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Chapter **1**

Exploring the Realities of Law School

Never has being a lawyer been more popular! Law school applications are up significantly, and law school seems to be the “in” thing to do across the country, regardless of whether you’re a graduating college senior or a middle-aged career-changer. If you’re looking to take that first step on the intellectual journey of a lifetime, now is a prime time for doing it. At first, everything about law school can seem intimidating and intense, but rest assured that this chapter starts you out on the right path by offering an overview of the entire law school experience.

Demystifying the Law School Experience

Many prelaw students are confused about what law school entails because they may not know anyone who is in or has been through the experience. (I surely didn’t when I applied.) How does the saying go? You don’t know what you don’t know. That’s definitely true as it relates to law school. It’s a big mystery. So in this section, I fill you in on exactly what you can expect as a new *1L* (first-year law student).



TIP

As part of the admissions process, I encourage you to actually visit a law school classroom in person or virtually if that's offered. That way, you can find out

- »» How the faculty or professors engage their students
- »» More about the Socratic method (check out the later section "Surviving the Socratic method")
- »» How prepared the students are (or aren't)
- »» How long the classes are
- »» How you should address your faculty members (they're professors, not "teachers")



REMEMBER

Ultimately, being prepared, being organized, and getting your mindset right for the journey are key. Just as admissions professionals tell you as you begin your application process!

Preparing for three (or four) years of blood, sweat, and tears

No one denies that law school is a lot of work. You have three years (or four, if you're a part-time or evening law student) of challenging classes, approximately 100 pages of reading every night, and sometimes only a midterm and a final exam that determine your entire grade for each class. On top of the academic load are time-consuming extracurricular activities, such as the law review or a law journal, moot court, and the myriad other organizations you can join. (See Chapter 19 for complete details about law school extracurriculars.)

And in your free time (who said anything about free time?), you're expected to send out résumés and cover letters while prospecting for your 1L and 2L summer jobs (see Chapter 20) and postgraduation permanent job (see Chapters 21, 22, and 23). Sound rough? It can be, but if you're up for it, law school can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. This is all you've worked for and dreamed of!

Initially, the law school process can seem so intimidating. You have no clue about how many hours per week you need to study to be a successful law student. You don't know how to take notes in law school. You keep hearing the word *outlining*, but you have no idea what that means or when you should start doing it.

You can also easily underestimate the amount of time you need to spend just reading. Law school reading is different from reading a regular textbook. You're often reading old cases with dense and unfamiliar language. You may take an hour

to read a handful of pages because the format is something you aren't used to and the words are unfamiliar to you.

Some students grasp the contracts concepts very quickly, while others struggle with civil procedure. Others walk away with a significant appreciation and understanding for property, while some really have a hard time understanding why an accident is a tort with one set of facts but not a tort with another set of similar facts.

What I can tell you is that all these things vary from one student to another. You'll eventually hit your stride and settle in.

Dealing with the law school setup

If one term describes how the law school experience is set up, it's *high school*. For many ABA (American Bar Association) law schools, all your classes are in one building; you have assigned seats and lockers again, and gossip spreads like wildfire. I'd have to say that "high school" is definitely an apt description.



REMEMBER

Despite its high school vibes, law school is professional school. I'm not saying you won't have fun or like all your professors, classmates, and so on, but your reputation is important. Remember that maintaining a good reputation is easier than rebuilding a tainted one. The respect of your classmates, faculty, and administrators is yours to gain or lose.



REMEMBER

Your law school reputation is important because the legal profession isn't that big. Your classmates may be on a future hiring committee or be opposing counsel in a case important to your career trajectory. Treat people well so they have positive memories of you. It may make a difference one day.

