

The cover features a dark blue L-shaped graphic in the top-left corner. A light blue rectangular area contains the title text. A vertical grey bar is on the right side, and a white area at the bottom contains the subtitle text.

Academic Success Toolkit

A resource guide to
achieving your personal
best in law school



This guide was created by Stetson University College of Law's
Department of Academic Success and Bar Preparation Services © 2016

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Introduction

Welcome to the Academic Success Toolkit, a resource guide created to assist you in achieving your personal best in law school. Wherever you are on your journey through the College of Law, this guide can help you to make the most out of your learning experiences and find your edge.

As you work through the guide, be sure to complete all of the Time Out exercises. They are designed to help you identify personal strengths and weaknesses, and reflect on how you can reach personal and academic success.

There is no magic recipe for law school success. Indeed, hard work, dedication and determination are ingredients. Still, you will need to discover what works for you and how you learn best in order to excel. That's what this toolkit and the Department of Academic Success and Bar Preparation Services is all about. Now, let's get to work.

How this toolkit is organized:

Step 1: Get Started

In this phase of the toolkit we explore how to set yourself up for success. Law school is a very different learning environment than any you have previously experienced. At times it can be stressful and overwhelming. Let's explore why you are here, how you learn, and find ways to live a healthy and balanced life throughout law school. Remember, this is your journey and the path to success starts with knowing what works for you.

Step 2: Build Skills

In phase two, we tackle concrete learning tools and resources that can assist you throughout law school and beyond. This includes strategies to employ during class, outside of class and in the exam preparation process.

Step 3: Achieve your Personal Best

We believe that all Stetson students can achieve their personal best and thrive in the study of law. Phase three explores ways to find your edge and excel.

Contact the Academic Success Program

The Department of Academic Success and Bar Preparation Services is here for you from 1L year through graduation and beyond. Our team of advisors believes that all Stetson students can achieve their personal best both in law school and on the bar exam. We are here to help each individual not only succeed, but thrive. Let us help you identify strategies that work for you.

**We are located on the Gulfport Campus
in the Law Library, Rooms 139-132**

Call us at 727-562-7343, or email

asp@law.stetson.edu

**Make an appointment
today to learn how we can
best assist and support you.**

STEP 1

Get Started

Success starts with making a plan

The Why

It all starts with The Why. What do we mean by The Why? That's simple, it's the core reason behind your actions. We have adapted this idea from the brilliant Simon Sinek, author of *Start with Why*.

For more on Mr. Sinek and his Golden Circle idea, check out this TED Talk:

How Great Leaders Inspire Action

Law school is an incredible, but also incredibly difficult experience. It is challenging, stressful, and pushes you to think in new ways. The sheer volume of work can be draining. In order to thrive in this environment, it is absolutely critical you develop and hold onto your Why.

Your Why can be any reason, but it must be personal to you and it must be based on your values and true motivations. Making money, reputation, prestige—these are all potential outcomes, or what you could get from your work. These are not Whys because you could reach them in many ways. What is it about the law specifically that drives you? The Time Out on the next page will help you to think through your Why.

Time Out:

When I applied to law school, the reason I wanted to pursue legal studies was:

The reason I want to pursue legal studies now is:

If the answer has changed, why do you feel differently?

How will the study of law help you to impact the world in a positive way?

The law is a service profession. Who do you want to serve as an attorney?

The How

Everyone has different learning styles and preferences. Do you have a particular “go-to” study method? Are you an audio or visual learner? It may be that you have never had to think much about how you learn before. If that’s the case, it is important to start exploring how you learn now and find what works best for you.

What style learner are you?

Some students prefer to learn new material through reading, while others prefer to listen to a speaker, or learn best through pictures or graphical representations of material. Law school requires you to learn an incredible amount of new material and understanding your preferences can help you. Remember, no matter what your preferred learning style, **all students learn best by combining various preferences** when interacting with new material.

Find your preferred style here:

[VARK Questionnaire](#)

Managing your Time:

Tips and Strategies

Keep a calendar

- Identify your most productive times of day; plan your most academically challenging tasks then.
- Enter **all** activities, from school work to recreation, to dinner time into your calendar.
- Avoid just entering "study time" on your calendar. Be specific: list goals for each hour, and plan study breaks too!

Work with a partner or mentor who will hold you accountable, especially for the first few weeks.

