

Chapter 1

The L Team: The LSAT and Its Sponsors

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If you want to go to law school, you must take the *Law School Admission Test*, a.k.a. the LSAT. All 201 law schools that belong to the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) (see the section, “What Have You Done for Me Lately? The LSAC” at the end of this chapter) require it. Law schools that don’t require it may not be approved by the American Bar Association (ABA), which in turn may not qualify you for admission to a state bar, so be careful about choosing a school that doesn’t.

The LSAT, annoying though it can be, is the only means law schools have of evaluating all their applicants on the same playing field. Colleges are different, backgrounds are different, cultures are different, but the LSAT is the same for everyone. The LSAT is carefully designed so that the testing experience of test-takers is virtually identical. Everyone has the same time per section, the same rules, and the same testing environment. And each LSAT test is crafted so that test-takers have a 90 percent chance of scoring the same on a different version. So, each school feels pretty confident that the LSAT is an objective measure of student ability.

Grade point averages, unlike the LSAT, are highly subjective; they vary depending on the difficulty of a school, the difficulty of particular courses, and other totally random and unpredictable factors (like how often a student decides to go out instead of staying in to study). Law school applications include other information like personal statements that can give them an idea of a student’s abilities, but still the schools can’t know for sure that they’re getting the real goods — plenty of students get help writing those essays. That leaves the LSAT as one of the most reliable and objective means to compare candidates.

In this chapter, I introduce you to the LSAT and its various parts, and then tell you all about registering and preparing for the big day. Finally, I talk about the organization behind all this madness, the LSAC.

Getting to Know the Enemy

If you want to get a decent score on the LSAT, you need to know the test. You can’t expect to walk into a test center cold, never having encountered an LSAT in your life and just ace the questions.

You don’t necessarily have to study for a long time. If you’re good at standardized tests, you may be able to flip through one or two sample tests, work a few of the problems, get the idea, and score in the 95th percentile. Some people can. If, on the other hand, you find standardized

tests in general difficult, and the LSAT particularly difficult, you probably need to practice a bit more. Whatever your situation, keep your motivation and prepare with the notion that you can and will improve with practice.

The LSAT consists of four parts:

- ✓ Analytical Reasoning section
- ✓ Logical Reasoning section
- ✓ Reading Comprehension section
- ✓ Writing Sample section

The Writing Sample section is always last, but the other three sections can come in any order. You take six different test sections, which include two scored sections of Logical Reasoning and one unscored section that can be any of the three multiple-choice tests. You don't know which section is unscored, and it looks just like any other LSAT test section. Every section except for the Writing Sample is a 35-minute multiple-choice test; the Writing Sample lasts 30 minutes.

Remember, on the LSAT, all the multiple-choice questions have five possible answers: A, B, C, D, and E.



The unscored section that you take is a collection of questions that the LSAC is considering using on a future LSAT. The LSAC wants to see how well these new questions work when presented to actual LSAT-takers. This section can be Analytical Reasoning, Logical Reasoning, or Reading Comprehension; you don't know which section is unscored.



The quickest way to get your hands on an actual LSAT is to download the sample test available at the LSAC Web site (www.lsac.org). Downloading the sample is a good way to familiarize yourself with the test and its format.

Taking a Quick Look at the Types of Questions

The LSAT has three different kinds of multiple-choice questions. Each of them has its own virtues and vices, and you will come to know and love them all (though I won't blame you if you pick a favorite).

Analytical reasoning — playing games with your head

The Analytical Reasoning section consists of four logic problems — the infamous “logic games” — each of which is followed by between five and eight questions. These problems involve a group of players that need to be arranged and the rules that govern how you can arrange them.



Many people call Analytical Reasoning problems “logic games.” This book doesn't use the term “logic games”; it calls them “Analytical Reasoning problems.” The reason for this is that there's another section on the LSAT called Logical Reasoning, and it gets terribly confusing if two different sections of the LSAT have almost identical-sounding names.

You may get something like: Five college students, B, C, D, E, and F, must share three rooms in a house. B can't stay with D. E must stay with F. This fact pattern is followed by several questions that allow you to explore your understanding of the relationships between the students and the dorm rooms. One question may propose five possible roommate arrangements, and ask you to choose which one is the only one that could work.

This kind of puzzle commonly appears on IQ tests or in books of games to amuse travelers on airplanes. What they have to do with law school is a mystery to many people. The LSAC PrepTest booklets say that these types of problems “simulate the kinds of detailed analyses of relationships that a law student must perform in solving legal problems.” That may be exaggerating the amount of logical analysis that law students must perform. When I was in law school, I was never called upon to work a logic problem. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, were any of my classmates.