Whether you're starting law school as a full-time student or part-time student, you want to ensure that your life is in order. Doing so means figuring out things like the following:

- » Where you're going to live and how you're going to get to and from class
- » Where you'll get your prescriptions filled
- » What your budget is and whether you should pack lunch versus buying lunch on campus
- » How many cups of coffee you need throughout the day to be a functional human (if you're a coffee drinker)

- »» What type of environment you need to study in
- »» Whether you're taking notes on your laptop or handwriting them (which may be determined by what your professor allows)
- »» How prepared you need to be for classes that start in the morning classes versus classes start later in the afternoon
- »» How to adjust your study schedule based on which subject(s) you find more challenging and which you find you like and easily digest



TIP

You'll receive a ridiculous amount of advice about how to manage law school, your professional persona, and so on. At the end of the day, do what's best for you. Most people have good intentions, but only you know your learning style, how many friends is enough, and who you need mentorship from.

Your first-year law school class is divided into *sections* or *tracks*, and you attend all your classes as a 1L with the same people. That can become trying when your class has several *gunners* (people who constantly raise their hands, usually just to hear themselves talk). In time, however, you may grow to appreciate the comforting feeling of seeing the same faces, especially when it comes time to speak in front of 60 to 100 of them! But most importantly, these folks become lifelong friends. You rarely meet a lawyer who doesn't remember their track/section. These students become members of your family, potential partners, godparents to your kids — and opposing counsel.

Surviving the Socratic method

One of the horror stories you've heard about law school is true: Professors really do call on you in front of the entire class. The intense questioning that professors direct toward students is referred to as the *Socratic method* because Socrates (that famous Greek philosopher dude way back when) apparently liked to clarify the responses of his students by asking them more and more questions rather than by providing answers. The scary part is that the Socratic method is something many law students haven't experienced.

The very thought of the Socratic method petrifies most prospective students because they're so unaccustomed to the idea. No college class that I've ever heard of (or taken) requires you to engage in a one-on-one interrogation session with a professor, sometimes even while you're standing up. I know, I know. Fortunately, by the 2L and 3L years, many professors tend to ease off the Socratic method; they often teach courses in lecture or discussion format. (Chapter 12 explains why.)



REMEMBER

The Socratic method does require you to really know your material; otherwise, you'll be embarrassed in front of the class while stumbling around for even a hint of the right answer. It also forces you to think quickly and challenge your previously held assumptions. It truly tests your understanding of the material in a unique and often scary way.

Though this situation is terrifying for most people, you can and will survive. Preparation is important. Prepare to be wrong; to walk away without a clear-cut, black-and-white answer; to be open-minded; and prepare to have a deep conversation with your professor while your classmates silently cheer you on!

Overall, I think the Socratic experience was a beneficial one for me. Although at the time it may have caused a few ulcers, in hindsight I can see it made me more comfortable about speaking in front of an audience (the class) and being on the mock trial team and more appreciative of the verbal jockeying that lawyers do in the courtroom.

The Socratic method can be frustrating and exhausting. But after you get the hang of it, get to know your professor, and learn how to brief cases, take notes, and outline, you may feel much better. Notice I didn't say you *will* feel better. For many law students, every semester or quarter brings the same anxiety and stress.

The only way through it is to do it.

Developing a lawyer's mindset

The whole point of law school is to train you in the fine art of problem-solving and legal reasoning. You're being prepared to become an advocate, a policy maker, and a changemaker. To do so, you must train your brain to think, write, and talk differently.

Thinking like a lawyer

Lawyers look at problems differently than laypeople. When lawyers hear someone talking about an incident, they listen for the ordering of facts and try to discern the precise issue without getting caught up in insignificant details. This process is what law school is all about.

The concept of *thinking like a lawyer* (see Chapter 12) is a change that comes over you subtly during your first few weeks of law school and more significantly at the end of your first semester or first year. You may be surprised how quickly you begin thinking differently about everyday items, news stories, and issues that arise in front of you during your first couple of weeks of law school.

