

HOW TO STUDY FOR YOUR LAW SCHOOL EXAMS

Effective study strategies can help you learn the material more efficiently with better retention. The way in which you study has a great deal to do with your law school success.

OVERVIEW

You should start studying at least a month before your final exams. Take a few of the LawExams.com practice tests before you even start studying. While you may not do well on these first tests they will give you an overview of what your final study goal is: writing a high scoring law school essay exam.

After taking a few tests you will realize the Key Skills you must learn through studying:

1. Be able to spot the legal issues in a fact pattern.
2. Be able to recite the black letter law for the legal issue from memory.

If you are serious about getting a top score you will need to add one more skill:

3. Recognizing fact patterns which are similar to cases discussed in class and knowing the holding of those cases.

Unfortunately, this is a skill which will be specific to your class and there is nothing but regular class attendance and case briefing which can help you with this skill.

If you do not have time to master Skill 3 or your class attendance and case briefing were horrendous, do not worry. The vast majority of points allocated on an exam answer test skills 1 and 2, the Key Skills.

PLAN YOUR ATTACK

Make a cursory outline of every topic covered in class and set out a frame work to cover all of these topics with a week to spare before the exam is scheduled.

Start with the main ideas in each topic. Use the LawExams.com elemental reviews to help set out the big picture. Learning main ideas first gives you a framework in which to hang supporting ideas and details. Study to recall material, not just for recognition. Practice the Key Skills by identifying issues and reciting the rules of law for that issue from memory. If you plan to handwrite your exam answer, write out these rules of law. If you plan to type, then type them out.

If you have time, work on Skill 3. First start with cases that the professor spent a significant amount of time on in class. You can almost guarantee that fact patterns either similar to or purposely distinguished from these cases will appear on your final exam. Review the fact patterns in that case. Memorize the name of the case and the holding. Think of ways the fact pattern can be changed to reach a different outcome.

Use the LawExams.com flashcards. Write out your own flashcards or at least copy the ones from LawExams.com on to notecards. The simple act of re-writing the flash cards helps commit this information to memory. Carry the notecards and the elemental reviews with you everywhere you go. Whenever you have a few minutes pull them out and study.

Periodically take a LawExams.com practice exam. You do not want to take these exams all at once. Spread them out, it helps you practice.

If you have an open book/note exam, type out all the cases and concepts in 2 pages. You probably know all the material, but can't remember certain words. Don't waste time by looking through pages upon pages during the exam. Have a skeleton concept outline right in front of you in an easy-to-read font.

Study with concentration and intensity. Think about your material, don't merely memorize it. If you can see the overall organization, it is easier to remember the details.

Talk to people who have had the class or the professor. Learn about the exams. Ask several people because opinions differ. Think of questions you would ask on the exam. If old exams are available from your professor get them and answer them. If your professors don't have any, take other professor's exams.

Finally, find a reason to enjoy the material and study for the enjoyment. You have to know it, you might as well like knowing it.

ONE WEEK BEFORE THE EXAM

With one week to go prior to the final exam, use the Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R) study method to truly overlearn the material.

1. Survey:

Go back to the beginning and take a broad overview of all of the topics covered in the course. This again provides a framework in which to hang details or supporting ideas.

2. Question:

For each topic, generate questions to focus studying. Write out close questions of law (When is consideration for a contract enough consideration? What is the ordinary course of business? What is reasonable for a particular situation? Remember, exam questions don't just ask you to recite back information you have learned. They ask you to evaluate and analyze that information and apply it to different situations.

3. Read:

Read through all the materials, including class notes, outlines, flashcards, elemental reviews, and briefing sheets. Read carefully, paying special attention to any underlined sections you may have marked.

4. Recall and write:

This is the most important part of studying. You want to memorize as much pertinent information as you can. Close the book or cover your notes and summarize the main points. Practice recalling and writing important concepts and definitions. Remember: on a law school essay exam you must be able to recite the black letter law cold.

5. Review:

Go back and review all the material again. This helps to fix the information in your long-term memory. Now, you should be able to answer all the questions you posed to yourself. If you can't, review again. Make sure you understand the concepts, don't just memorize names and details.

Take one or two more LawExams.com practice essay exams.

Relax, you are going to do great!