Tip of The Week

This chapter provides some advice as you go through each of the nine weeks of bar preparation. Some people suggest a ten week study schedule, others study for eight weeks. Nine weeks is not only a happy medium, but it gives you enough time to get through all of the lectures, and still have two to three weeks of solid memorization and practice time right before the exam. If you do not have nine weeks to devote fully to bar study, you will need to alter the recommended schedule, and start studying earlier than nine weeks before the bar exam. You have likely heard stories of people who only seriously study for the bar for two weeks, or who work full-time and study part-time and pass. Of course, there are individuals who have done so. However, they are the exception, not the rule. You don’t want to take that chance. Give the bar exam its due and give yourself the best chance to pass it the first time.

If you will be working during bar study, you should start studying early. Make sure that you give yourself enough time to not only watch the lectures and memorize the doctrine, but also to do considerable practice of each section of the bar. Reflective practice is truly the secret to bar exam success.

*Week 1*

The first week will generally allow you to ease into bar study. You may find yourself questioning why this book suggests that you study for ten hours per day. But, don’t get too excited, your commercial bar review company’s schedule will ramp up soon enough, and you will easily be able to fill ten hours.

Make sure that you carve out some time to get to know your bar course’s materials. Bar review companies offer many services and materials, and it is worth it to take time now to familiarize yourself with everything on their website, as well as the printed materials they sent you. Often students don’t understand everything that is available to them until much later in the bar study period. Spend some time now playing around on the website and perusing the books so that you know what is there. Make notes to remind yourself of components that you want to utilize in the future.

You should also use this week to test out your daily schedule. Do your study locations work for you? Is it noisier or more crowded than you thought? Is your commute too long? When are you going to do each of your daily tasks? You want to do the most difficult tasks when your brain functions best. You’re not going to magically become a morning person or a night person. Bar study is not the time for radical shifts. Don’t try to do your most taxing task (whether that is lecture, practice questions, or making/annotating study materials) when your brain is the most tired. The first couple of weeks should be used to figure out what works for you, and adjust accordingly. (Don’t get caught up in what your friends are doing. Everyone does things slightly differently. You need to do what works for you.)

*Week 2*

During the second week, you may still be figuring out a schedule that works best for you. Try to solidify your schedule by the end of this week. While some flexibility is always important, you don’t want to be constantly changing things around. You will be better off if you get into the groove of a comfortable study routine.

This week, make sure that you have a plan for making study materials every day. You do not need to make entirely original outlines, charts, or flashcards for everything. But, you want to think ahead to the last couple of weeks and what you will want to memorize from. Make (or purchase) those materials now. (Be mindful, if you do purchase extra memorization materials, that they will be written by yet another third party, so you now have your bar review lecture notes in one voice, these purchased materials in a second voice, and neither of them in your own voice. Having two sources phrasing things differently can lead to added confusion. You don’t want to be overwhelmed with too many potential sources to memorize from, so be thoughtful about your purchases.) If you will be using commercial materials, make notes on them and make them your own in some way so that you can more easily memorize from them. Even if you use pre-made materials, it is important to review them every day after your lecture to reinforce what you learned during the lecture. Seeing the material more than once, in different formats, will help you internalize it.

If you are someone who has always made your own study materials, and you are finding yourself spending several hours per day outlining what you learned in your lecture, you need to make a change now. It is not sustainable, and you will not be able to catch up every weekend. It is important to find materials now that you can memorize from, and make them your own by annotating them and adding rules you learn from MBE and essay practice.

You want to make sure that your memorization materials are actually useful by doing practice questions with them. Are you able to easily find the answer to a question that comes up? Can you use the materials when practicing essays and MBEs?

Even though you need to prepare for memorization now, you are not expected to actually memorize now. You will do your rote memorization towards the end of the bar study process. Your task now is to learn, understand, and practice. Get your questions answered now. (You can reach out to your commercial bar review company with a question or ask your bar support teacher.) Make sure you understand the basic concepts by doing practice essays and MBEs.

If you have not already done so, start doing MPTs this week. You should do at least one MPT per week during the course of your bar study. (As the exam gets closer, you will want to do two MPTs back to back at least twice to make sure you know what that feels like.)

*Week 3*

You may start to feel overwhelmed around week three or four. You have covered a lot of material already, and there is still plenty more to come. Remember that it is not humanly possible to do everything that your bar course assigns, and you do not need to. Focus on watching the lectures, making/reviewing study materials, and doing practice every day. If you find reading the outlines before the lecture to be helpful, do it. If you find that you are spending hours reading and not retaining much, skip it.