Some law students swear that it's never happened to them, but your non-law-school friends and family are likely to be better judges of that. Listen closely to their comments after your first year. Are they saying things like "You're so much more analytical or logical than you used to be"? Do you find yourself thinking about everyday situations — like a banana peel lying on the floor of a supermarket — just a little differently than you did before law school? If so, you know that thinking like a lawyer has begun to take hold.

Adding legalese to your vocabulary

Legal writing is very different from everything else you've learned. It's brief. It's factual. It isn't flowery at all. You rarely see adjectives in legal writing.

The transformation to the lawyer's way of writing and speaking is swift for some people. They're surprised at how quickly they begin to pick up on the legalese. For others, those first legal writing assignments are alarming. Be prepared for your legal writing professors to be very critical. Every word, detail, citation, and so on matters, and their job is to make you transform your writing as quickly as possible. They're setting you up for the rest of your career — in law school and as an attorney.

Assessing Whether You Can Make It in Law School

At a minimum, you need to have a love for learning, reading, and writing and a penchant for studying — plenty of studying — to succeed in law school. In addition, successful law students

- » Manage their time effectively
- » Don't succumb to procrastination
- » Are strong writers (or willing to put in the time to improve)
- » Get reading done in a timely manner
- » Prepare for each day's class
- » Juggle multiple tasks simultaneously
- » Sometimes delay gratification (in other words, they put off going out for the evening to spend extra time getting their criminal law outline in better shape)

Similarly, full-timers can put in time on an extracurricular activity like moot court or a law journal (see Chapter 19) without sacrificing the quality of their schoolwork. Extracurricular activities aren't required but come highly recommended because they're great preparation for legal jobs. They're opportunities to network, to take a break from studying, and to socialize.

Can I do it? Do I belong here? These are questions that come up quite frequently throughout the first couple of weeks of law school. I can't tell you that they won't come up at other times as well. The most important thing to remember is your why. Why are you doing this? Why are you working this hard? Staying motivated and keeping your self-talk as positive as possible are important. You want to be confident while also being humble.

Going part time versus full time

Full-time programs for most candidates really look like 60-to-80-hour-per-week jobs. It's that much reading, writing, and thinking. If you need to work full time to support yourself, avoid excessive post-law school debt, or pay tuition, you can consider opting to go to law school in the evenings or part time during the day. Most part-time and evening programs run four years rather than the traditional three, so think about how quickly you want to enter the job market. A few hybrid programs are available, but they're rare.

Part time or full time is a big decision for many candidates. If you have a job you love that will pay for you to attend law school, it seems like a no-brainer. The reality is very few part-time programs are left, though. Fewer than half of ABA law schools offer part-time or evening programs. Also, know that most part-time programs are actually more like three-quarter-time programs. The workload is less for part-timers, but it's still very heavy.



REMEMBER

Part-time law students face challenges that their full-time peers don't. Part-time students need to make sure they have enough time to handle the often-overwhelming responsibilities of school, full-time work, and household and family life. Often, they have their hands too full to participate in some of the traditional extracurricular activities, such as law reviews and journals and moot court. Luckily, schools make opportunities available to part-time and evening students to ensure they don't miss out on co-curricular and/or extra-curricular opportunities.

Over the years, many law schools have found that part-time students do relatively well because they have jobs and /or family obligations that they're trying to balance, so their time management skills are on point. They want to get in and out in three years, be done with this whole school thing, and become an attorney.

The bottom line: Weigh the pros and the cons of going part time or full time for yourself.

Evaluating your study skills

Law school, like most other graduate programs, requires you to really buckle down and study. But studying in law school doesn't mean the kind of last-minute studying that may have worked well for you in college. Studying for law school classes is more of a little-bit-each-day-of-the-semester sort of studying that keeps you up to speed (prevents you from falling behind) and enables you to absorb as much information as possible. The volume and depth of reading in law school is vastly different from what you may be used to. You can't be a passive listener in a law school class. You have to keep up with the lecture, conversation, and discussion in each class.

