Passing the Bar: A Quick Reference Guide For Today’s Law Student
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Registering for the Bar

Registration

The first step to sit for the bar exam is to register for the bar exam. Every jurisdiction has a slightly different process with different deadlines, so make sure you familiarize yourself with the website of your jurisdiction’s bar examiners. The National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) also has a very helpful [Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admissions](http://www.ncbex.org/publications/bar-admissions-guide/), on the homepage of its website, which it updates annually.

Deadlines

Make sure that you understand all of the deadlines you will face. Some jurisdictions have a series of deadlines with increasing fees. Others have deadlines for various stages of the process, particularly pertaining to character and fitness requirements. Sometimes there is a different deadline for laptop registration and handwriting the exam. Every year, students will register for the bar but miss the deadline to download the exam software, and then be forced to hand-write the bar exam. It’s not the end of the world to have to write by hand, but it is an added stressor to build up your handwriting skills and stamina while studying for the bar, if you weren’t planning to do so. Make sure you read all of the bar examiners’ instructions thoroughly, so you know everything you will have to do.

Exam Accommodations

If you have received exam accommodations during law school and want to receive accommodations on the bar exam, make sure that you know exactly what documentation you will be required to submit. Bar examiners are very strict about providing accommodations. They will likely require both historic and recent medical documentation. Work with your law school’s bar support and disability support services providers. They have worked with similarly situated students in the past and can assist you with your application. Pay close attention to the deadline for applying for accommodations, as it may not be the same as the deadline to register for the exam itself. (Note that if you have not yet taken the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam (MPRE), you must apply for accommodations prior to registering. <http://www.ncbex.org/exams/mpre/ada-accommodations/>.)

Character and Fitness

Some jurisdictions conduct the character and fitness process prior to registration for the bar exam, while others have a simple exam registration process, and a lengthier character and fitness process once bar results are released. The character and fitness process can be anxiety inducing. Many people have things to disclose – everything from underage drinking in an undergraduate dorm to felony convictions. There is almost no single disclosure that on its own will prevent you from becoming a lawyer. The key is to err on the side of disclosure and candor. Be sure to disclose all character and fitness matters to your law school, so that your law school file matches your bar admission application.

One concern that regularly comes up during the Character and Fitness process, but not during law school, is financial history. Because many lawyers will be accountable for managing client funds, Character and Fitness Committees want to ensure that applicants understand financial responsibility. You may wish to run a free credit check on yourself to make sure that you have no outstanding obligations about which you are unaware.

If you have something serious to disclose, see if your school has someone who works with students on these issues or speak to an attorney who specializes in character and fitness issues so that they can advise you on the process. If you do need to speak to a lawyer, your law school may be able to refer you to someone who can help. If you are prepared and forthright, you will be able to move through the Character and Fitness review without a problem.

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