Still, the skills that the Analytical Reasoning section tests are important in law school. To answer these questions correctly, you must read carefully and accurately. You have to apply rules to a system, which is similar to applying statutes or case law to a problem. You have to restrict your analysis to what is directly stated or that can be logically inferred. So the Analytical Reasoning section is fairly useful at predicting who might succeed in law school.

The Analytical Reasoning section is worth 25 percent of your LSAT score. See Chapters 4 through 7 for more on analytical reasoning.

Logical reasoning — putting your arguing skills to good use

The Logical Reasoning section consists of about 25 short (for example, three or four sentences) passages about various topics. Each of them is followed by one or two questions. The questions ask you to identify the point of an argument, to make deductions about what the author is assuming, to draw conclusions, to identify principles or argument structures, to spot logical errors, and so forth.

You don't need to know any formal logic to answer these questions. All you have to do is read carefully (and quickly) and think clearly. Sometimes the wording is tricky, and you have to concentrate to avoid getting confused. Sometimes jotting down some notes or paraphrasing the passage in your own words can help you focus.

Every LSAT has two Logical Reasoning sections. Together, they're worth 50 percent of your LSAT score. Chapters 8 through 13 are full of information and practice for logical reasoning.



This point may seem obvious. Because the Logical Reasoning section is with 50 percent of your total LSAT score, work hard on your technique for these problems. You get twice the benefit if you do well on this section!

Reading comprehension — concentrating and remembering what you read

In the Reading Comprehension section, you read four fairly long passages on particular topics and answer several questions about them. The questions ask about the author's conclusion, the author's tone, the meaning of words, how the passage is organized, and other points designed to test your ability to understand what you read. The good news: The LSAT uses

a limited pool of question types over and over again. Because you can predict the types of questions being asked, you can practice reading to answer the questions you know you'll see.

Topics range from humanities and science and social science disciplines to political writing. You don't need any expertise in any particular area; in fact, if you have expertise in the subject of a passage, try to forget your outside knowledge. You want to answer all the questions from the information given to you in the passage. Outside knowledge may actually distract you!

This section tests your ability to read and understand a fairly long reading passage. Reading and understanding a long passage is applicable to law school because most law classes consist of reading long, densely worded passages on obscure topics and then answering questions about them.

The Reading Comprehension section accounts for 25 percent of your LSAT score. See Chapters 14 through 17 for the lowdown.

The writing sample — jumping the final hurdle

The last part of the LSAT is the Writing Sample section. You receive one sheet of lined paper, and you get 30 minutes to write your essay on it. (Yep, that means you write it by hand.) The essay topic lets you exhibit your skills at arguing one side or the other of a proposition.

For example, your question may ask you to decide which dog a widow should buy: a German shepherd, who would be a good guard dog but eat a lot of food and not be very affectionate; or a Pekingese, who would make a good companion and be cheap to feed but would be utterly useless for home defense. (Actually, my mother's Pekingese was a fierce little demon and terrorized the whole neighborhood. You can explore this question further in Chapter 20.)

Your selection doesn't matter. There's no right or wrong answer. All you have to do is pick a side and justify your decision. Chapters 18 and 19 go over this process in detail.

You don't get a score on the writing sample, but the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) (see "What Have You Done for Me Lately? The LSAC" later, in this chapter) sends a copy of your essay to every law school that receives your LSAT score.



Some folks wonder why they should prepare for the Writing Sample section if it's unscored. Law schools often read essays in deciding borderline cases or comparing similar applicants. If your profile is substantially similar to hundreds of others, law schools often look at the essays to compare like candidates.

You Gotta Score!

The LSAT is scored on a scale from 120 to 180; every year a few people attain the Everest-like peak of 180, and they can pretty much write their own tickets to law school. The average score is a little higher than 150 (around 153). Any score higher than 160 is quite good, and puts you in the top 10 to 12 percent of test-takers. A score of 166 puts you near the 95th percentile, and a score more than 170 is rare.

To get a 160, you need to get more than 80 percent of the answers correct. To get a 150, you need to get about 65 percent correct. If you get 95 percent or more right, you'll be up in the stratospheric 170 or even 180.