Many new law students are shocked to discover the things that worked for them in undergrad or even grad school don't work for them in law school. Those that were visual learners realize that they're auditory learners. Others realize they need to write their notes and then type them and then put them into cards or outlines to ensure that they've memorized the rules. If that information is scaring you, take heart; most law schools have academic programs throughout orientation to help you figure out what works best for you.



TIP

Doing a little self-assessment and backup planning throughout the summer before school can put you ahead of the game. Be prepared to make some changes. Are you someone who needs to type your notes? How will you adapt if you have a professor who doesn't allow laptops? If you're an auditory learner and your professor doesn't allow you to record their lecture, what's your plan B?

If you don't already have these kinds of study skills, you need to gain them quickly before law school starts; otherwise, you'll find yourself struggling to keep up. Chapters 11 and 13 have some hints on developing successful law school study skills.



WARNING

If you suspect that you may have a learning disability, get testing as soon as possible.

Managing the pressure, stress, and highs and lows

For most people the volume of work and the intensity of law school's classroom engagement is very different from that of other programs. Law school is a space where you have to be engaged in class all the time; you don't really get an

opportunity to check out. Gaining a good sense of time management before entering law school is your best protection against the debilitating kind of stress that can crop up thanks to the constant pressure of your classes and obligations.

So what do you do when you start feeling overwhelmed? Most schools provide you with a variety of opportunities to cope with stress through counseling sessions and student organization activities or programming.



REMEMBER

You'll need tools like stress management and self-care throughout your career as a lawyer.

Considering Other Important Factors Before Deciding on Law School

Enrolling in law school isn't something that you can do on a whim (or because you don't know what else to do with your college degree). You must take into account whether spending three (or four) years of your life (and a bunch of money) engaged in the study of a discipline that realistically may not land you the job of your dreams right off the bat is really worth it. Here are some points to consider:

- » **What will you do with a law degree?**
- » **How does the debt you'll take on relate to your chosen career path?** You want to be sure you can manage your debt and the lifestyle you envision.
- » **Are you putting yourself in a position where you can maintain the level of study, commitment, and focus you're going to need in your first (and second, third, and maybe fourth) year of law school?** Be sure to assess your mental health, your spiritual health, and your physical capacity.
- » **Are your family members, friends, mentors, and supervisors (if you'll continue working) ready for the fact that you won't be available in the same way for the next three to four years?**



TIP

These are just some of the considerations that you may add to your list. Doing your research as a prelaw student is key. Talk to as many people — law students, lawyers, and law professors — involved in the law as you can. Actually go to a law school or two and sit in on some classes. Do you like what you hear? Do some job shadowing and/or informational interviewing (which I cover in Chapters 20 and 21). Find out what your student tour guide likes and dislikes about law school and/or their careers. Only by being armed with as much information as possible can you make a well-informed decision.

Taking a hard look at your financial situation

Law school is certainly a financial sacrifice, so do the math. The real math.



TIP

- » **Have you looked at your current student loan debt?** Many prelaw students don't realize that having a large amount of student loans often precludes new graduates from taking lower-paying jobs they'd really like in favor of the ones that will help with loan repayment.
- » **Have you considered the career paths that you may be interested in and how those may impact your overall lifestyle after you've completed law school?**
- » **Have you saved up enough money to live comfortably for your first year?** Have you paid off as much of your credit card debt as you can?

Don't live like a lawyer while in law school. Being more frugal now ensures that you can enjoy the fruits of your labor after you begin working as lawyer as opposed to only working to pay off your debt.

- » **Do you have a spouse or partner to consider?** Childcare? Elder care?
- » **Have you reviewed whether the health insurance the university/law school offers meets your needs?**
- » **Are you conducting your own scholarship research?** This task should be part of your school application process. Does the law school offer other scholarships or opportunities to decrease your debt while you're in law school? These may include scholarships in the second, third, and/or fourth year; work-study jobs; or paid research assistance or teaching assistant roles.