Many bar review courses offer review questions and other assessment activities that are not reflective of bar essay or multiple-choice questions. If you find them to be helpful, keep doing them. But, if they don’t feel effective, it is a better use of your time to do bar-type questions instead (that means MBEs, essays, and MPTs as opposed to learning or review questions that your bar company has developed to reinforce the doctrine).

At this point, you may also find that being around your classmates is stressful. It is ok to break up with study partners that you have had throughout law school. You need to focus on what works for you now. They will still love you six weeks from now when you can commiserate about how terrible it was to study for the bar exam.

If you find yourself experiencing anxiety that is abnormal for you, speak to someone at your school, or reach out to your doctor. The earlier that you can get help and develop a plan, the better off you will be.

*Week 4*

This week, remember to breathe. This is a marathon, not a sprint. You can do it! You will remember what you need to (and you don’t need to remember everything). Breathe and take care of yourself. Make sure you take breaks, eat well, exercise, and sleep.

Trust yourself. By now, you should have a very good understanding of what is working for you. Keep doing those things. Stay focused on your end goal.

Focus on getting as much as you can out of your practice sessions. When you do essays, don’t just review them to see if you picked out the right rules and reached correct conclusions. Also review your structure. Make sure that you are using IRAC or CRAC, breaking your answer into small paragraphs, and writing clearly and concisely.

When you review MBEs, make sure you understand both why you answer questions incorrectly, and why you answer questions correctly. Focus not only on doctrinal errors, but test-taking mistakes so that you can develop strategies for improvement. Keep a list or journal of tips for yourself that you can periodically review. They can be tips on tough rules, or test-taking reminders. You want to interrupt bad habits now, and move past common mistakes. When you learn new rules through practice (which you will), add them to your outline/flashcards.

You will likely be offered a simulated MBE exam by your bar company sometime between weeks four and six. You may want to skip it because you don't feel ready. Don't. It's a good idea to do it, and it’s an even better idea to go to a live location and take it around other exam-takers, if that is offered as an option. You want to take it in an environment that feels as close to the actual exam as you can get.

You should take the practice MBE to practice the MBE. You are not taking it to get a score that is dispositive of how you will do on exam day. You haven't memorized everything yet. This isn't the test. But it is still a valuable experience. It is important to feel what it is like to do 100 multiple-choice questions, take a lunch break, and have to come back and answer 100 more. It is important to take away some lessons about test-taking and stamina. Pay attention to how you feel and how focused you are at various points during the exam. Notice when you are distracted, tired, or anxious. Notice your timing as you move through the exam at various points in the day. Focus on which subtopics you struggled with.

When you review your answers, notice when you answer several incorrectly in a row. Was it because one question was difficult and it blew your concentration and confidence for the next several questions? Was it because you were tired or hungry and you need to build in a snack (if your jurisdiction’s security policies permit), drink of water, or quick trip to the restroom to reset your focus?

Make note of how you felt at different parts during the day. What distracted you? When did you get hungry or tired? Make a plan for just before you get to that point on the actual exam, so you can prevent the same response.

Remember that if you get anxious, you can close your eyes, take 3-5 deep breaths, and reset. Sometimes people close their eyes and slowly count to ten. It will only take a few seconds and can save you a lot of wasted time and mental energy. Center yourself.

Also pay attention to specific topics and subtopics that you struggle with. Doing so can help you determine what to prioritize during the last couple of weeks, and eventually what you might need to let go of.

Remember, even though the practice MBE is a mock exam, you are still in learning mode. Use this experience to learn as much as you can about taking the MBE. As you review your answers, ask yourself what you can take away from each question that will help you get a similar question right in the future.

If you don’t do as well as you would have liked to do on the simulation, don’t panic. Many people bomb the practice tests. It's just practice. It's not the real thing. It can be very valuable if you stay in learning mode. The key now is to learn as much as possible from the experience and adjust your study plan accordingly.

This score is not dispositive. Keep studying and stay focused on learning. Your score will improve significantly from now until exam day as you learn more, memorize more, and practice more. You're not in exam mode until the actual day of the exam.

*Week 5*

At this point, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. You will probably be done with new doctrinal lectures next week, or the week after.

Make sure that you are not doing all of your practice questions on the computer. You will be given printed essays and MPTs, so you should have hard copies in front of you to write on when you practice. Similarly, the MBE is in a booklet, not on a computer screen. You need to practice in the manner that you will actually take the exam. We read differently on screens and on paper. You want to be comfortable engaging with the material in the way you will encounter it on exam day.