Scenario 1:

Sam Student is a 1L. He never had to keep a schedule before and had a lot of free time in undergrad to hang out with friends. He is used to cramming for exams. Sam thinks that as long as he starts studying a bit earlier, these general habits will work well in law school.

Scenario 2:

Sally Student is a 1L. In undergrad she was involved in a sorority, played an intermural sport twice a week, and volunteered at a children's charity. Afraid that law school would be much more demanding than undergrad, Sally decides not to join any clubs, sports teams or volunteer during her first semester. Instead, she plans to study all day, every day.

What's wrong with these pictures?

Often students who are successful juggling a busy schedule struggle to manage their time when they suddenly have no structure. Yes, you will need to devote many more hours to study than ever before. That doesn't mean you should give up on what you know works for you. Are you more productive with a lot going on? If yes, get involved—just not overinvolved. If you are used to cramming or don't know how to create a workable schedule for yourself, come see us. We are here to help you! It is not possible to cram in law school.

Time Out:

Try using a calendar to conceptualize your time during the week. Each study block should lay out exactly what you will be accomplishing.

Take a look at this [Example Weekly Schedule](#)

In total, this example schedule contains 42 hours per week of class and prep time (the Miscellaneous boxes being optional). As you move through the semester, demands like papers and preparing for finals will increase your weekly workload. It is imperative that you find and stick to a schedule that works, so that you won't become overwhelmed by the heavier workload later in the semester.

Use this template to [Create Your Own Calendar](#)

Managing Stress:

Tips and Strategies

We all face stress in our daily lives. This can be exacerbated in law school. It is important to practice stress management techniques and find ways to cope with stress when you encounter it.

Start by checking-in with yourself, at least daily. How stressed are you? What caused the stress? What can you do in the present moment to alleviate the cause of the stress, or to simply move past the stress into a healthier, more productive emotion?

If you practice being self-aware, it can help you to better manage and cope with stress.

Try to:

Exercise: Get at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise three times weekly

Eat Right: Seek a balanced diet; moderate sugar, alcohol and caffeine intake

Sleep Right: Stick to a regular sleep schedule; shoot for 6-8 hours nightly

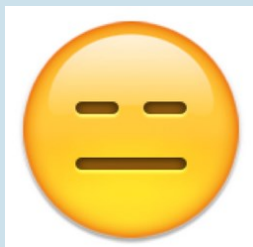
Anticipate and prepare for stressful situations:

- On a **daily basis**, practice relaxation techniques, such as meditation, deep breathing, and visualization
- Employ the relaxation techniques you practiced before the stressful event.

Check-in: How Stressed am I?



Not stressed; calm!



Mildly stressed.



Very stressed, but coping.



Freaking out!!

What is Mindfulness?

“**Mindfulness** is a state of active, open attention on the present. When you're **mindful**, you observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them good or bad. Instead of letting your life pass you by, **mindfulness** means living in the moment and awakening to experience.”

-Psychology Today

Mindfulness is a clinically proven method for reducing stress and improving brain function. In fact:

Moderate meditation for 3 months at the novice level has been shown to significantly reduce cortisol levels—a stress hormone.

Studies have shown that mindfulness meditation regulates stress, emotion and attention. How does it work?

Stress activates the amygdala (the part of your brain that interferes with attention, thinking and decision making). Mindfulness helps to reduce your bodies production of cortisol, a stress hormone, thus counteracting the amygdala's control.

Mindfulness also helps your brain function better. It improves executive function, cognitive flexibility, and both long and short term memory.

For more information on this powerful stress reduction tool and resources to help you get started with your own mindfulness practice, check out this brief presentation: [Mindfulness](#).

Time Out:

Let's take just a few minutes to see what this mindfulness is all about.

Listen

Post meditation reflection:

How did you feel while listening to the meditation?

Did you feel uncomfortable? If so, how?

Did your mind wander? If so, were you able to return your concentration back to the present moment?

How do you feel now?

Campus Resources

Q: What's the difference between a stand-out law student and one who just gets by?

A: The stand-out student knows when to ask for help.

Learning the law is like learning a new language. You would never be able to speak perfect Italian if you only practiced at home alone. So, don't attempt to learn the law or navigate through law school alone.

There are many resources on campus to help you through this process:

The Department of Academic Success and Bar Preparation Services

The Office of Career Development

Student Life

Eckerd Counseling Services: Free counseling services are available to you as a Stetson student. Click the link above to schedule an appointment today.