REMEMBER

Paying close attention to your overall indebtedness can ultimately impact your career choices. Choose wisely so you can do the work you're most interested in or most passionate about.

Law school is certainly a financial sacrifice, but that sacrifice is mitigated when you're committed to taking advantage of the benefits of a legal education, including potential upward mobility, qualification for a broader range of jobs, and (sometimes) greater income. A legal education is an investment in your future.

Critiquing your reasons for becoming a lawyer

Why do you want to become a lawyer? This point is going to be important when you're up reading the case for the third time at 11 p.m. You know you're going to

be called on tomorrow — drilled about the facts, the rules, the analysis — and you still don't quite understand why the ruling came out the way it did. In times like these, you must remember why you're putting your heart and soul into this professional degree.



REMEMBER

Your why is your motivation. Your inspiration. It's what you'll come back to when you start to feel overwhelmed or self-doubt or imposter syndrome sneaks in.

Peeling back the glamour

When you think about why you want to enter the law, base your reasoning on your observations of real lawyers engaged in their typical, everyday, low-profile work and not on high-profile cases that come around only once in a great while.

Because of the way many movies and TV shows portray lawyers, many people think all lawyers live glamorous, jet-setting lives. But the truth is that most lawyers fresh out of school earn what some people with bachelor's degrees make. The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) found that the median starting salary of JDs from the class of 2023 in legal jobs was \$90,000. The median law firm salary was \$165,000. Also remember to factor in lost earning potential during the three years of school (for full-time students) and tuition and living expenses.

In addition, keep in mind that gigantic law firms aren't where the majority of U.S. lawyers find work. Instead, many lawyers are employed by firms with fewer than ten attorneys, private businesses, public interest organizations, the judiciary and academia, or the government. (Chapter 21 has a rundown of all the settings in which you can practice law.)

That's why you need to make sure that a sky-high salary isn't your only motivation for wanting to enter law school. (Of course, that salary may come eventually, after years in practice.) Identify the other reasons, such as your love of advocacy, desire to truly help people, or interest in a particular practice area, that are driving your decisions.



TIP

Focus on what matters to you. Doing what makes you happy and allows you to sleep at night, along with paying your bills, is the key to job satisfaction.

Identifying who's really behind your decision to go

The decision to attend law school needs to be yours, and yours alone. You don't need to give in because of a persuasive parent, because all your friends are doing it, or because it's a respectable profession in society's eyes. Instead, you must have your own reasons for pursuing a career in the law that have nothing to do

with anyone else's opinions. All too many law students are unhappy in law school, mostly because they went into it for the wrong reasons. Make sure you're not one of these people; otherwise, you're in for a long and depressing three (or four) years.

The Law School Experience Year by Year

Traditional programs are three years for full-time students and four years for part-time students. Each program is made up of the first (1Ls), second (2Ls), third (3Ls), and potentially fourth (4Ls) years, each with its own particular characteristics. The 1L curriculum is pretty much the same across the board at all law schools, though some have introduced professionalism courses, legislation courses, and/or tax courses. Some law schools have introduced year-long courses.

First year: They scare you to death

The notion of scaring you to death comes from an old law school saw. It's based on the terror that grips many 1Ls regarding the sheer amount of work they need to do and the fear of being grilled in the Socratic method I cover in the earlier section "Surviving the Socratic method." Getting used to the workload, the professors' interrogations, and infrequent opportunities to measure whether you're truly understanding the materials takes some time and effort. Chapter 8 offers some great hints to help you ease into your first year.

You'll be busier than you ever imagined. The volume of reading and the intense nature of the material can be alarming to many new law students. The language can be challenging. But it can also be fun, energizing, and life-altering in a positive way.

Second year: They work you to death

Busy, busy, busy. Grades are in. Units are counted, and you're now rising 1L. Which means you're now 2L!