The LSAT of the future

The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) is constantly working to develop the LSAT, testing new questions and considering ways to make the test more accurate. One potential new addition is a scored writing test. The LSAC realizes that many people and schools currently ignore the Writing Sample section, and the LSAC believes that a scored writing test would better reflect the abilities of test-takers, which makes sense, because law students and lawyers do a lot of writing. The LSAC is also considering a listening comprehension test, which would test a

student's ability to take notes on a dialog and answer questions about it. Other possible modifications to the LSAT include revisions in the Analytical Reasoning and Reading Comprehension sections, perhaps requiring students to use two related passages to answer questions, which would be similar to the law school skill of applying principles from several different cases to a legal problem. All potential changes would be intended to make the test a more reliable method of identifying students with the skills that would make them successful law students.

The LSAT scoring is straightforward. Your raw score is the number of questions you get right; no points are deducted for wrong answers. You plug that raw score into the score chart to determine what your LSAT score would be. So if, say, your test has 100 questions on it, and you get 75 of them right, your raw score is 75 and your LSAT score would be 161. If you get 44 right, you'd get a 142.



The LSAT-writers work hard to ensure that the test is reliable. That means the same test-taker should get scores in a similar range on two or three different tests, and that luck in getting an easy test shouldn't be a factor in scores. In practice, luck will always be something of a factor, but it shouldn't be a major one.

Still, you've probably taken a metric ton of tests by now, and you know that everyone has good days and bad days, good tests and bad tests (hey, even good hair days and bad hair days!). The combination of a bad test and a bad mood (say, for instance, despite my advice to the contrary you showed up at the test center with a killer hangover) can lead to a misleadingly bad score. If that happens, you can cancel your score and try again (see more about doing this in Chapter 2). On the other hand, you may be in the test-taking zone on test day, and every question seems laughably easy to you. It can happen that way. If you have a good day, thank your lucky stars because that'll probably result in a good LSAT score and law school admission.



What if you get a 160 and your friend gets a 163? Does that mean your friend is a better law school prospect than you? Probably not. Small differences between test-takers aren't usually due to actual differences of ability. Your score will be in the range of scores you're capable of, but if you take the LSAT several times within a short period of time, you probably won't get the same score every time. It may go up slightly; it may go down slightly, but it should be within 3 points up or down of your original score (though your mileage may vary).

Registering for the LSAT

The LSAT happens four times a year: in June, October, December, and February. If you want to enter law school the next fall, you must take the LSAT by December at the latest, though I highly recommend taking it earlier. October and December are the most popular test dates because some law schools start taking applications in the fall and begin accepting applicants early in the winter; the earlier you apply, the better your odds of acceptance. The October, December, and February tests are scheduled for Saturdays. The June test is on a Monday.



If you observe the Sabbath on Saturday, you can request to take the test on another day, usually the Monday following the Saturday test date. To do this, have your rabbi or minister write a letter on official stationery, confirming your religious obligations, and send it to the LSAC.

The registration fee for the LSAT is currently \$112. If you miss the first deadline and must register late, there is an additional charge of \$56. (All prices are subject to change; be sure to check with the LSAC to find out current charges.)

Keep the following things in mind when registering for the LSAT:

- ✔ **Be sure to register.** Okay, duh. But really, be sure to register. The deadlines for registration fall well ahead of test dates, so you need to be on the ball. You can find the deadlines on the LSAC Web site (www.lsac.org). (Also, test centers fill up early, so you may not get into the site you want if you don't register on time.) If you want to go to law school in September, you need to take the previous December's LSAT, which means you must register in November. Plan accordingly. And make sure you're free the day of the test!
- ✔ **When you register, be very careful you enter the correct code for your test center.** If you get the code wrong, you may be assigned a test center in a different state — not convenient. (The LSAC isn't checking for accuracy; the LSAC has no idea where you really want to take the test, so it won't know if you make a mistake.) Driving several hours the day before your test definitely won't calm your nerves. You can change your test center through the LSAC Web site, but you don't want to have to worry about that if you can avoid it.
- ✔ **Not every test center offers the LSAT on every test date.** Check to make sure that your preferred location is offering a test on your preferred date. (Occasionally you can get the LSAC to administer a test in a different location, but only if you can't travel to a regular site and if you register well in advance.) Safeguard your admission ticket when it arrives.
- ✔ **If something comes up — you catch the flu, you get sent overseas to war, you go into labor — and you're unable to take the LSAT, you can get a partial refund.** Granted, you only get (\$40) of your registration fee back, but that's better than nothing. The LSAC Web site has deadlines for sending in a written request.
- ✔ **If you discover before the test date that you won't be able to make it that day, you can change your test date.** Of course, you have to pay a fee of \$29. The LSAC Web site has the deadlines for sending in a written request.



If you absolutely can't afford the cost of the LSAT, you can apply for a fee waiver. The LSAC doesn't want to deny access to the legal profession solely on the basis of economic disadvantage. Be warned, though; the requirements are quite strict.