STEP 2

Build Skills

It's what you do when no one is watching that matters most

Critical Reading

As future attorneys, you are part of a large, common law system. Common law is made by judges. This is different than enacted law, or statutes passed into law by the government. Your task is to read and understand the law so that you can on day explain it to the judge in a way that is favorable to your client's case. So, critically reading and understanding court opinions means you are "thinking like a lawyer."

A critical reader:

- **Uses context clues**

What does your syllabus, table of contents or casebook headings tell you about why this case is important?

- **Connects to the text**

Bring your prior knowledge, experience, and ideas to your reading. What do you think the case is about? What do you already know about the issues in the case?

- **Questions prior notions or understanding**

Reflect; how does the case change your prior knowledge?

- **Defines unknown terms**

Don't guess at what terms mean, look them up! Do you really know what en banc or per curiam means?

- **Considers the significance of the case**

Why is this case important?

- **Tracks time**

Set limits on how long a reading assignment should take and stick to it. Don't needlessly re-read. Instead, lookup or mark down what you don't understand and ask for clarification in class.

Case Briefing

A brief is a document that summarizes a case in your own words, based on your understanding of the judge's opinion. This **note taking device** is meant to help you manage all of the information in a court opinion and be prepared for class. Briefing cases should help you analyze the opinion in the case and organize how the court came to the decision. Briefs can also create a good structure to the in-class notes you take. Instead of trying to record everything the professor is saying about a case, your brief allows you to simply add to, correct, and improve your understanding of the case. There is no exact right way to make a brief; but, it should capture all of the elements that influence YOUR understanding of the case. There are some common elements that most briefs share. Those are:

- **Case style and procedural history**
- **Facts**
- **Issue**
- **Holding**
- **Reasoning**
- **Rule**

The exercise on the next page will help you to better understand these parts.

Time Out:

Parts of a Brief Defined

Style + Procedural History

The style of a case is the who, what, where and when. Who are the parties to the case? What is the charge or cause of action? Where is the case being heard (i.e. which court are we in)? When is the case taking place, or the historical context. The procedural history of the case is how we got before this specific court. This matters to your interpretation of the decision.

Facts

Do not rewrite the entire case. Many new law students give up on briefing because they feel it is too time consuming. If you are feeling this way, you are probably including too many and too detailed of facts. You only want facts that trigger your memory, and those that give rise to the dispute or legal argument. Think about using shorthand to save time.

Issue

This is the legal question being asked of the court. There may be more than one issue in a case. To find the issue look for a statement of rule language that applies to the key facts.

Holding

This is the court's answer to the issue being raised. The holding is where we find out who won and who lost. Look for words like: affirm, reverse, remand, render, grant, deny.

Reasoning/ Rational

This is the court's "why." It explains how the court came to its decision and helps other courts determine when this case will be binding. Things to look for: Did the court draw an analogy to another case with similar facts? Did the court apply a statute or regulation? Did the court have a public policy reason behind its decision? Did the court feel any other decision would be unfair—i.e. equity demanded the decision?

Rule

This is the synthesized holding that will become part of the common law. It is the legal principle that led to the court's holding.

Your Turn:

Read this case: Heien v. North Carolina

Now, complete a case brief:

Style + Procedural History:

Facts:

Issue:

Holding:

Reasoning:

Rule:

Outlining

Outlining can be an effective method to organize and conceptualize vast amounts of information. Headings and subheadings allow you to keep track of how different concepts and cases fit together. Even if you successfully used outlines as a study method in the past, outlining a law school course may feel different or overwhelming. You may be thinking:

"What's important enough to put in the outline? What if I leave something out that was critical? What is the best way to organize all of this material?"

First, it is critical to understand there is no one perfect style for outlining. Outlining is a verb. It is a method of active learning. If you aren't outlining to condense, synthesize and keep track of the big picture, it won't matter how long or well tabbed your outline is. An ideal outline is used for synthesizing and condensing information, not recording your entire class. It is not your class notes.

Ask yourself, "Is my outlining strategy helping me to learn?"

Outlining Tips

True or False: The best outlines are rule driven.

This is true. An outline should help you to pull concepts together, to keep track of general legal rules and the nuances to those rules from the cases you have read.

True or False: Format matters.

This is true. The format your outline takes should make sense with how the class is structured, what your professor has focused on, and the material itself. It also needs to match how you think!

