



MSLAW Academic Support

Successful Strategies for Outlining

- Get into the habit of developing your own course outlines for your law school courses early on—simply reading a commercial outline is not enough! Remember that to enhance your understanding and retention, you must: see it, hear it, say it, and write it. It is the practice of creating the outline that matters, first and foremost: as you force yourself to continually cull the most important information and put it all together into one organized document, you also effectively learn the law that you'll need to know on your law school exams.
- Choose the format that works best for you. As with case briefs, there isn't just one way to structure a great course outline. Whether you use a traditional outline, a flow chart, flash cards, or some other format, the key is to experiment with different types of outline, review materials, and other resources, and ultimately choose one that best fits your needs and your study style.



- Customize your review materials and course outlines to the course and the professor. Include the concepts that your professor tells you to study. If your professor provides you with his or her own outline for the course, use it: customize it by adding your own class notes, reading notes, and case notes. You may also choose to use your casebook's table of contents as a starting point for creating your own outline.
- Don't include too much or too little. Ideally, you should include the black letter law (such as definitions and standards) you'll need to know for each concept that may be tested on your essay exam, along with brief descriptions of the cases you've read that apply to that concept. In your descriptions of the cases, you should never include the kind of detailed information you may have included in your case briefs; rather, aim for a clear and concise depiction (perhaps a paragraph) of how the outcome of the case illustrates the rule of law.

- Work on your outlines periodically. Set aside a time to outline each week or every other week, cull the most important points from your reading and class notes, and put them all into an organized format. Continue reducing your outlines as you go through the semester (for example, if you start with a 50-page outline, get it down to just 20 pages, and then use part of your study period for final exams to create a 2-3 page “skinny” outline that you can study.) By forcing yourself to reduce and rewrite your outlines, you will be able to retain the most important points you need to remember for your essay exams.

Excerpted from *IL BootCamp* by Michael L. Coyne, Joseph Devlin, Ursula Furi-Perry and Peter M. Malaguti.