Check in with yourself and make sure that you are not simply going through the motions and doing bar company assignments for the sake of doing them. You do not want to be so focused on checking off items on your bar company’s to do list that you forget to actually learn.

Your goal should be learning, not just thoughtlessly doing. That means that it is more important to be thoughtful and reflective about each task, than it is to complete a to do list. There is no point in doing 50 MBE questions if you don't have time to review them. Doing that does not help you get similar questions right in the future. It is the review – and the incorporation of rules and tips into your study materials – that ensures that your practice is useful.

The same is true for essays. Don't just do essays closed book and move on. You should practice issue-spotting closed book, but if you don't know the rule, look it up. It is more critical for you to review, apply, and then remember the correct rule, than it is to do an essay closed book just because your bar company tells you to. (You will do more closed book essays and MBEs later.)

Keep pushing forward. You want to have two (preferably three) weeks before the bar where you are done with lectures, and can focus on active memorization and practice. If you stop now and try to master a subject, you will be taking away from that crucial time at the end where you will need it more.

Remember that the real learning happens through thoughtful and deliberate practice. Your brain remembers more when it has to work hard to solve a problem, especially when you get it wrong and have to figure out the answer through the explanation.

Stop trying to have the perfect outline, or have it all down. Keep moving forward. Spend more time on practice then you think you should, especially if you don't feel ready for practice.

*Week 6*

Now is the time to design a schedule for what you will be doing once bar review lectures are over. Everyone does things slightly differently during this period, and your daily schedule now will depend on what you have done up to this point. Most people find that they need to spend most of their time memorizing the material. However, you don’t want to go backwards in your progress on MBE, MPT, and essay practice. This time period – like all of bar study – is about balance. Make sure you do some of everything. Exactly how much of each thing you do depends on how comfortable you are in each area of law and how much practice you have completed up to this point.

The bar review companies will give you assignments for this period. You should follow their schedule to the extent that it is comfortable to you and you feel like you are getting out of it what you need. Feel free to tweak it so that you can spend more time on the areas you are having trouble with. You should make a calendar for yourself so that you make sure you fit in time to repeatedly review all of the subjects.

Your schedule should include going over each subject more than once. That means you’ll want to work through 2-3 subjects per day, moving on even though you will not know everything. Giving yourself the time to go back to subjects is critical. It is far more effective than spending all day on a single subject and then not coming back to it. Remember the virtues of spaced repetition from the *Unlearn What You Learned About Learning* chapter.

If you feel like you need to spend time memorizing, you’ll probably spend 60-75% of your day reviewing your outlines, charts, and/or flashcards. Make sure to stay active. Test yourself. Write things out. Talk things out. Don’t just passively read.

You may feel like that process doesn’t help very much and you would rather spend the majority of your time doing MBEs and essays. If that’s the case, you can spend closer to 75% of your time on practice.

Either way is fine, and both ways work. Just make sure to make a schedule, and stay as active as possible.

It’s common at this point to feel like everyone else is doing better than you, knows more than you, or has a better study plan than you. They don’t. You are doing just fine.

*Week 7*

Hold on to your dreams. Remember why you are doing this (see Chapter 9). You have come very far, and are in an excellent position to succeed on the bar exam.

Now is the time you have probably been waiting for – no more new lectures. But that doesn’t mean that you are done learning and should already know everything. Stay in learning mode.

With three weeks to go, you may feel like you need to already have everything memorized. You don't. That would be impossible. You have plenty of time between now and the exam to get the law to stick.

Stay focused on learning. Right now your days and nights are filled with memorization and practice. While you should move into doing practice closed book, that doesn't mean you are expected to have everything memorized perfectly. It is important to practice writing down what you know, and reasoning through the rest. Working through a question where you feel shaky on the law is an essential bar exam skill. You will have to answer a question on the exam about which you are not confident.

Every time you do an essay, MPT, or set of MBEs, think about 2-3 lessons that you can take away from that experience and carry with you to a similar fact pattern in the future. Write these lessons down. If they are rules, put them in your outline. If they are test-taking tips, keep them in a separate journal or on a separate list.

Everything you do is in service of internalizing and memorizing the rules. True memorization takes time and repetition. It won't happen overnight. Fortunately, you have just enough nights left to make it work.

