

Lawrite Consulting

Legal Writing Solutions

Ten “Game Changing” Tips for Law School Exam Success

1. Know the challenge of Law School exams! Exam success requires skills that go beyond learning doctrinal rules of law. You must be able to spot and analyze legal issues under difficult testing conditions. That’s no secret. But it’s far less known that drafting high scoring essay exam answers demands a specific skill set not taught by professors.
2. Work smart and not just hard. That means adopting efficient study habits that help you learn the law and learn how to use the law. Those are not habits most students bring to Law School. Devoting substantial time briefing casebook assignments and participating in study groups seem logical – but are they actually distracting you from more effective and efficient study habits?
3. Adopt a strategy for drafting high scoring essay exam answers, and then practice it on old exam questions. Practice testing is the single most effective exam prep activity. There’s no close second. Memorizing doctrinal law will take much of your time and effort, but that’s only half the battle. The real “grade maker” is developing critical thinking and analytical skills. Practice testing is how you learn to apply the laws that you have memorized.
4. Start prepping for exams early in the semester. Exam prep is time intensive, especially when you have little experience with this unique challenge. Don’t assume that professors will train you how to write essay answers, or that their advice is consistent with their expectations.
5. Be a self-starter and take the initiative to prepare for exams. Indeed, Law School is largely a self-taught endeavor. Following the pace set by your professor almost always is a mistake. Most don’t finish covering syllabus topics until the end of the semester, if at all. By then, it’s too late for meaningful practice testing. Draft and memorize useful course outlines early enough in the semester to leave at least five weeks for practice testing. Of course, make sure that you know what a “useful” course outline looks like.
6. Be disciplined about time management. Anticipate an onslaught of reading and writing assignments during the semester. Many bright, enthusiastic students struggle because they lack sufficient time management skills to meet that challenge. Fall behind in Law School and it’s tough to catch up. Stress and anxiety make matters worse. Treat school as a full-time job where you are the boss. Stay on schedule.

7. Be absolutely sure that your exam writing strategy produces answers that satisfy the needs of the easily distracted, highly skeptical law-trained reader. Spotting and analyzing legal issues is just a goal. It's not a strategy. Does your strategy work well under exam conditions to produce answers that are structurally and stylistically well organized, unambiguous, precise and concise? And any exam advice suggesting that you spot and analyze issues without telling you *how* to do that is sadly incomplete.

8. Maximize scoring opportunities by knowing your audience. How long have your professors been teaching? Where did they come from before that? What topics are they passionate about? What is the structure and style of their writing? Do they devote more time to rule explanation or rule application? Are policy arguments important to them? Learning about their writing will help you draft meaningful answers.

9. Emphasize a writing style that makes reading easy on a professor who must grades lots of exams in a short period of time. At a minimum, that includes: short sentences and paragraphs; simple, unambiguous vocabulary; avoiding legalese and passive voice; enumerating the elements of a rule; and avoiding self-serving, undefined adjectives.

10. Finally, be your own fiercest critic. Overcoming the challenge of Law School exams requires that you be intellectually nimble enough to modify your study strategy when confronted with poor grades.

Better yet, avoid poor grades in the first place by preparing smart for exams. Most students did that before Law School when they took prep courses for AP exams, the SAT, ACT, and LSAT. In truth, few students begin classes prepared for the difficulty of Law School essay exams, but the successful ones seek out support and adapt.

Good luck!

Want to learn more about Law School essay exam prep? Visit Lawrite Consulting at www.LawriteConsulting.com or email us at Levine@LawriteConsulting.com to schedule a free consultation.