

**LAWTUTORS ULTIMATE GUIDE ON HOW EXACTLY
TO GET GOOD GRADES DURING YOUR
FIRST YEAR OF LAW SCHOOL
DATA FROM HUNDREDS OF OUR LAW STUDENTS**

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What do we know? Our LawTutors Team, still decidedly relatable and hip, have not been 1Ls for a long time. We heard you. You want the real stuff from the people who are in it right now. So, the LawTutors Team gathered data from hundreds of first year law students who had just completed their first semester of their first year of law school and had received their grades to put together this Ultimate Guide/

The purpose of article is to share with you the feedback we received from all of these students on what worked for them (and what did not work for them).

CLASS PREPARATION AND CLASS TIME

“I spent so much time trying to understand the law before class, and I was misunderstanding it. Then finally, in class, I learned about what I read.”

For the most part, the above quote summarizes what a lot of our 1Ls felt. Those students who performed well felt they balanced preparation with reviewing / condensing / outlining. Some of our students decided they would stop briefing cases while others decided you would start doing it.

Without a doubt, condensing, outlining and reviewing was a significant indicator on performance. However that still leaves the question of preparation. With the last semester behind us, we know how to prepare more efficiently through briefs/notes. Most of our students felt that while they would still prepare for class with some combination of briefing and note taking, they would do so mindfully by using resources like **LawTutors, Study Buddies Pro and Casebriefs**, hypotheticals, and Examples and Explanations for guidance and efficiency.

Most importantly, students should use actual class time to guide how they prepare. Here are some considerations to help you determine how best to prepare for class:

- If your professor asks you verbatim questions from your brief, you may consider briefing for the class (or using a commercial brief and writing your own reading notes on top of the brief)
- If your professor skips cases entirely and talk about examples instead, then you may not need to spend significant time briefing cases
- Use your specific class as your preparation litmus test. For some classes, briefing prior to your class may make more sense than in others.

Some of our students also indicated that writing everything that was said in class wasn't helpful and that they were going to listen in class and write less. Remember that this avenue requires **condensing notes regularly** and then **reviewing the section** in the course and making sure you understand it before moving on so that you can better identify the key points to take notes on. It's a scary prospect to not take class notes and then try to figure out everything at the end without any notes.

CONDENSING NOTES

Our top students condensed their notes along the way.

Here are some tips to help you incorporate condensing your notes based on students who performed well:

- **Organize the time you spend condensing notes** either:
 - (i) when you find a logical end to a sub-topic, or
 - (ii) by picking a particular day or time to condense each subject.
- You should aim to **condense your notes on a weekly basis** the most successful students seemed to be able to condense their notes at the end of each week, usually on the weekend).
- Condensing your notes gives you **more time to engage in practice questions** and to feel more comfortable with the material.

OUTLINING

Creating your own outline correlated with better performance, even if you were using other outlines to do so.

Here are some tips to help with your outlining based on students who performed well:

- **Start early.** Students who waited until late in the semester felt like they did not have as strong a grasp on the material as they could have.
- **Be mindful when you outline.** Outlines should be set up in a way to help you answer an exam hypothetical. Lengthy outlines tend to be a regurgitation of your class notes/case briefs, which are not as helpful.
- **Aim to condense your outline to 20-30 pages** (which equates to about half a page or one page per class session).
- **Create an attack outline (1-2 pages) to help you answer the hypothetical.** Doing many practice exams in conjunction with outlining can help you determine what questions you need to ask and answer on the exam in order to determine what should be included in an attack outline.

PRACTICE PROBLEMS, EXAMS AND SUPPLEMENTS

There is a clear correlation with the amount of practice problems you did and your grades. You need to be constantly testing your understanding of material,

such as with multiple choice questions, miniessays, problem sets, and exams rather than just focusing on taking and organizing your notes.

Here are some tips to help you incorporate practice exams into your studying based on students who performed well:

- **Aim to complete one hypo per week.** Students who did practice problems frequently reported greater comfort with the material as it helped them see issues and recite law more quickly on the actual exam. Frequently practicing applying the law helps to increase your understanding of the material more than simply memorizing the law.
- **Do practice problems from a variety of sources**, including **LawTutors, Study Buddy Pro and Casebriefs**, Examples & Explanations, and practice problems from your professor. Students who did the best utilized a wide variety of sources for practice problems. You can use supplements as “refreshers” *and* for practice problems.
- **Review your answers against a model answer.** The most successful students did not just do the practice exams, but they reviewed the model answers (when available) or discussed the answers with their study groups. To get the most out of your review, you should not only see if you spotted the issue but you should also see how your analysis compares to the analysis in the model answer.
- If you do not feel like you know enough information to do a full practice exam, **you can always do a mini practice problem** from SB Pro, Siegel’s, or your book on issues that were covered earlier in the semester.
- Lastly, **be weary of suggestions from upperclass students!**

SELF ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

A lot of our students thought that did not get enough direction or feedback from their professors throughout the semester. This is where the importance of self-assessment comes in. All of them told us that they would like to be more comfortable with doing practice with self-assessment, so they could figure out what works for *them* early on.

For those of who did do some form of self-assessment, the *analysis* part of their writing was the biggest concerns. First, there is still a general concern about connecting the law and the facts together to form your analysis. Second, there is the question of weighing your issues (ex: how long you should spend on each issue). This would be a great focus of your one-on-one sessions with us this semester.

PROFESSOR’S OFFICE HOURS

Those of our students who could do practice problems and utilize office hours with their professor to review your answers found this incredibly useful.

Even if your professor has limited availability and/or may not be willing to review a practice problem with you, going to your professor’s office hours is still helpful for the following reasons:

- You want to find out how your professor thinks, and
- You want to find out what your professor expects from you.

STUDY GROUPS

There was a true mix of opinions on this topic. Some students who did well did not utilize study groups and plan to use the same strategy. Other students who did well felt that the study groups were helpful. And there were some of you who used study groups and felt they were not helpful.

You should do what works best for you.

If you utilize study groups, you want to make sure you have an action plan and goal for your study group to get the most out of your group sessions (which should include short breaks). For example, you can assign a practice problem to do independently and then meet together as a group to discuss your answers.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Those students who did well seemed to **consistently read ahead** in order to avoid the domino effect of either catching up or rushing on the reading. **Those students who performed the best felt the least pressed for time.**

One suggestion to help you manager your time is to color-code a schedule (much like the below example developed by Stephen Covey of *Seven Habits of Highlight Effective People*) **ahead of time**, using the following categories:

- Case Reading
- Class Time
- Condensing Notes
- Outlining
- Practice Problems
- Writing Assignments

Some of us utilize this method professionally, so we know where our time must be spent on certain aspects of work, and where we have more flexibility with our time.

Another effective way to also manage your time is to do short bursts of intense work and then have meaningful breaks, which has been proven to produce better results and productivity than long days of mediocre work. We can speak from our own experience that a long 12-hour workday will be much less productive (and more draining and stressful) than short bursts of intense work involving breaks, getting up and moving around.

Time Management and Exams

Many of our students felt like they ran out of time on their first exam and got better as they went along or that they weren't targeting their answers to the questions but instead just writing every rule/case/fact they knew into their answer.

