

# LAW SCHOOL STUDY TIPS

If you want to excel in law school, you must excel at taking law school exams. Excelling at law school exams requires specific study and preparation techniques. To succeed using these techniques, begin to apply them before you enter law school and continue to apply them throughout each law school semester. Never wait to begin your exam preparation. In fact, the first day of class you should begin preparing for your exams. Law school is exam-driven. So the more you prepare every day for exams, the better you'll perform in law school.

## **EXAM PREPARATION**

(1) **How-To Books**. First learn HOW to take a law school exam. Before you begin law school read one or more of the excellent books on exam preparation. The majority of law school exams are in-class exams. Some exams are take-home. Most of these how-to tips focus on in-class exams, which are closed-book and more difficult, but many of the tips apply to both kinds of exams. These books will teach you how to read the exam questions, how to spot the exam issues, and how to provide the proper exam answers. I recommend the following book. But also see the book list *infra*, p. 5.

*The Eight Secrets Of Top Exam Performance In Law School: An Easy-To-Use, Step-by-Step Program for Achieving Great Grades!* (9780159003237): Nichols Publishing / Seloc Publications: Books:

<http://www.amazon.com/Eight-Secrets-Performance-School-Easy/dp/0159003237>

(2) **Exam Archives**. Every law school keeps an archive of sample law school exams. These are exams that were completed by students in recent semesters. Professors select examples of excellent exams and place them in the archive so current students can see what an excellent exam looks like. This is a FANTASTIC way to prep for exams. Find the class and/or professor you're taking, e.g., Contracts with Prof. Jones, and print out his sample exams. Study them. Memorize them. See how the questions are written, see how the answers are formatted, see the content of the answers, see how the student related each part of an answer to info in the question, see the specifics of how Prof. Jones likes an answer completed. You can also print out sample exams from other professors and/or other law schools. The standards for law school exam excellence are universal and the more samples you read, the better. Most law school exams last 3 or 4 hours, contain 4 or 5 questions and usually each question is a hypothetical, i.e., you are given a hypo and must

# LAW SCHOOL STUDY TIPS

apply the law to those specific facts. Exam answers must be very methodical and comprehensive. Every hypo factual detail is given to you for a reason, i.e., to provide you with an opportunity to apply the law. It's up to you to seize that opportunity and show the professor that you see every legal issue and option.

(3) **Take Practice Exams.** For every law school course, e.g., Contracts, as the semester nears an end and study period begins, give yourself practice exams. When I was at the University of Michigan Law School, at the beginning of each semester I would print out at least 5 sample exams from the exam archive and put aside 1 or 2 of those samples and NOT read those samples. Then, at the end of the semester, I would use those samples for practice exams. In the final week of each semester and during the study days before exams began, I would take practice exams for each class. I would give myself the same amount of time as a real exam, e.g., 3 or 4 hours depending on the class, and I'd take the test. Then I compared my answers to the sample. Dry runs are incredibly helpful. You'll see how you perform under fire. Are you providing the substantive content that's necessary? Are you spotting the key legal issues and facts? Are you pacing yourself properly, e.g., using 1 hour for question one, 1 hour for question two, etc., saving 30 minutes at the end to review, etc. Note: most exams are answered in bluebook, i.e., you write your answer in a small blue booklet that contains 20 lined pages. You can use as many bluebooks as you want per question. Remember to number your bluebooks, e.g., Question 1, bluebook 1 of 3, Question 1 bluebook 2 of 3, etc. Also note: As you write each answer, it's wise to leave space on the last page of the answer or to double-space your answers. That way, you can add material when you review your answer before handing-in the exam. Trust me, you'll always think of something you forgot. Professors are NOT happy when you insert text with arrows leading everywhere. If you leave some extra space AS YOU WRITE, then you can always make it easy for the professor to read your answer, even if you've inserted last-minute content.