Your second year is often considered the hardest because you have many different commitments competing for your valuable time. You'll probably be working on a law journal, law review, moot court, or other co-curricular or extracurricular involvements (see Chapter 19), which takes up most of your spare time. (As I note earlier in the chapter, part-timers have more time limitations, but law schools are finding creative ways to ensure part-time students have access to similar opportunities.)

You've spent the summer interning or clerking, gaining expert experience and applying all you learned in your 1L year. You may have taken summer courses or participated in a study abroad program (or both). You're now also becoming more involved on your campus in any number of ways:

- » Taking on leadership roles for various clubs or organizations
- » Participating in moot court, mock trials, or journals
- » Becoming a research assistant or teaching assistant for your favorite professor
- » Helping bring in the next class by serving in the admissions office as a student ambassador or tour guide

Third year: They bore you to death

The third year is often the easiest, because by then you're an old hand; you know what you need to do to get by, and you may not even care that much about hammering away at your studies when you already have a job offer in hand. At this point, you know what you're doing — how to manage your schedule, which professors require papers versus exams, how to manage your internships along with your coursework along with your personal life. With graduation (see Chapter 25) and the bar exam (see Chapter 24) right around the corner, you may find you want to savor your last year of studenthood before moving out into the real world!



REMEMBER

You still have a lot to consider as a 3L. You're now seeking that job offer and preparing for the bar exam, submitting all your character and fitness items, and thinking about how you're going to pay for your expenses while you're not working during bar exam preparation and the bar exam.

Charting the Law School Course

You pass through many milestones during law school, ranging from the first time you're called on in class to finding a summer job. Each one is important in your development as a future lawyer, and each has its own triumphs and tribulations along the way.



TIP

Pay attention to your milestones, accomplishments, and triumphs. Small wins often lead to major gains. You're developing skills that will advance your career and help your clients. Don't be afraid to celebrate a solid grade on a memo or successfully answering a question in class. It's all part of the process.

Choosing an area of practice

Some but not all law students choose an area of practice, such as tax, intellectual property, social justice, environmental, or corporate law, to informally specialize in during law school. This informal specialization means they take lots of courses in these areas, work summer or part-time jobs in these fields, and generally try to get as much experience as possible. The purpose of doing so is to figure out whether they'd enjoy actually specializing in that area in legal practice. (See Chapter 22 for more information about various practice areas.)



REMEMBER

Throughout the application process, many admissions professionals tell you that you don't have to know what type of law you want to practice. Many of us say you just need to know that you're going to have to work hard and are willing to do so.

That's true. But at some point, you begin thinking about what area of law you may want to specialize or practice in — or which you don't like, aren't passionate about, or aren't good at.

Many law students end taking on internships in multiple areas of law because they find that they really enjoy or are good at more than one. This approach isn't a bad idea because it leaves you open to many different opportunities. It allows you to take advantage of a clinic or two on your campus while also interning off-campus with a firm, or government entity, or private nonprofit.

You may start law school thinking that you absolutely want to practice tax law and then realize after a couple of courses that it's not your area of strength or that you just hate it. You may go in thinking you want to be a litigator only to change your mind and turn to family law when you realize how much research and writing is involved in litigation.

Whatever your path, the beauty of this degree is that you don't have to choose one area of law. Your degree is a foundational degree that sets you up for success in many different areas of law. You're going to gain skills and learn how to work in a way that you never have before. But you also will be privy to a professional degree that has the ability to impact so many aspects of the world.



REMEMBER

Not every ABA law school even has a certificate program, specializations, areas of concentration, and so on. It isn't like undergrad, where you need to declare a major. Many law students graduate law school after having completed a stint in a small business law clinic, an externship with a judge that oversees civil matters, and a job as a research assistant for a professor who's writing a new chapter in constitutional law. Then they end up working for a medium-sized law firm that focuses on employment defense work. In short, law school prepares you to practice law in general, and most grads are open to the job opportunity that's available to them.