A traditional format that works well for some students—not all—uses the table of contents from your case book as the base (use your syllabus if the class is reading out of order). After class, you would condense your class notes, pulling out rule statements and clear concepts. This is the information you want to record in your outline. That means, the cases are important for what they stand for and how they help you consider the legal concepts you are studying—you do not need all of the facts. Each week you will add this condensed material to the skeleton outline you created from the table of contents.

Not sure if you what you are doing is working?

Bring your outlines in to Academic Success and review your work with one of our advisors.

DO have a system and stick to it

DO focus on the big picture of the course

DO identify and define important concepts

DO make the outline your own; personalize it to your learning style and needs

DO start early, and refine the outline frequently

DO seek help if you need it

DO condense or make a shrinking outline for final exams

DON'T create a transcript of the course

DON'T include full case briefs

DON'T leave any questions unanswered

DON'T waste time recording irrelevant facts

DON'T wait until the end of the semester

DON'T rely on commercial outlines or outlines generated by your peers—this should be a part of your learning process

Outlining: Do's and Don'ts

Practice Makes Perfect

One of the toughest adjustments to make in law school is the exam and grading schedule.

Some of your professors may give a midterm, but it's likely that for at least a few of your classes, you will only receive one grade each semester – *your final exam*.

This means that you might not practice applying what you are learning until the end of the semester. Many students spend their first semester wondering, "Am I getting it?"

It is imperative that you find ways to apply the information you are learning in class. The best way to do this is to work through practice problems and hypotheticals. In fact, the most effective way to learn new material is to *practice answering questions*. What's the least effective, you ask? Rereading material is proven to be least effective way to learn and retain material in the long term.

This means you should be doing practice problems before you feel totally comfortable with the material, because it will help you learn! Make sure to spend some time working through the problems in your casebooks. These are just as important as the cases.

A good time to do practice problems is at the end of covering a new subject within the course. So, you might not be doing property practice problems on the first day, but you should definitely work through some problems after covering adverse possession.

Hype for Hypotheticals

One type of practice problem you will hear a lot about is a hypothetical, or “hypo” for short. A hypo is a story of sorts. It is a narrative that describes various people, their interactions, and harms. Each hypo contains various legal issues, or causes of action. The hypo will end with what we call “the call of the question.” This is a prompt that lets you know what to look for, and what to include in your answer. Hypos are the most common format of law school essay exams. You will need to spot issues, define rules, analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the parties position and draw a conclusion about the probable outcome of the situation.

It is impossible to excel on a hypo based essay exam without practicing the skill beforehand. Here in Academic Success we have a bank of hypothetical questions to share with you.

After you have reviewed and answered a hypo, submit it to **asp@law.steston.edu** for feedback. We are happy to meet with you and talk about where you can improve your exam writing skills.

Many of your professors will also make hypos or old exams available to you. These are your number one, best, most important (did I say best?), learning tools! Don’t just answer these—review them with your professors too! Your professor truly is your best source for feedback.

Study Groups

Another reality of law school is the “study group.”

You may hear your classmates forming study groups, and you might feel like you are falling behind if you do not join one. Again, there is no right or wrong here. If you are person who has always learned best through independent study, you may be better off sticking to that strategy. If done correctly, a study group could help you master course material by providing you with another source for feedback. If you do choose to form a study group, the following tips will help you to get the most out of your time together:

1. SET GOALS

- Plan ahead—what exactly will you discuss?
- Be realistic about what you can accomplish in one meeting

2. TIME MANAGEMENT

- Make a plan for how long you will spend on each topic
- Leave enough time for the hardest topics
- Remember to schedule breaks and stick to the schedule
- Who will lead the meeting?

3. DISCUSS

- Discussion means listening to each other
- Focus on what you learned in class and in readings

4. COME PREPARED

- Do not divide work
- Not a substitute for individual learning
- Think REVIEW

5. NOT SOCIAL HOUR

- You know what this means

6. PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- Use questions to stay focused
- Review all members’ answers and learn from each other

7. MOTIVATION

- Help each other stay on track
- Be positive
- Critique don’t criticize

Our office has resources specially designed to help your group succeed.

Study Group Bags are now available for all IL topics. Pick one up today in LIB 139!

Commercial Study Aids

Your professors will assign plenty of required reading materials. These will be case law textbooks, rule books, and other assigned reading for class.