Preparing for the LSAT

Helping students prepare for the LSAT has become a multimillion-dollar (at least) industry. Test-prep companies promise huge score increases; students spend thousands on semester-long courses and tutors. Every major bookstore is full of books to help prospective lawyers on their way.

Be wary of expensive classes or snake oil salesmen that promise to reveal secrets or give you huge score increases. Usually, all that most people need is a good LSAT-prep book and a few recent LSAT tests to do their best on test day. Save your money for law school! (But be warned,

many folks lack the motivation and discipline for self-study. If this describes you, either buckle down and sign a contract with yourself, form a study group, or consider enrolling in a course.)

Methods and madness

Many test-prep companies promise to teach you methods to beat the LSAT, proven techniques that make the right answers appear before your eyes like visions from the heavens. They break the test down into its component parts — 7 different kinds of logic games, 14 different types of logical reasoning questions — and expect their students to spot these types on test day, so they can approach the LSAT with the proper strategic attitude.

This book doesn't make such promises or take the complicated approach. There aren't any secrets or shortcuts to success on the LSAT. Some skills — an ability for reading rapidly, having a strong vocabulary, and being able to concentrate — certainly do help, but you acquire these skills by spending years of your life in school and reading. No book can magically endow you with these skills overnight. This book isn't going to help you analyze the test so you could do a better job writing the LSAT than the people who actually make it up; life is too short to spend much of it shuffling pieces of the LSAT into categories. And the fact is, you never know what your actual LSAT will look like. Every test is unique, and you're best off preparing to be flexible.

You can answer all the LSAT's questions by using pretty much the same approach — careful reading and calm, logical thinking. This book illustrates this approach.

What will really help

What will really help you succeed at the LSAT is exposure to the test. Exposure may mean something as simple as flipping through a sample test the night before you take the official one. More often, though, it may mean several hours of practice, or it may even mean weeks of practice.

This book, however, doesn't provide weeks of practice. It provides about 24-hours' worth, which is most profitably spent if you don't do it all at once.



If you need extra prep materials, you can't do better than the old LSATs sold by the LSAC; they're called PrepTests, and they're the actual LSATs that have been administered to willing victims over the last decade. Be warned, though; the LSAT has increased in difficulty over the years, so you'll get your most valuable practice from the most recent tests.



Staples in the central gutter hold the LSAT PrepTest booklets together. These staples aren't always flattened down to the paper, so be careful that you don't stab your finger with one as you run your hand down the page to flatten it out. (I'm speaking from personal experience.)

If you want to take a prep course, by all means do so. It can give you valuable practice. It may even improve your score. Then again, it may not. Not everyone who takes a course sees much improvement, if any. (My brother took a course that promised an LSAT score up around 180; he got a 178 on the practice test that the test center gave him, but dropped to 166 on the real thing.)

If you want to use other books that promise a foolproof "method," go right ahead. Do what you think you need to do. But if you don't think those things are necessary, don't bother. Beating the LSAT doesn't need to be the ultimate goal of your existence, and preparing for it doesn't need to take that long.

What study method works best for you?

No one wants to spend too much of her life thinking about the LSAT. Studying as efficiently as possible makes sense. Here are some possible plans for your LSAT studying.

- ✔ **The slow and careful approach:** You should go with this approach if you take preparing for the LSAT very seriously and are willing to spend a good deal of time on it. Start at least 2 months before you plan to take the LSAT. Go to the LSAC Web site (www.lsac.org) and order some actual LSAT PrepTests. While you wait for them to arrive, read all the chapters in this book carefully, working all the practice questions. Then take the two practice exams at the end of the book. By this time your LSAT PrepTests should have arrived for you to take. When the time comes to take the real LSAT, fear not — you'll be ready for anything it throws at you.
- ✔ **The quick and dirty route:** Okay, so you don't want to waste one more minute than necessary on the

LSAT. Here's what you should do: Begin at least the day before the LSAT. Read Chapters 4, 8, 14, and 18. Work some of the questions in Chapters 6, 12, and 16. If you can't answer them quickly and easily, check back to the appropriate chapters to find out more about your problem areas. Outline a writing sample essay in your head to make sure you know what to do. If you have time, work one of the practice tests. Show up at the LSAT and do your best.

- ✔ **Riding the fence:** Most of you probably fall somewhere in the middle. That's fine; you're the one who knows what you need and how much time you can afford.

No matter how you choose to study, start sooner rather than later. The more time you spend working on the LSAT, the better you'll get at it, so you don't want to short-change yourself by procrastinating.