Once I began prepping for exams using these 3 methods, I began to get A's. These tips are the best method I know to excel in law school exams. See below for additional how-to resources.

# LAW SCHOOL STUDY TIPS

## OTHER STUDY TIPS

**Class Notes and Outline Preparation:** Some students spend time during the semester preparing lengthy outlines for each course they're taking. I rarely found this to be helpful and it takes an enormous amount of time. In-class law school exams are usually closed-book (no books, no notes, just a pen and your brain – and bring extra pens -- and learn some hand relaxation exercises for when your hand cramps after 2 or 3 hours of continuous writing), so obviously you'll need to memorize a lot of info. As I said, some students use outlines for this memorization process. I found that traditional outlines never captured all of the material and so I studied directly from the casebook and my class notes. BUT THIS IS WHAT I DID – in class, I wrote notes on my laptop in outline format. So, for example, my Contracts notes would basically be an outline. But, most importantly, my notes would contain the professor's perspective and emphasized points (which is what the professor will want to see in your exam answers). After each class I would review my class notes and insert any additional material that seemed relevant for study purposes. For example, the professor might have discussed a specific case and my notes were too rushed for me to include details of the case. So I'd go back and insert the details. Eventually I'd print my class notes in hard copy and use Post-Its to tag pages, labeling each topical (sub)section and key point. Then I'd use these course notes – in conjunction with the casebook and archived exams -- to prep for the exam.

**Using Your Casebooks:** For each course the assigned readings are likely to be from a thick heavy casebook consisting of thousands of pages. For each course your professor will expect you to read hundreds of casebook pages per night. A casebook contains case law, i.e., judicial opinions. The casebook will also contain commentary about the cases, and supporting materials, for example, excerpts from cited statutes. In class, the professor will ask students to state details about the reading, focusing on the details of each specific case assigned. How do you remember all of that info for the next day's class and for the exam? First, separate the wheat from the chaff. Learn to separate the info that you need to know from the extraneous info. One way to identify the "need to know" info is to color-code your reading. Each night, as you read the material for tomorrow's classes, identify certain info about each assigned case as "need to know": (1) the court, e.g., the United States Supreme Court, (2) the procedural posture of the case, e.g., an appeal of a motion to dismiss, (3) the holding, e.g., dismissal affirmed, (4) the legal issue(s), e.g., does the First Amendment protect flag burning, (5) the facts, e.g., John Doe went to rally and set fire to a flag, (6) the legal reasoning, e.g., flag burning is protected under the First Amendment

# LAW SCHOOL STUDY TIPS

because . . . , (7) the legal rule (usually a single sentence that summarizes the broad underlying rule), e.g., the First Amendment protects freedom of expression even where the expressive conduct is offensive to public sensibility. As I read each case, I highlighted each of these types of info in a different color, e.g., facts were ALWAYS pink. In class, if the professor asked me for the facts of a case, I would automatically go to the pink highlights in my casebook. This will also be helpful as you prep for exams. You can focus your study on the relevant highlighted info in your casebook. The key to successful studying is knowing what you need to know and making it quickly accessible.

## **BOOKS & WEBSITES ON PREPARING FOR & TAKING EXAMS**

### **ONLINE ARTICLES**

There are several online articles about test-taking, including:

- Patrick Wiseman, *"When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take It," and Other Sage Advice for First-Time Law School Exam Takers*, 22 Ga. St. U. L. Rev. 653 (2006). [Hein Online](#)
- Jerry J. Phillips, *Thirteen Rules for Taking Law Exams*, 72 Tenn. L. Rev. 797 (2005). [Hein Online](#)
- John H. Langbien, [Writing Law Examinations](#)
- Carol Nygren, [Using Professors' Old Exams To Prepare](#)
- Carol Nygren, [Confronting Your Final Exam - Torts](#)
- William R. Andersen, [Writing Better Law School Exams: The Importance of Structure](#). This is a CALI lesson. To obtain a password to register to use CALI, contact [lawhelp@u](mailto:lawhelp@u), a computer lab attendant in Room 222, or the [Reference Office](#) (543-6794).