You will almost certainly hear your classmates talking about a ton of other resources apart from your assigned textbooks. Someone might say, "My friend is a 2L here, and she gave me her outline for this class." Or you might see your colleagues carrying around extra books for one of your classes.

You will think to yourself, "I wonder if that material is better than what I'm using to study?" Do not give in to this temptation! Study aids are meant to *supplement* what you are learning in class; they are not a substitute for course materials!

Supplemental reading may help you to find a structure for your notes, or clear up a concept you are struggling with. You will find that your own notes are still the best resource, since they are specific to your professor.

Remember, your professor's materials, problems, and any old exams or hypos they make available are the best supplemental source.

Trust me, you will have plenty to read, and you don't want to be distracted by an outline that is not specific to your professor. Instead, pick up, *at most*, **1** good commercial resource for your class and use it to clarify or supplement your learning along the way.

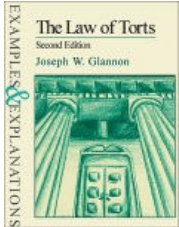
So, which ones do we recommend?

Academic Success Bibliography

Practice Based Supplements

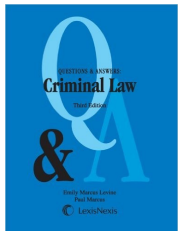
(Or where to find additional practice problems):

Examples & Explanations Series



Published by Wolters Kluwer, this supplemental series includes books on all 1L subjects and most other law school courses as well. This series includes short, but comprehensive chapters explaining concepts in plain terms. Chapters also contain hypotheticals and explanatory answers. Students can use this series to test themselves on key concepts.

Questions & Answers Series



Published by LexisNexis, this series is the ultimate guide for multiple choice practice sets.

Law in a Flash, Series of Flashcard Sets



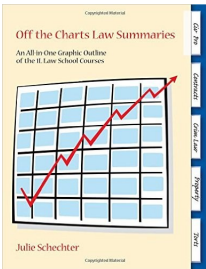
Also created by Wolters Kluwer, these flashcards are a part of the Emanuel series of supplements. These pre-made flashcards save you time and help you to review key terms, concepts and cases. Some cards also contain short hypothetical problems.



Cali.org Lessons, Online concept lessons with multiple choice quizzes

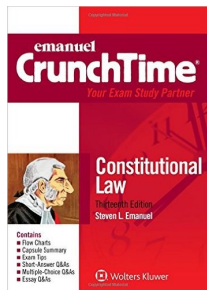
Cali Lessons are short video lectures on key concepts, presented by law school professors. Test yourself after each lecture with a short quiz. Free login info available for Stetson students.

Informational Books/ Commercial Outlines:



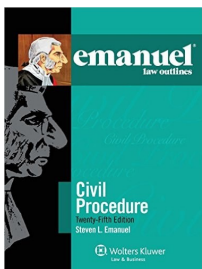
Julie Schechter, *Off the Charts Law Summaries: An All-In-One Graphic Outline of the 1L Law School Courses* (Carolina Academic Press 2014)

This is a helpful book for the visual learners out there. Each 1L subject and subtopics are broken down into useful charts and tables. This book can help you to organize vast amounts of information into useable, visual schemas.



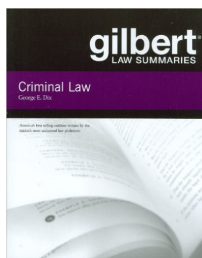
CrunchTime Series from Emanuel

Published by Wolters Kluwer, the CrunchTime series from Emanuel contains short outlines of key concepts. Series covers most law school courses. Each section also provides flow charts to help you conceptualize how various concepts work together. Great for visual learners.



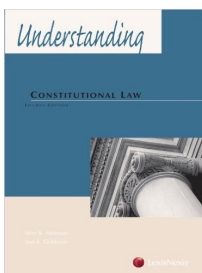
Emanuel Law Outlines Series

Detailed commercial outlines available for most law school courses. This series is also published by Wolters Kluwer. Helpful to conceptualize what a rule-driven outline might look like. Not a substitute to creating your own outline, this series can provide clear explanations of many key concepts and also includes some exam tips.



Gilbert Law Summaries Series

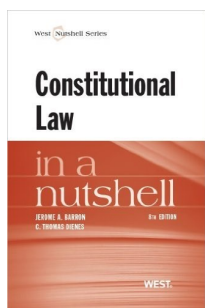
Published by Thomas/West, this commercial outline series is also available for most law school courses.