Practice makes perfect

Any book you consult will recommend that you prepare for the LSAT by taking a practice test or two under simulated test-day conditions. That means sitting down on a Saturday morning (or some other day when you have three or four hours unscheduled) with a test booklet, an answer sheet, a No. 2 pencil, and a timer, and working your way through the test, section by section, stopping work when the timer buzzes.

You can do that, and you should if you think it will help you. I expect, though, that you already know what test pressure is like. After all, the LSAT isn't your first standardized test. Your valuable (and presumably limited) study time may be better spent working through questions slowly and carefully, making sure that you really know how to work the analytical reasoning and read the logical reasoning questions.



A word on mood: Sometimes you just can't start studying. You're too tired, too distracted, too whatever to think clearly. Other times you fly through the problems. Try to practice when the time is right; forcing yourself to work questions when you don't feel like it won't help your skills and will certainly make you think you know less than you do.

However you decide to practice, just be sure you give yourself enough time. Try to start at least a couple of weeks before the test date. You can always slack off if you decide you don't need the preparation.

What Have You Done for Me Lately? The LSAC

Did you ever wonder who makes up the LSAT? It comes from the minds of the *Law School Admission Council*, or LSAC, a nonprofit corporation in Newton, Pennsylvania. The LSAC comprises 201 law schools in the United States and Canada; the member professors and

attorneys volunteer their time to the council. The LSAC offers a number of services designed to facilitate applications to law school and improve legal education, and it also sponsors research into issues such as minority representation in the legal profession.



If you're serious about applying to law school, familiarize yourself with the LSAC and its offerings, because it's going to be part of your life for a while. You can visit the LSAC, register for the LSAT online, and do various other fun activities at the LSAC's Web site, www.lsac.org.

Creating and administering the LSAT

The LSAC administers the LSAT to more than 100,000 people every year; almost 150,000 took it in 2003. They create four complete tests every year and constantly work to develop new questions and refine the LSAT's accuracy — that's one reason why you get to take an extra, unscored section of multiple-choice questions when you take the LSAT. The LSAC compiles statistics on the number of people that take the tests and scores received, schedule test dates, field questions and complaints from test-takers, and generally make it possible for many people to apply to law school every year.

Aiding in law school applications

The LSAC also plays a major role in law school applications. When you register for the LSAT, you can also sign up to participate in the *Law School Data Assembly Service*, or LSDAS for \$103.

The LSDAS streamlines the law school application process by assembling most of the information needed to apply to law schools and sending it to the schools in one package. An LSDAS report includes

- ✓ Summaries of transcripts from all your undergraduate and graduate schools
- ✓ LSAT scores and copies of the LSAT Writing Sample section
- ✓ Letters of recommendation

Your registration fee buys you one report to a law school. If you buy additional reports to law schools at the same time as you register for the LSDAS, they cost \$10 each; if you buy them later, they're \$12 each. (All prices are subject to change, of course.) LSDAS registration lasts five years. If you register for another LSAT during that period, your LSDAS gets extended to last for five years from your most recent registration.

Almost all the law schools approved by the ABA require that its applicants use the LSDAS, which makes your life much easier. Rather than having to assemble all that information for every school to which you apply, you just give the information to the LSAC (along with some money) and it takes care of everything. When you apply to a law school, the school requests the report from the LSAC, the LSAC sends the report, and you just sit back and wait.

You can register for the LSDAS on the LSAC Web site (www.lsac.org) at the same time as you register for the LSAT. When you do this, you authorize the LSAC to release information about you to eligible law schools, which means law schools who are interested in you may contact you.



If you don't register for the LSDAS at the same time as you register for the LSAT, you still must register for the LSDAS before you apply to law schools. Do this at least six weeks before you start applying.

Providing other goods and services

The LSAC does a number of other good deeds for the legal education system.

- ✓ The *Candidate Referral Service* allows law schools to search LSDAS data for students who match particular profiles (for example, LSAT scores of a certain level, minorities, women, students from a certain region, and so on) so that they can contact them and invite them to apply.
- ✓ Law school forums held in different states give prospective law students an opportunity to find out more about law school and the legal profession.
- ✓ The LSAC sells LSAT-prep materials and other information; you can buy these materials on the Web site. Buying copies of recently administered LSATs is one of the most useful tools. They come with answers, not explanations, but they're the real thing and make great practice tests. (Do focus most on the most recent tests, because they've gotten a bit harder since the late 1990s.)
- ✓ The LSAC also works to increase minority representation in the legal profession.