Now is the time to shift your focus towards memorization. Everyone memorizes a bit differently. Some use outlines, some use flashcards, some people talk to themselves, some people record themselves and listen to their recordings, some people draw big charts and pictures, some people turn their notes into songs. You need to do what you know works for you. Do not try to do something just because it is working for your colleague, when you know it has not worked for you in the past. Think back to the doctrinal classes you did well in during law school. What did you do then?  What did you do in elementary school when you had to study for vocabulary tests?  Don't throw out what you know about how you learn. This may be the largest amount of material you have ever had to memorize, but the way you go about memorizing does not change much. Your brain has the capacity to memorize large amounts of information. You can, without a doubt, do this.

Break the material into smaller pieces. You may think you will never understand future interests, or jurisdiction, or secured transactions. Take it piece by piece, and it will come together.

There are many ways to memorize. Be creative! The key is active learning – don't just read, do something more.

*Week 8*

It is common to feel like nothing is sticking, no matter how many hours you put in. But, like many feelings during bar prep, just because you feel a certain way about your level of preparedness, it does not mean that feeling is an accurate representation of how much you know. You know a whole lot more than you think you do.

If you feel like something is not working, switch to a different activity. Varying study methods is useful because it forces your brain to work harder and helps with memory retention.

Remember that this is not a test where someone is going to be asking you to recite the details of various rules. The rules will be triggered by the MBE and essay fact patterns. You will be amazed at how much comes out of you during the exam, once you see the fact patterns.

Make sure you stay active with your learning. Do not just read and reread. Talk things out, write things out, do practice questions. Just keep moving forward.

Keep practicing. Remember that you want to learn the test, not your outline.

You may find that your practice MBE scores are going down. Unfortunately, this is very common. It does not mean that you are forgetting everything, or that you are going to fail the bar. There are a number of potential reasons for this MBE score decline (such as the time of day you are taking the questions, anxiety, and exhaustion), but the important things to remember are 1) you’re in good company, and 2) you are still capable of passing the bar. A score decline happens to plenty of people, and they go on to pass. Focus on learning as much as you can from each practice question that you do. Every single one is a learning opportunity.

Keep pushing forward. Try switching the source of your MBE questions. Focus on essays. You want to see as many fact patterns as possible, so even if you do not have time to fully write out every essay your bar company provides, read through several essays every day, issue spot, and read the model answer. You can even copy down the model answer if that helps you learn.

*Week 9*

It’s the last week of bar prep. You’re almost done! Take some time to review the exam day strategies from Chapter 25. Map out your day so that you know exactly what to expect.

Sometimes people slow down during this week, and that is totally ok. You don’t need to put in super long days just because the bar exam is next week. Let your brain rest if it needs to.

Take this time to solidify what you know and let go of the things you feel like you will never understand.

Only you know where you need to focus at this stage. Some people focus primarily on memorization in the last week, while others focus more on practice. You can make that determination based on what is helping more information stick. If you need to spend more time memorizing, do it. If you feel like you need to improve your essay issue spotting, read through more essays each day. If MBEs have got you down, do more MBE practice (on paper please, not just online). But don’t do only one thing, always build in some memorization and some practice.

The best thing you can do for yourself this week is to trust yourself, and take care of yourself. Stay focused, stay healthy, and get some rest.

*The Day Before the Exam*

Take a break the day before the exam. Go see a movie, have dinner with a loved one, get settled into your hotel room if you have one. Do some light outline review if you feel like you have to, but also do something that takes your mind off of studying.

You have worked so hard for the past 3-4 years. Today is your day to stop. Let your brain rest so it can remember all that you have learned. Do something to take your mind off of the bar exam.

Stop worrying. Stop trying to predict what will appear on the exam. Just breathe – deeply.

Remember that this exam is not a measure of your worth as a human being, or as an attorney.

Remember that you have been preparing for this moment for years, and you are ready.

Remember that you are standing on the shoulders of giants. Let the love and light of those who came before you and sacrificed to allow you to be in this moment, guide you to the finish line.

Enter that exam room proud, bold, and confident. You deserve to be here. You've got this!

*The Night Between*

The night between the two days of the exam, can be very stressful. If you are taking the exam under non-standard conditions, it may be a four-day exam, and then you will have multiple “nights in between” to consider. You are likely going to be exhausted, and anxious both about the first day and what is to come the second day. If you used a laptop, make sure that your answers for the written day are properly uploaded. Then, have some dinner and try to relax. Studying will not help you at this point. Your brain needs to calm down after an intensive day of testing. Try to get to bed early. You probably did not sleep much the night before the first day of the exam, so try to sleep some more now. You are almost done! Getting to this moment itself is a huge accomplishment. Take some time to be proud of yourself for all that you have done.