

Chapter 1

The L Team: The LSAT and Its Administrators

In This Chapter

- ▶ Exploring the various sections of the LSAT
 - ▶ Understanding the LSAT scoring system
 - ▶ Knowing how and when to register for the LSAT
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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. The more than 200 law schools that belong to the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) require it (see the later section “What Have You Done for Me Lately? The LSAC” for info about the LSAC). 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 require the LSAT.

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, and 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, law schools feel 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 random and unpredictable factors (like the grading policies of individual professors). Law school applications include other information like personal statements that can give schools an idea of a student’s abilities, but the schools still 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, you get an introduction to the LSAT and its various parts and learn all about registering and preparing for the big day. You also get a peek at the organization behind all this madness, the LSAC.



If you’re going to be a lawyer, you have to get used to disclaimers, and here’s ours for this chapter. The technical information we offer about fees and procedures is subject to change, so refer to the official website (www.lsac.org) to verify the facts and figures for yourself.

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 generally challenging, and the LSAT difficult in particular, you probably need to devote yourself to more practice time to master the proven strategies provided by this book. Whatever your situation, keep motivated and prepare with the certainty that you can and will improve with dedicated practice.

The LSAT consists of four parts:

- ✓ Analytical reasoning section
- ✓ Logical reasoning section
- ✓ Reading comprehension section
- ✓ Writing sample section

The writing sample section is the only section that isn't multiple choice, and it's always last. The other three multiple-choice sections can come in any order. You take six separate test sections: two scored sections of logical reasoning, one scored analytical reasoning section, one scored reading comprehension section, one writing sample, and one unscored section that can be any of the three multiple-choice sections. You don't know which section is unscored, and the unscored section looks just like any other LSAT test section. Every section lasts 35 minutes.



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 free sample test available at the LSAC website (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 and an unscored written essay. Each questions type has its own virtues and vices, and you'll come to know and love them all (though we 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 games involve a group of players (or game pieces) that you need to arrange or assign and the rules that govern how you go about it.

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.” And it’s true that the skills 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’s directly stated or to what 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 about 25 percent of your LSAT score. See Chapters 4 through 6 for more on analytical reasoning.

Logical reasoning — putting your arquing 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.

Most of these questions involve informal or casual logic, the kind you use to make everyday decisions. 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. 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 about 50 percent of your LSAT score. Chapters 7 through 10 are full of information about logical reasoning.



Because the logical reasoning section is worth a considerable percentage 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 three fairly long and one pair of shorter 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 law-related 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 about 25 percent of your LSAT score. See Chapters 11 and 12 for the lowdown.

The writing sample — jumping the final hurdle

The last part of the LSAT is the writing sample section. You receive one double-sided sheet of lined paper, and you get 35 minutes to write your essay on it. (Yep, that means you write it by hand.) The essay topic lets you exhibit your skills at using a set of facts to defend one course of action over another.

For example, your question may ask you to decide which dog a widow should buy: a German shepherd, which would be a good guard dog but not very affectionate, or a Pekingese, which would make a good companion but be utterly useless for home defense. (You can explore this question further in Chapter 13.)

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 13 and 14 go over this process in detail.

You don't get a score on the writing sample, but the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) 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. Although percentile charts vary slightly among test administrations, the average LSAT score is around 152. Any score higher than 160 is quite good and puts you in the top 20 percent of test-takers (80th percentile). A score of around 164 puts you around the 90th percentile, and a score of 173 or above is where the top 1 percent of test-takers usually reside.

To get a 160, you need to answer about 75 percent of the answers correctly. To get a 150, you need to answer correctly about 55 percent. If you get 95 percent or more right, your score will be up in the stratosphere, around a 175. 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 may be 161. If you get 44 right, you'd get more like a 144. The raw score to scaled score conversion changes very slightly from test to test to account for the minor differences in difficulty of each test.



The LSAT-writers work hard to ensure that the test is reliable. That means that 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 is always 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 our advice to the contrary, you pull an all-nighter before exam day) 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 among 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 or 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 should take the LSAT by the prior December, or February at the latest, though we 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 \$165. If you miss the first deadline and must register late, there's an additional charge of \$70. (All prices are subject to change — and likely will — so 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 website (www.lsac.org). Also, test centers fill up early, so you may not get into the site you want if you don't register early. If you want to go to law school in September, you most likely 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 to 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 doesn't check for accuracy; the LSAC has no idea where you really want to take the test, so it doesn'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 website for a fee, 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 get only a small portion of your registration fee back, but that's better than nothing. The LSAC website 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. The LSAC website 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 on the LSAC website. 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 (such as this one!) 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, buckle down and sign a contract with yourself, form a study group, or consider enrolling in a reasonably priced test prep course.

What really helps

What really helps you succeed at the LSAT is exposure to the test. Exposure may mean something as simple as taking one or two sample tests the days before you take the official one. More often, though, it may mean several weeks — or even months — of practice.



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 and changed slightly in format over the years, so you'll get your most valuable practice from the most recent tests.

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 two months before you plan to take the LSAT. Go to the LSAC website (www.lsac.org) and order some actual LSAT PrepTests. (You can order the tests as e-books if you'd like, but you won't be able to write on the tests the way you can during the exam.) While you wait for them to arrive, read all the chapters in this book carefully, working all the practice questions. Then take the three practice exams at the end of the book and the others available online. By this time your LSAT PrepTests should have arrived to give you more practice. 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've put off studying for the LSAT to the last minute (a habit we recommend you overcome before you enter law

school!) and need to maximize the little amount of time remaining before you take the test. Here's what you should do: Begin at least the week before the LSAT. Read Chapters 4 through 12. Work some of the questions available online. If you can't answer the questions quickly and easily, check back to the appropriate chapters to find out more about your problem areas. Download a full-length LSAT PrepTest from the LSAC website, take the test under timed conditions, and review your answers to discover your areas of weakness. Work as many of the practice problems in this book as you can, concentrating particularly on the question types that give you the most trouble. Outline a writing sample essay in your head to make sure you're familiar with how to organize a response to an essay prompt. 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 shortchange 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.

Taking a timed, full-length practice test is ideal, but if you're unable to carve out three or four hours to complete this useful exercise, don't despair. 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 problems and analyze the logical reasoning questions. Then take timed practice sections to hone your time-management skills for each question type.

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. The more exposure you have to test questions, the more comfortable you'll be on exam day.

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 the majority of 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 the LSAC will 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 website, www.lsac.org.

Creating and administering the LSAT

The LSAC administers the LSAT to more than 100,000 people every year. The organization creates four complete tests every year and constantly works 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 the scores they receive, schedules test dates, fields questions and complaints from test-takers, and generally makes 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 *Credential Assembly Service*, or CAS, for an extra fee. Law schools require you to use the CAS to send your application documentation.

The CAS 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. A CAS 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

The LSAC gets you coming and going. In addition to paying the CAS fee, you need to purchase a report for each law school on your application list. LSDAS registration lasts five years. Almost all the law schools approved by the ABA require that their applicants use the CAS, 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 your 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 CAS on the LSAC website (www.lsac.org) at the same time that 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 that are interested in you may contact you.



If you don't register for the CAS at the same time that you register for the LSAT, you still must register 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 CAS 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 website. 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.
- ✓ The LSAC also works to increase minority representation in the legal profession.

