



LAW

*Academic Enhancement Program*

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## **Basic Study Habits for Success**

### **Before Class:**

- Read all class assignments, including the footnotes and note cases. Consider reading each case twice, and create a brief during the second reading.
- Create briefs for every case.
- Review notes before your next class

### **During class:**

- Go to class.
- Avoid distractions that may interfere with your concentration (daydreaming, looking around the room, talking to a friend, passing notes, dozing). Checking email, surfing the Web, or instant messaging causes most students to lose focus on the class discussion.
- Edit your case briefs based on the professor's comments.
- Develop your own style for taking notes. Here are some suggestions:
  - Avoid the temptation to become a stenographer. Listen attentively to the exchange, evaluate its relevance and importance, and then select what is essential and write it down. If you can't help but write everything down, budget time after class to edit your notes while still fresh.
  - Make a system for highlighting the rules of law and their elements as articulated by the professor (e.g., use a highlighter, different color type, or make stars in the margins). Include page numbers when possible.
  - Write down all hypothetical problems and their answers. These often demonstrate the scope of the rule of law and exceptions; they also suggest exam questions.
  - If the professor writes something on the chalkboard, you should write it down.
  - Make notes on any social policy issues and/or the professor's opinions.
- Pay attention to reviews. Some professors begin or end the class with a summary that relates the individual cases to the general themes or topics covered in the class. This can help you identify headlines for your outline.
- If the professor calls on another student, listen actively to the exchange. Imagine that you are the student on the "hot seat" and think about how you would answer the questions posed.
- Participate in class. This is great practice for public speaking and will also aid in your comprehension.



## **Basic Study Habits for Success (cont'd)**

### **After class:**

#### The day or week of the class:

- Review and supplement your notes and case briefs while your recollection of the class session is still fresh in your mind.
- If there is something that you really don't understand, take those questions to office hours.
- For any "holes" in your notes or confusing issues, discuss the issues with classmates or consult a hornbook on the topic.
- If there is a conflict between what you thought was important and what your professor emphasized in class, figure out why your professor's analysis was different.

#### Weekly:

- Consider doing a weekly review or weekly summary for each class. This will help you develop an understanding of the "big picture," which is critical for success on an exam. Formulate your weekly reviews to help develop these skills:
  - General Themes: How do the cases relate to each other? Do the cases represent a progression or evolution of the law? How are these cases alike? How are they different?
  - Steps of Analysis: What legal tests might be applied for problems in this topic area? What are the elements to these tests? Is there a sequence of analysis that must be followed? Devise a fact pattern that illustrates this legal principle and analysis.
  - Social Policy: What public policy considerations influence the court's decisions in this area?

### **Throughout the semester:**

- Form a study group or find a study buddy. Discussing class material and hypotheticals with other students helps test your understanding of the law and strengthens your critical thinking skills.
- If you add information to your notes after class, use a different color type or ink. This will help you separate your class notes from review information when you study later.
- After the first few weeks of the semester, begin building your outline. Maintain your outline throughout the semester in intervals that make sense to you (weekly, at each section or chapter break, etc).
- Begin considering and preparing other study tools you may want to have for exam preparation: flash cards, hypotheticals, sample exams, etc.
- As exams approach, begin pulling everything together, and consider creating shorter outlines and, ultimately, checklists for each subject. These will be invaluable for quick reference and memorization on any exam.
- Protect your briefs and notes - keep them together in a notebook and/or back up your computer files regularly.