Understanding Series

Published by LexisNexis, this series delves deeper into concepts and ideas and is structured as a true text, rather than outline. Great for students who like to learn with a narrative.

Informational Books/ Commercial Outlines cont'd:



Law in a Nutshell

Published by West, this series is available for most law school courses. The outline is more chapter based and covers key concepts, terms and ideas.

Strategy Based Books (Or where to learn about law school learning):

Alex Schimel, *Law School Exams: A Guide to Better Grades* (Carolina Academic Press 2012)

This practical, straight-forward book explains how to effectively approach law school essay exam questions. This short read provides a very detailed and methodical approach to law school exam preparation, including six critical tips to implement when preparing for exams and five big mistakes to avoid.

Herbert N. Ramy, *Succeeding in Law School* (Carolina Academic Press 2006)

Covers all aspects of law school from preparing for the first day of classes to exams; helpful chapter on dealing with law school stress.

Michael Hunter Schwartz, *Expert Learning for Law Students* (Carolina Academic Press 2005)

Focuses on explaining and applying learning theory to the law school environment.

Ruth Ann McKinney, *Reading Like a Lawyer: Time Saving Strategies for Reading Law Like an Expert* (Carolina Academic Press 2005)

Good discussion of critical reading skills; exercises to help improve reading comprehension.

STEP 3

Achieve Your Personal Best

If you look back and know you tried your hardest, you are a success

Growth Mindset

Our #1 tip for you in law school is...

Develop a Growth Mindset

This is a term coined by Carol Dweck, a psychology professor at Stanford. She explains that your mindset is the set of beliefs you hold about yourself and your most basic qualities.

People with a fixed mindset believe that their intelligence and talent are fixed traits that cannot be changed. However, all great lawyers, CEO's, teachers, and athletes know that their most basic abilities can be developed and expanded through hard work; they have developed a growth mindset.

A fixed mindset says, "Are you sure you can do that?"

A growth mindset says, "I might not be able to do that right now, but I will get there."

What we're saying is: Take risks. Law school is brand new to you, and you will likely struggle with the material you are learning. Be patient with yourself and don't be afraid to learn from failure. If you can develop a growth mindset and maintain a positive outlook, you will be successful here.

Along the way try to remember...

Law school is completely new to you. You will be asked to think and express yourself in ways that are completely different from anything you've ever done.

If it doesn't come naturally to you, that's ok. *We know that adults learn better from failure than they do from success.*

That means that if you get something wrong, you actually retain it better than if you had gotten it right.

Learn from your mistakes, don't be controlled by them. If you can develop a thick skin, your mistakes will not be set-backs, they will actually help you learn.

Secondly, much of your learning in law school will likely happen in a confrontational setting.

You will be confronted with different viewpoints on the same rule of law. For every argument, there is a counter-argument, and you will be asked to defend your position.

Don't take this confrontation personally. You are training to become a professional advocate, and your colleagues are here to help you grow into that role.

Learn to develop your position or your argument, and don't take it as a personal attack if you encounter the opposite viewpoint. On that note, there is a difference between confrontation and rudeness. **Be kind to your peers**; you may just see them at the bench one day and feel glad that you were.

Self-Evaluation v. Feedback

The other day, I was driving to work and singing—nay belting along with the radio. And you know what? I felt like I sounded pretty good. That is until the radio cut out and I heard, what I can only assume was still a better version of how I really sound.

Lesson: No matter how objective we try to be, we can't hear ourselves.

Law school exam writing is different than anything you've done before. It is impossible to know if you are really answering the question the way your professor wants if you only self-evaluate. Just as I over evaluated my singing abilities, you **will** over evaluate how good your response is. Don't fall into this trap. So, where do you seek feedback?

The best source of feedback is your professors, because they are experts on the topic (and the ones giving the grades). You will find that your professors are approachable, and that they actually *like meeting with students*.

Our office can also review your writing and give general guidance on essay structure and formatting, as well as multiple choice testing skills.

If you haven't noticed this already, Stetson is truly an academic community. We want to help! Bring in some work today and experience the feedback difference.

Forest or Trees?

How often and in how many contexts have you heard the saying, “don’t lose sight of the forest for the trees?”

Probably too many. I promise, law school is the one place where this warning can become all too real.