Carol Nygren offers excellent advice at <http://lib.law.washington.edu/ref/lawexams.html>

# LAW SCHOOL STUDY TIPS

## **SUBJECT OUTLINES**

Sometimes it's helpful to look at generic capsule summaries or outlines of the legal subject. You can purchase generic outlines for a topic, e.g., Contracts. Or you can find subject summaries and outlines online. See e.g., the links at Findlaw, [Outlines & Exams](#).

## **BOOKS**

There are some excellent books on taking law school exams, including the following titles, which may be available in your law school library or for purchase online:

- *Getting to Maybe: How to Excel on Law School Exams*, 1999. KF283.F57 1999
- *Law School Exams: Preparing and Writing to Win*, 2007. KF283.C35 2007
- *Law School Success in a Nutshell: A Guide to Studying Law and Taking Law School Exams*, 2008. KF283.B87 2008
- *Law School Without Fear: Strategies for Success*, 2d ed., 2002. KF287.S53 2002
- *Mastering the Law School Exam: A Practical Blueprint for Preparing and Taking Law School Exams*, 2007. KF283.D37 2007
- *A Practical Guide to Writing Law School Essay Exams*, 2001. KF283.D47 2001
- *Strategies & Tactics for First Year Law: Maximize Your Grades*, 1995. KF283.W35 1995
- *Writing Essay Exams to Succeed (Not Just to Survive)*, 2007. KF283.D47 2007

## **ADDITIONAL ONLINE ADVICE**

- Top Law Student blog, [How to Prepare for Law School Exams](#)
- Evan Schaeffer's Legal Underground, [A Law Professor Shares The Top Arbitrary Number \(Turns Out to be Six\) of Things Not to Do on Law School Exams](#)
- [Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction](#) (CALI) podcasts
  - [Six professors provide advice on Exam Preparation](#)

# LAW SCHOOL STUDY TIPS

- Scott Burnham (U of Montana), [Tips for Multiple Choice Exams in Law School](#)
- Jennifer Martin (Western New England), [Top Ten Tips for Successfully Writing a Law School Essay](#)

## **LINKS TO LAW SCHOOL EXAM ARCHIVES**

Below are links to law school exam archives. Most of the archives are password protected (PWP) and can only be accessed by current students. However, using this list, you can easily locate past exams at your law school.

Please feel free to send me updated/corrected/additional hyperlinks as appropriate.

## **NEW JERSEY LAW SCHOOL EXAM ARCHIVES**

Seton Hall | Law - Archived Exams

<http://law.shu.edu/Students/academics/Archived-Exams.cfm>

Exams Archive Rutgers School of Law-Newark Law Library

<https://njlegallib.rutgers.edu/splash/exams.php>

## **UNITED STATES LAW SCHOOL EXAM ARCHIVES**

Alabama (<https://proxy.law.ua.edu/login?url=htt...rch%3dexam>) PWP

American (<http://www.wcl.american.edu/exams/>)

Arizona (<http://www.law.arizona.edu/library/uala...page=ualaw>) PWP

Arizona State (<http://apps.law.asu.edu/Apps/Library/OnlineExams/>) PWP

Arkansas (<http://law.uark.edu/current/courses-exa...chive.html>)

Baylor (hardcopies are available at library reserve desk)

BC (<http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/library/s...elist.html>)

Berkeley (<http://www.law.berkeley.edu/library/dynamic/exams.php>)

