

# TEN STEPS TO SUCCESS IN LAW SCHOOL

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1. **Believe in Yourself.** Do not allow law school to intimidate you. Even when you feel overwhelmed, do not give in, and above all, don't panic. You were successful in college and you can be successful in law school.
2. **Respect the Fact That Law School is an Intense Educational Experience.** Whatever your experience was in college, law school requires substantial reading, writing, and test taking. In addition, law school also requires a significant amount of memorization and a major dose of reasoning – that is, applying facts to law and law to facts. Reasoning is a learned skill developed through **practice and more practice**. For most students, law school will be more challenging than college, require greater focus and work, and be subject to fewer shortcuts. Understanding this and preparing for it are half the battle.
3. **Preparation is the Great Equalizer and Tranquilizer.** As you look around at your classmates, you may think they have better credentials and are smarter than you. Most students feel this way; it is a normal reaction to a new experience like law school. Whether true or not, each and every student has complete control over the great academic equalizer: **preparation** for class and exams. The same is true for virtually every task you will be asked to perform as a lawyer. Feeling stressed about being called on in class or because of an upcoming exam? Preparation is the best tranquilizer and no prescription is needed.
4. **Organize Your Life Before Law School Begins.** To the extent possible, remove unnecessary obstacles to your success. For example, find a good place to live close to campus or close to public transportation, so you have the option to read if you have a long commute. If possible, arrange your finances so you do not work during your first year. (If you do work throughout law school, consider starting to save some vacation days so that you can take three months off after graduation to study for the bar exam. It may seem like the distant future, but it will be here before you know it!)
5. **Find Comfortable Furniture.** You will need a big desk, a very good light, and a comfortable chair. Either buy these items for your apartment or find a quiet place in the library with these items.
6. **Attend All Classes.** Law professors have spent years honing their lectures to cover the most important cases and issues. In our experience, almost all exam issues come from classroom discussions. Given that attendance is mandatory and many professors give points for class participation, the first priority should be to attend all classes. The Socratic Method of classroom discussion is a form of active learning between teacher and student. Do not be afraid to get in the discussion.
7. **Organize Your Study Time.** Think this through. Figure out a schedule. Human beings are most comfortable when they have a routine. It should take only one or two weeks to develop a routine for law school once you receive your class schedule. Be realistic about how long you can concentrate at one study session. Plan for physical activity – the second best stress reliever after preparation.
8. **Find a Study Partner.** You can continue active learning by talking through concepts and examples with a classmate or a study group. A study partner or group can be a powerful tool if used properly, or it can be a major disaster. You must select a partner or group that works as hard as you do and uses time wisely. Set ground rules at the first meeting. Socializing is another wonderful way to relieve stress, but only at designated breaks. You must create your own case briefs and outlines because significant learning takes place in the process of distilling facts and law. Write practice exams under exam conditions with your partner/group and critique each other. Decide whether to write or type exams and practice that way. A study partner can also share class notes if you are ill and miss a class.

9. **Organize Your Study Materials.** By our count, you may have six sets of material to contend with: 1) your casebook; 2) your case briefs in preparation for class; 3) class notes; 4) a self-prepared class outline; 5) a required or elective hornbook; and 6) possibly a commercial outline. (**Caution:** Some commercial outlines contain incorrect information. Ask your professor for a recommendation.) One way to organize is to summarize your casebook information, case briefs, in-class notes, and hornbook into your written outline as you proceed chapter by chapter. Don't wait until the end of the semester to outline. Outline each chapter or section of the syllabus as the semester progresses so that you have time to write practice exams before the real exams. Aim to have your outlines finished by Reading Week so that at that point you can focus on practice.
10. **Use All Academic Resources.** Make use of all resources early and often:
- a. **Professors.** If you have questions about classroom material, visit your professor after class or during office hours. Many are located in the faculty building next to classrooms G and H, but some faculty offices are also located in Northwest Hall, the Courtroom building, and the Library. Office hours are posted next to the professors' doors. They are there for you. Do not assume it will all become clear later – get clarification now. Too often, new students assume they will be “imposing” on or annoying their professors if they come with “simple” questions, but nothing could be farther from the truth! Professors genuinely welcome office hour exchanges with their students. Take advantage of this important opportunity.
  - b. **Assistant Dean for Student Affairs.** If you would like to discuss classroom or examination accommodations for disabilities, campus rules or policies, or other issues that may affect your legal studies, please contact Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Mary McGuire or Student Services Counselor Rebekah Grodsky at (916) 739-7089.
  - c. **Director of Academic Success.** If you have questions about study techniques, time management, stress management, school resources, or law school in general, stop by the first floor of Northwest Hall and talk to Professor Lee. You can also reach her at cleel1@pacific.edu (do not forget the “1”) or (916) 739-7242.
  - d. **Academic Success Resource Center.** Between Professor Lee's office and the Career Development Office (CDO) is the Academic Success Resource Center (ASRC), which is available for individual and/or group study, relaxing, or reviewing and checking out various study aids. The ASRC is open whenever the CDO doors are open, regardless of whether Professor Lee is in.
  - e. **Skills Support Team.** This team of upper-division students is available to help with any non-substantive questions you may have. Stop by the ASRC to visit their “office hours” or email them to set up an appointment. Their information is available on the McGeorge website and on the Skills Hours TWEN page.
  - f. **Writing Specialist.** If you would like help with grammar, punctuation, or writing composition, contact Lexis M. Allen at (916) 455-4800, ext. 231 or email lallen@davidallenlaw.com. Ms. Allen is a former English and writing teacher who is also a practicing attorney.
  - g. **Skills Hours.** These are classes given in the fall semester for first-year students. They cover case briefing, note taking, study groups, outlining, practice exams, and multiple choice exams. Most importantly, they offer the opportunity to take a fully simulated practice exam under “combat conditions” and get feedback from professors. All first-year students are expected to attend.

If you are interested in further reading that may help you get started on the right foot, some options include: Getting to Maybe (Fischl, Paul); Expert Learning for Law Students (Schwartz); Reading Like a Lawyer (McKinney); and/or Learning Outside the Box (Christensen).