



Feature

## Survival Tips for 1Ls Part 1

By Charisse Dengler

You did the whole college graduation thing: You wore the infamous cap and gown yet again, posed for family pictures, and blew out the candles on the congratulatory cake. Now, it's time for the good stuff. You're off to law school, the land of historic law libraries and brilliant legal minds, and you're brimming with expectations.



During the period of time between your dull, undergraduate life and your exciting, post-graduate legal education, you may dream of lounging with brand new, ultra-hip law school friends on a lush campus, voraciously devouring

interesting case materials while sipping iced mochas.

However, you're probably beginning to realize that—compared to reality—your daydreams may have been just a tad bit more Elle Woods than Average Joe Law Student.

Don't worry, though. Instead of turning to that carton of Ben & Jerry's for comfort, take a look at these tried-and-true techniques. These tips will help turn that disconcerted, sleep-deprived frown upside down and get you through your first year of law school with flying colors, and, hopefully, a GPA you can be proud of.

### 1. Be Prepared

When something is assigned, do it. Seems simple enough, but many first-year students who haven't experienced the dreaded Socratic method of teaching (in which the professor teaches by asking questions) that's practiced in countless law classes across the country don't really understand the importance of being completely prepared for class. You're no longer an undergrad. You can't get by with doing the bare minimum of work. You will get called upon. And if you don't know your stuff—if you haven't read the assignment—you will be embarrassed.

### 2. Make the Grade

If there's anything you should strive toward during your first year, it's good grades. This is especially important for students aspiring to be on their law review or law journal staffs. When it comes to filling these positions, 1L grades are what count.

In order to get stellar 1L grades, Cathy Kirkman, author

of *Silicon Valley Media Law* blog and a partner at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati in Palo Alto, CA, advises relying on whatever method of studying has worked for you in the past (implying, of course, that you managed to squeeze in at least a tiny bit of studying during your stint as an undergrad).

"Stick with whatever study system made you successful as an undergraduate, and have confidence in yourself," she said. "Don't believe the hype that law school is somehow different, and promise yourself not to waste psychic energy stressing about it."

### 3. Get a Life

Upon entering law school, you will suddenly be confronted with a new group of friends, a myriad of prospective dates, more reading assignments than you can possibly handle, horribly intimidating professors, and all the juicy law school gossip you could ever want. Before you know it, law school will have become your whole world.

However, if you stay close with your old friends and stay active in non-law-related organizations, you will find that you feel more balanced. These friends and activities will be a welcome distraction when you need a break from your life as a law student.

"I think maintaining parts of life outside law school are critical," said Peter Olson, founder of The Olson Law Firm, LLC, and author of Peter Olson's Solo in Chicago blog. "It's not your entire life; it's another academic experience that you've chosen to undertake as sort of your 'job' for three years.... I think the job analogy is a good one. Here's eight to ten hours a day where you're at a job, and then you move on to other parts of life. Law school should not be your entire existence."

"For me, being active in a local church and having a core group of friends outside of law school were both critical. If someone is married, that's another facet I think that can help a person get away," he said.



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### 4. Refresh your Skills

If there's one thing you will be doing more than anything else during your first year, it's reading. You won't just be expected to simply read things, though. You will also be expected to understand them.

In order to avoid wasting time reading and then re-reading cases and other materials, it would be wise to work on your reading comprehension skills. Whether you buy a book on the subject or surf the Web for some tips, taking the time to hone some serious comprehension skills will save you major headaches down the road.

### 5. Don't Be Intimidated

It's easy to feel like everyone at law school is smarter than you, more connected than you, and more liked than you. You may feel like you are the only one who has no clue what's going on, but rest assured that you aren't. In fact, it's highly likely that everyone else feels the same way.

Instead of focusing on how much you don't know and how much you assume everyone else does know, remind yourself that everyone has his or her own special talents and abilities; and focus on the things you have to offer that make you different from other students.

### 6. Get Some Sleep

In the midst of all your studying and socializing, you may be inclined to scrimp on sleep. However, this can be dangerous in the long run, leaving you lethargic and tired. Studies show that getting between six and eight hours of sleep a night makes for happier, healthier people; but more or less than this amount results in slower mental capabilities, fatigue, and even depression. In other words, sometimes the best thing you can do is get some sleep.

### 7. Supplement your Case Diet

If, after reading the cases you are assigned, you find yourself confused and a little bewildered, there are some supplemental materials, such as law review articles and Black Letter law outlines, you can read to help you out.

With outlines, examples, and review questions, Black Letter law outlines are great for making sure you understand the basic points of the law.

"Buy the Black Letter law outlines to ensure you are learning the law on which you will be tested, to help navigate a 'hide the ball' or 'philosopher king' situation without relying on divine revelation," Kirkman said.

**Check back next week for more advice in Survival Tips for 1Ls Part 2.**

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