Brooklyn (<http://blsconnect.brooklaw.edu>) PWP

BU (<http://www.bu.edu/lawlibrary/restricted...index.html>) PWP

# LAW SCHOOL STUDY TIPS

BYU (<http://eres.lib.byu.edu/eres/coursepass.aspx?cid=780>) PWP  
Cardozo (<https://cardozo.elearning.yu.edu/>) PWP  
Case Western (<https://lawhome.case.edu/libraryService...chives.asp>) PWP  
Catholic (<http://lib.law.cua.edu/home/libinfo/exams.html>) PWP  
Chicago (<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/law/courses/exams/>) PWP  
Chicago-Kent (<http://exams.digitallib.kentlaw.edu/index.htm>) PWP  
Columbia ([http://www.law.columbia.edu/faculty/fac.../Old\\_exams](http://www.law.columbia.edu/faculty/fac.../Old_exams))  
Cornell (<http://library.lawschool.cornell.edu/Students/index.cfm>) PWP  
Davis (<http://www.law.ucdavis.edu/library/Serv...pport.html>) PWP  
Denver (<http://www.law.du.edu/index.php/library...past-exams>) PWP  
DePaul (<http://eres.lib.depaul.edu/eres/coursei...age=search>) PWP  
Duke (use Blackboard to access past exams by course)  
Emory (<http://library.law.emory.edu/for-law-st...es-direct/>) PWP  
Florida State (electronic copies are available on computer near printers)  
Fordham (<http://lawlib1.lawnet.fordham.edu/exams/public>) PWP  
Georgetown (<https://gull.georgetown.edu/screens/exams.html>) PWP  
Georgia (<http://gavel.law.uga.edu/>) PWP  
Georgia State ([http://law.gsu.edu/library/index/exam\\_archive/](http://law.gsu.edu/library/index/exam_archive/)) PWP  
GMU (hardcopies are available at library reserve desk)  
Gonzaga (located on professor's TWEN site) PWP  
GW (<http://docs.law.gwu.edu/facweb/gmaggs/>)  
Harvard (<http://www.law.harvard.edu/academics/registrar/exams/>) PWP  
Hastings (<http://holmes.uchastings.edu/library/st...ces/exams/>) PWP  
Hofstra (<http://eres.hofstra.edu/coursepage.asp?cid=151&page=01>) PWP  
Houston (<https://www.law.uh.edu/secure/exams/homepage.asp>) PWP  
Illinois (<https://www.law.uiuc.edu/intranet/>) PWP  
Indiana – Bloomington (<http://apps.law.indiana.edu/lawlibrary/...find.shtml>) PWP  
Indiana-Indianapolis (<http://indylaw.indiana.edu/library/examfiles.html>) PWP  
Iowa (<http://www.law.uiowa.edu/library/reserve.php>) PWP  
Kentucky (<http://www.law.uky.edu/files/examarchive/>)  
Lewis & Clark (<http://lawlib.lclark.edu/students/lawexams.php>) PWP  
Louisiana State (<https://lsulaw.louislibraries.org:5303/...X/BLASTOFF>)  
Louisville (<http://www.law.louisville.edu/academics...am-archive>) PWP  
Loyola Chicago ([http://www.luc.edu/law\\_library/faqs/exams.html](http://www.luc.edu/law_library/faqs/exams.html)) PWP  
Loyola LA (<http://library.lls.edu/pastexams.html>) PWP  
Marquette (?)  
Maryland (<http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/services/exams/>)  
Miami (hardcopies are available at library Circulation Desk)  
Michigan (<http://www.law.umich.edu/library/studen...fault.aspx>) PWP

# LAW SCHOOL STUDY TIPS

Minnesota (<http://library.law.umn.edu/ereserve/index.html>)

New Mexico (<https://lobolaw.unm.edu/exam/exams/index.php>) PWP

Northeastern (<http://www.northeastern.edu/law/library...exams.html>) PWP

Northwestern (<https://www5.law.northwestern.edu/libra...ereserves/>) PWP

Notre Dame (<http://law.nd.edu/library-and-technolog...ast-exams/>) PWP

NYU (<https://its.law.nyu.edu/depts/library/L...search.cfm>) PWP

Oklahoma (<http://libraries.ou.edu/eresources/rese...fault.aspx>) PWP

Oregon (hardcopies are available at library reserve desk)

