

HOW TO GUIDE #3

PREPARE FOR AN OPEN BOOK EXAM



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How to:

Prepare for an Open Book Exam

Many students underestimate the degree of difficulty of open book exams. However, not only are these exams quite lengthy but markers will expect more from you than a closed book exam because you have access to your course materials. There is an art to sitting an open book exam, and this Guide outlines key preparation tips.

Study as if the exam is closed book

Open book exams usually involve multiple problem questions. You will not have enough time to teach yourself legal principles during the exam. Thus, it is useful to pretend the exam is closed book and prepare as such - the more that you know going into the exam, the more likely it is that you will complete the paper on time. It also means that if you do run into difficulty during the exam with a particular question, you will have enough time to consult your notes or textbook. Knowing principles and cases off by heart also helps with your issue identification as hypothetical scenarios are often based on key precedents.

Make notes

Making comprehensive notes is a good way to learn the course content. Whether you choose to base your notes on a lawskool summary you should also supplement

your notes content from your textbook, answers to tutorial questions, and your notes from the lectures. Also, check your online subject page to make sure there are no supplements for the textbook – this is particularly relevant for fast-paced areas of law such as Income Tax, or where the set textbook is an edition that is more than one or two years old. Consulting all these sources will reduce the likelihood of you citing repealed, amended or irrelevant laws in your exam. If you choose to use a lawskool summary you need to make the summary your own. Tag pages and highlight your notes so that key principles and cases are easy to find. We encourage students not to wait until the last minute to purchase your lawskool notes. Get them as early as possible so that you can use them to keep up with your lectures throughout the Semester. This will give you more time to complete practice exam papers to help you prepare for your exams.

It is advised that you do not use a friend's notes to prepare for your exam as they might be out-of-date or contain errors.

Make notes of your notes

Making comprehensive notes is extremely useful in preparing you for an exam. However, in the exam itself, you will not have enough time to consult these notes for every question. Therefore, if you have time it is advised that you create your own summary by using a lawskool summary and your notes for quick reference. This could be as simple as stating a legal principle and then listing the relevant case or provision. If you are a visual learner, drawing flowcharts or writing checklists are useful ways to summarise your notes. Keep your summaries in a separate bundle to

your comprehensive notes, so that in the exam you can find brief or detailed information as needed.

Read, highlight and tab your textbook

In the exam, you only want to use your textbook as a last resort as it is very time-consuming to try and find relevant sections. This issue is compounded if you are nervous or stressed. However, if you need to consult your textbook during the exam, you want to make sure that it is easy to use – so it is important to read the book, highlight important content, and tab the examinable chapters. Under no circumstances should you take an unmarked textbook into an open book exam.

Do practice problem solving questions

It is highly advised that you do practice problem solving questions prior to an open book exam. This gives you experience in identifying issues and in combining legal principles together to form an argument. In addition, in the process of answering practice questions, you will develop extremely useful summaries of law. In an exam, if a legal issue is on point, you could copy this content directly from your notes. This will save you time consulting your other materials, and also mean that you are less likely to miss vital precedents because you have previously given this issue thought.

Reviewing lawskool exam questions and model answers are an invaluable way to help you prepare for your exams. Many universities also make past exam papers available online through the library catalogue.

Make sure you know what material is examinable

Attend non-compulsory revision lectures and tutorials. They give vital information about what material will be examinable, and might save you days of studying topics that will not be in the final exam. Attending these classes will make your study more time-effective.



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