Throughout the semester, you will read countless pages containing countless cases, with countless nuanced holdings and rules. At times, these cases will begin to blur together. On top of that, your class time will often focus on the nitty-gritty details of cases. You may spend an entire class time debating whether or not a whale is similar to a fox (that actually may happen, just wait for Pierson v. Post and Ghen v. Rich). By the end of the semester your heads and hearts will be full of facts and details, and nuances. And that’s great! That’s helping you to think like a lawyer, to create syllogisms and distinguish fact patterns.

At the end of the semester, you will still need that information and those skills; but, you will also need to be able to talk about legal concepts at a higher level. You will need to know how all of the issues and legal rules fit together, and you will need to apply them to a new set of facts on the exam. You need the big picture!

The cases and the facts from those cases are the trees. Keep asking yourself throughout the semester, “Do I understand how this case and this rule fits into the bigger picture of this course?” The big picture, my friends, is the forest.

Exam Strategy

Most law schools exams are made up of essay questions, multiple choice, or some combination of the two. Whatever form your exams take, it is imperative to practice. Here are some additional tips for success on exams:

TOP 10 ESSAY EXAM TIPS

(Or steps for approaching an essay exam):

- 1) Determine how many questions are on the exam, the point values of each, and allot your time accordingly.
- 2) Read the instructions and call of the question first! This is what the question is asking you to do, and is usually at the end of the question.
- 2) Skim the question to get an overall idea of the facts.
- 3) Read the question thoroughly and carefully a second time. Underline, circle, highlight important words and facts and/or make notes in the margins.
- 4) Briefly outline or make an **issue checklist**
- 5) Finally, begin writing. Make sure that you make it clear which issue you are addressing, state a clear rule of law that relates to the issue, analyze which facts in the hypo demonstrate/support/contradict that rule, AND WHY those facts lead to a certain legal conclusion. Whatever form you use to organize your response, it must touch on these elements to be a success.
- 6) Do not waste time with a facts section, like you might in a memo. Just use the facts that matter in your analysis.

ESSAY EXAM TIPS cont'd

- 7) If a rule has multiple elements (e.g. Battery = 1. Intentional 2. Touching of another 3. Causing harm). You must perform a full analysis for each element. This means, you need to state the sub-rule for each element, analyze which facts in the hypo demonstrate/support/contradict that rule, AND WHY those facts lead to a certain legal conclusion. Don't lose points by trying to discuss battery as a whole, without fully addressing the elements. Breakdown your thought process.
- 8) Don't forget to address other points of view. Are there any counter arguments to be made? Most law school exam questions exist somewhere in the grey area of the law. Are you forgetting a valid, alternate argument? Remember only do this if the facts support the other argument. Don't make up facts for this purpose. If there is nothing in the question to support another argument, move on.
- 9) Did your professor focus on a certain policy argument a lot? Or, is there a case you remember that is very similar to the facts in the exam question? Would this case help support the conclusion you are drawing? Use this information to support your analysis, but don't get distracted from the facts in front of you and the other issues you need to discuss.
- 10) Shake it off. You will be nervous heading into that exam room. Try to employ a relaxation technique before heading into the exam. Leave your stress at the door. If questions are throwing you for a loop, or your stress starts to get the best of you during the exam, breathe! Get up and take a short walk if you need to. Don't let the stress take control. You know more than you think you do!

Idea Applied; IRAC:

The elements of a good essay response can be summed up with the acronym IRAC (Issue, Rule, Analysis, Conclusion). Some professors will tell you they love IRAC, hate IRAC, want CRAC (Conclusion, Rule, Analysis, Conclusion), or CREAC (Conclusion, Rule, Elements, Analysis, Conclusion) instead. Others will tell you to forget these confining organization structures and just write a good exam response! So, what is a law student to do?

First, acknowledge that these acronyms are all there to help you remember the parts of a good exam response, not to make you write like an IRAC robot or repeat yourself needlessly, wasting your time and your professors. At the core, all these methods are the same. You need to:

I Spot the issues. Have some sort of structure (headings can work well for this) to let your professor know what issue you are addressing.

R Show that you have learned the law by clearly stating the legal rule that applies. This includes the sub-rule for any elements that might apply.

A Analyze the facts in the hypo, discussing WHY the facts support/contradict/demonstrate the rule and lead you to draw a particular legal conclusion.