OSU (<https://moritzlaw.osu.edu/intranet/exams/index.php>) PWP

Penn (<http://www.law.upenn.edu/fac/npersily/exams/exams.html>)

Penn State ([http://law.psu.edu/library/course\\_reserves](http://law.psu.edu/library/course_reserves)) PWP

Pepperdine (<http://lawmedia.pepperdine.edu/exam/examlookup.php>)

Pitt (Sample exams can be borrowed by students with a valid Pitt ID for 2 hours)

Richmond (<http://lobo.richmond.edu/examfile>) PWP

Rutgers Camden (<https://cas.rutgers.edu/login?service=h...reserve%2f>) PWP

Rutgers Newark (<https://njlegallib.rutgers.edu/splash/exams.php>) PWP

San Diego (<http://sally.sandiego.edu/screens/reserves.html>)

Santa Clara (<http://heaferes.scu.edu/coursepage.asp?cid=51>) PWP

Seattle (hardcopies are available at library reserve desk)

Seton Hall (<http://law.shu.edu/Students/academics/e...-Exams.cfm>) PWP

SMU (?)

South Carolina (hardcopies are available at library Circulation Desk)

St Louis (<http://eres.slu.edu/eres/courseindex.as...age=search>) PWP

St. John's (search for "law school exams" <http://docutek.stjohns.edu/eres/coursei...age=search>) PWP

Stanford (<https://www.law.stanford.edu/library/digitalreserves/>) PWP

SUNY-Buff (<http://www.law.buffalo.edu/portal/loginForm.asp>) PWP

Temple (<http://www.law.temple.edu/servlet/Retri...aminations>)

Tennessee (<http://www.law.utk.edu/library/student1.htm#eof>) PWP

Texas (<http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/students/exams.html>) PWP

Tulane (<http://www.law.tulane.edu/tlslibrary/index.aspx?id=2052>) PWP

U of Cincinnati (<http://www.libraries.uc.edu/services/re...earch.html>) PWP

U of Florida (<https://ares.uflib.ufl.edu/>) PWP

U of Kansas (hardcopies are available at library Circulation Desk)

U of Missouri (<http://www.law.missouri.edu/students/ex...mbank.html>)

U of Washington (<http://lib.law.washington.edu/exams/exams.html>) PWP

UC Boulder (hardcopies are available at library reserve desk)

UCLA (<http://sites.law.ucla.edu/library/PastE...Items.aspx>) PWP

UConn (hardcopies are available at library reserve desk)

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UMaine (<https://mainelaw.maine.edu/library/exams/>) PWP  
UNC (<https://my.law.unc.edu/library/exams/>) PWP  
UNLV (hardcopies are available at library Circulation Desk)  
USC ([http://mylaw2.usc.edu/login.cfm?CFID=12 ... N=51820431](http://mylaw2.usc.edu/login.cfm?CFID=12...N=51820431)) PWP  
USF (hardcopies are available at library Circulation Desk)  
Utah (<http://www.law.utah.edu/library/ereserves/>) PWP  
UVA (<http://lawnotes2.law.virginia.edu/logindat.nsf>) PWP  
Vanderbilt (<http://law.vanderbilt.edu/intranet/index.aspx>) PWP  
Villanova (<http://www.law.villanova.edu/files/examdatabase/>)  
Wake Forest (<http://law.wfu.edu/intranet/>) PWP  
Washington and Lee (<http://law.wlu.edu/students/page.asp?pageid=102>) PWP  
William and Mary (<http://web.wm.edu/law/lawlibrary/exams/?svr=law>) PWP  
Wisconsin-Madison (<http://library.law.wisc.edu/services/examsreserves.html>) PWP  
WUSTL (<http://law.wustl.edu/Exams/>) PWP  
Yale (<http://morris.law.yale.edu/search~S2/a>) PWP