How To Organize Class Work In Law School?

How does one organize his class work in law school and how does one locate materials when it comes to creating your outline. There are three big sources from which you will be able to gather a wealth of information. You can amass huge knowledge by briefing assigned cases, by taking notes in class from the teachers lectures and by taking notes from the outside reading that you do.

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Buy three spiral-bound notebooks for each class, spiral because outlining requires a lot of flipping back and forth and lose pages tend to get misplaced or lost - one for case briefs; one for class notes and the third one for notes from outside sources.

Professors may give you outside assignments-perhaps readings from law review articles, books, or articles in non-legal publications. In addition, if I were confused about something in class, I would often look up the subject in a hornbook or treatise and write notes on what I learned. This outside material proved to be invaluable in helping me understand concepts professors never adequately explained or sped over. This practice of merging information from these three different sources is central to the Law School Success System.

Procrastination

Try to do the assigned reading and briefing as close in time as possible to the class for which it’s to be covered. For instance, if in your Wednesday contracts class, you are given an assignment that’s due next Wednesday; don’t do the briefing until Monday or Tuesday. This is tantamount to asking the student to procrastinate. But that is for the simple reason that the material should be fresh in your mind when discussed. Brief it too far ahead of class and you won’t be able to follow the discussion as clearly as if you’d done it the day before. And if called upon, your recitation, not to mention your composure, may suffer.

Reading assignments will be long, but it’s vital that you don’t fall behind. If you’re a week behind the professor’s lectures, both what you’re presently reading (last week’s assignments) and what he’s currently teaching (this week’s assignments) will be lost on you.

Absences

Don’t cut classes. All contract law is not alike. All tort law is not alike. When you take a law school course, you’re not learning the absolute law, but the law according to your professor, who will emphasize some
topics to the exclusion of others—perhaps taking an approach quite different from that taken by the legal outline you bought. Similarly, all students are not alike. If you rely on other students’ notes for classes you missed, you’re gambling that they are as interested as you are in learning the material. That might not be the case.

There are many other reasons why there is no justification for missing classes. If you are not present in class, something important could be explained or taught and you find it to comprehend later on. You could also miss out on an important assignment because you did not know that it had been given and you also fall low in the esteem of the teacher who will value the hard working and regular student more than the ones who are lax and prone to being tardy and irregular in their attendance.

Color Coding

Some students use unique techniques for taking notes and briefing cases—color-coded pens, for instance. As long as you don’t neglect substance for technique, there’s nothing wrong with doing this. If writing your torts notes in fuschia ink helps you stay organized and remember the material, by all means, go right ahead. Just be sure to buy a semester’s worth of fuschia pens so you don’t run out of ink just before the exam and have to drop out of the class.

Personal Computers

If you have a personal computer, use it. I often typed my notes after class. If laptop computers or PCs had been available then I would have begged, borrowed, or stolen one and used it daily. The ability to cut and paste, to merge files, to check spelling and use other word processing features will drastically cut down on the time and effort required when you create your master outline.

You can create “macros”—replicating dozens of commands or words by pressing a single key—that will reproduce standardized information in your briefs. Of particular help in the Law School Success System is the automatic outlining capabilities built into most word-processing systems.

This feature will save hours and greatly speed the writing of your own master outlines. All you need to do is hit the return key and then tab in the desired number of spaces for your subcategories. The computer automatically prints out the proper number or letter level for the subcategories and creates outlines entirely by its word-processing system:

In addition, database programs or the mini databases built into some word-processing software will greatly aid in the assembly of your outline by allowing you to search for all cases, notes, and references dealing with, say, slander and libel or for all cases handed down in New York.

The Study Group

Law is not practiced in isolation. There is not one attorney, judge, or legal philosopher whose final product cannot be improved by comments and criticisms from others. One of your most humbling experiences as a student or new attorney will be to explain a very complicated legal rule to a layperson, only to have that listener ask a very uncomplicated, not legal question that points out the fallacy of your reasoning. A variety of perspectives on a legal issue are immensely helpful in solving legal problems.

In law firms, attorneys always meet in conferences and engage in less formal discussions when they are attempting to adopt a litigation strategy or plan a business deal. The corresponding phenomenon in law school is the study group. Are such groups important?

Not necessarily. Consider, for instance, what would happen if a group of attorneys sat down at a conference table to discuss an issue yet had no idea of the rules of law involved. The meeting would be a waste of time; the attorneys should get themselves into the library and do some preliminary research first.

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It’s the same with study groups. If you don’t come to them with sufficient knowledge, they’re a waste of time. By all means, talk with other students; there’s no better way to find out what you don’t know (which is much more important, of course, than finding out what you do know). But it’s probably smart to keep these get-togethers informal and short. Students will find it most helpful to meet with their groups during the study week prior to the final exams. But don’t leave all the studying with the group only. Ensure that you spend considerable time studying on your own for the exams. Although it can be a valuable supplement to the education process, group study is no substitute for learning the material yourself.
A fairly common mistake made by students, especially in their first year of study is to try and seek answers to lengthy problems armed with only a small portion of the facts. Study the case in its entirety before making a judgement on how you are going to approach it. By basing your response on just the basics of the problem, you may suddenly find that there is more about the problem that you did not know, or did not take the trouble of knowing that is going to vitally impact the case.

Before you enter the class review and outline whatever is likely to be covered in the classrooms. This will not only help you stay abreast of others in the class but you are likely to follow what the teacher teaches with a lot more ease and effortlessness.

Students should keep their study materials in a specially designated place, so that they don’t have to search for them when the need arises. It always pays to be well prepared for what is likely to be taught over the week. This can be done by going through the curriculum diligently and highlighting important dates and issues and also making a note of them in their personal diary.

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