your final examination in civil procedure, you would immediately jot down:

Subject Matter Jurisdiction
Personal Jurisdiction
Service of Process
Venue
Pleadings
Joinder
Discovery
Jury Trial and Related Motions
Judgments
Finality and Appellate Review

Do not write down any rules because at this point, you already know the rules cold and should be able to regurgitate them upon demand.

B. Read the Question Twice

The purpose of the first reading is to get the big picture. You will be given a great deal of information and asked to process that information in a short period of time. During your first reading, you need to make sure that you understand what the question is asking you to do. If you do not answer the question asked, you will not receive a good score. Pay attention to the potential parties, dates, relationships, and descriptive words.

During your second reading, underline the facts that comprise the legal issues. Make notes in the margins, jot down your mental cues, begin to organize your answer, and be prepared to write.

C. Identify the rule that will resolve the issue or answer the question. In most instances, you need to know more than the majority rule. Minority rules are important when evaluating alternative arguments. These are typically found in the dissent of your case opinions.

D. Number each issue to establish the order in which you will answer the questions. Focus on the major issues first. These issues will be identified in your outlines/checklists.

E. Start by addressing the most important issue first, following I-R-A-C for each issue. Remember to address both sides of an issue. Do not make conclusory statements. Make sure you explain why and how you reach your conclusions. Show your professor that your reasoning is based on the law and that you are applying the facts of the questions to the law. Address every genuine issue that the fact pattern raises. If a rule requires five (5) elements, address all five (5) even if your conclusion in element number (1) would make the other elements moot.

Do not ignore issues because you think they are too obvious. You may dispose of the matter in a line or two, but let the reader know that you recognize the issue.

F. Aesthetic issues

One often-ignored aspect of writing your law school exams is the aesthetic issue. We highly recommend using headings. Use a heading for each major issue that you will be discussing. Underline each heading.

Additionally, imagine you are a professor and you have to read 300 exams. Would you rather read a legible exam or an illegible one? Clearly you would rather read the legible answer. To this end, we highly recommend that you utilize headings and write as neatly as possible. Write on every other line of the blue book. First, this will make your essay appear more legible. Second, if you leave out anything, you can always go back and add it.

If your writing is illegible, consider typing your exams.