C Draw a conclusion. The answer probably is grey. It probably could go both ways. Pick what you feel is the most likely outcome. State it. Make sure your analysis made it clear WHY you picked that side. You can address the counter argument as well, where valid; but, do so with a separate analysis.

TOP 10 MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAM TIPS:

- 1) Remember your new growth mindset? No matter how you have performed on multiple choice tests in the past, it's a new day. If properly prepared, you are capable of answering each question correctly!
- 2) Don't rush. And, don't get stuck. Figure out how much time you can devote to each question and stick to it.
- 2) Carefully read each question and watch out for qualifiers—these are words like **all, always, often, most, least**.
- 3) If you have it narrowed down to two response and can't decide, consider if one is a good answer and the other is the best answer. This might just break the tie.
- 4) Use grammar. If one answer would make the question grammatically incorrect, this is a clue it might be the wrong answer.
- 5) Sometimes the answer states a rule you learned in a different way. Different doesn't necessarily mean wrong. Again, read carefully.
- 6) Don't make any assumptions or add any facts to the question that aren't there. This is sure to lead you astray.
- 7) Is an answer mostly right? Then it's wrong.
- 8) If you are stuck, trust your gut and move on.
- 9) Keep track of time.
- 10) Check out this Cali Lesson on multiple choice strategy: <http://www.cali.org/lesson/1108>

Time to Reflect

Albert Einstein may or may not have said,

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results.

George Bernard Shaw did say,

Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.

Change starts with understanding ourselves, our actions and our thinking process.

The exercise on the following pages will help you consider what you did this semester, what you didn't do, and what you can change going forward. Progress won't happen without making changes for the better. I urge you to be open and honest with yourself when answering these questions. You might just surprise yourself and take the most important step towards reaching your full potential: true reflection.

Time Out:

Did you miss any classes, and if so why?

How often have you met with professors outside of class to discuss class materials?

How much time do you spend preparing for class?

What do you do to prepare for class?

How do you take notes during class?

Do you review your notes after class?

If so, do you work on synthesizing the material, creating an outline, or do any other active reviewing exercises?

Do you use a study schedule?

Did you use any supplements, if so how?

Have you participated in a study group? If so, describe how many people participated, how often the group met, and how the group functioned.

Describe how you typically prepare for exams.

Have you taken any practice exams, midterms or completed practice problems for your classes, AND have you received feedback on any practice problems? How did it go?

Were you able to identify any concerns with your exam performance during or immediately after the exam? If so, what were your concerns?

Did you employ personal learning strategies based on individual preferences, your learning type, MBTI type, etc.?

What other things affected your performance and/or ability to find balance this semester?

Exam Review Tips:

Now that you have had some time to reflect, you may find reviewing your exams with your professors to be incredibly beneficial.

Hindsight truly is 20/20, especially when an expert walks you through what you did well and could have done better.

Each professor has their own protocol for exam reviews. If you don't receive specific instructions from a professor, it is usually best to email them after the first or second week of the following semester. This gives you both time to settle in to the new term.

Tips to get the most out of your exam reviews

Bring whatever you used to study with you (especially notes or outlines used during the exam, if it was open book).

Try to discover a pattern of errors. Common errors include:

- Time management. You did a great job on the first few issues, but rushed or failed to complete others.
- Missed issues altogether. What you did write was good, but you failed to spot some of the big issues.
- Misread or misaddressed the call of the question. You wrote a good response, but you answered the wrong question.
- Bad organization.
- Analysis was lacking. You generally stated the law correctly and spotted the issues, but you failed to show how this applied to the facts on the exam and WHY it led you to draw certain legal conclusions.
- You forgot that a law exam is a like a math test. If you get the answer right, but don't show your work, your grade will be low. Did you fully and clearly explain yourself?
- You misapplied the law or stated the law incorrectly. If this was your issue, look at your study materials; did you learn incorrect information or just make a mistake on exam day?

Final Thoughts and Action Items

This toolkit started with planning for success. That's because the first step to success is *making a plan*. We then discussed building skills to help you flesh out that plan. Finally, we reflected on what worked or didn't work. Since we've developed a growth mindset, it's time to revise. Your plan for success should be constantly evolving, updating, and *improving with you*. So, what do you need to revise based on your new skills? What action items will help you make the most of next semester? What action items will help you to improve, to grow and to reach your personal best?

My Action Plan for Success:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Notes