Landing a summer job

You have two summers in law school — your 1L summer and 2L summer — as a full-time student. Of these two, the job you find for your 2L summer is by far more important because it's the job that sometimes leads to a permanent offer of employment (particularly at firms). Chapter 20 has detailed information about the summer job search.

During the fall of your first year of law school, your career services/career development officers begin making contact with all their new students. Usually, the officers invite you to programming that helps you learn more about the legal market, which helps you start to narrow in on a summer job. They speak to you about a variety of topics, such as the following:

- » What writing samples from your legal writing program to use
- » How to set up or update your LinkedIn profile
- » What your email signature should look like and what your business cards should contain
- » The do's and don'ts of interviewing
- » How to be prudent about your social media and privacy settings
- » What's negotiable and what isn't negotiable

This process is a time to be open-minded. Explore. Take advantage of the opportunities that come your way. Follow up with attorneys and judges you meet. **Remember:** To remain competitive, you want to ensure you have three to four legal experiences before you graduate. If you're a part-time or evening student, never fear; most law schools have created special opportunities for you to obtain legal experiences that don't conflict with your full-time job, such as work at firms and organizations who have opportunities on the weekends, clinics that operate on the weekends, virtual opportunities, and so on.

You want to take advantage of any networking events your law school hosts; any in-person or virtual panel presentations by firms, organizations, and government entities; and networking with your school's alumni to learn more about what they do and what their firms or organizations offer.

You also want to join any bar associations as a student. These are excellent chances for you to network, identify additional mentors, and so on.



TIP

If you have a full-time job, save your vacation and sick time for midterms, finals, and potential experiential learning opportunities.

Searching for a postgraduation job

Finding any type of job that fits your personality and goals takes time, particularly in a tight legal job market. Graduating 3Ls or 4Ls without a job offer in hand may feel a lot of stress, but with the right attitude, experience, and a good dose of patience, job leads should soon start heading your way. In Chapter 21, I point you in the right direction toward job-searching success and let you in on a variety of job-search tips. In short, persistence and a willingness to tell everyone you meet that you're looking for work are key to landing a great job, whether that's legal or nontraditional, JD preferred, or whatever. (Chapter 23 has more info on nontraditional jobs.)

Passing the bar with flying colors

Becoming a practicing attorney means that you must take and pass the bar exam in the state where you want to practice law. The exam, which is offered in February and July, is typically a two-day affair and varies in difficulty from state to state.

Taking advantage of all the bar-required courses and bar-recommended courses, your program puts on is critical. You want to attend any workshops that your school offers related to preparing for the bar, financing bar-related expenses, deadlines, and so on. Bar prep companies often come to campus and share their bar prep philosophies, tools, strategies, and schedules.



REMEMBER

Many law schools incorporate bar-related costs into the cost of attendance over your three or four years in law school. Doing so helps to defray the cost toward the end when you're already stressed and stretched.



TIP

Plan through law school to ensure that you've saved up money so you don't have to work during your bar prep. Maximize your in-school student loans to avoid the high-interest bar loans where possible because so few bar loan companies exist.

Another consideration is where you take the bar exam. Where's your job offer? Where do you want to live? Every U.S. jurisdiction requires passing a bar exam, with the following nuances:

- » **Wisconsin (diploma privilege):** Graduates of the two ABA law schools can be admitted to the bar without taking the bar exam.
- » **California, Virginia, Vermont, and Washington (apprentice route):** These states allow people to become licensed without attending law school. The individuals must complete a legal apprenticeship under the supervision of a licensed attorney. But they still have to pass the bar exam.

Some jurisdictions allow for *reciprocity* or other pathways for experienced attorneys to practice in other jurisdictions without taking another bar exam. The National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) has the most recent information. Reciprocity gives attorneys the ability to be admitted to the bar and practice law in another jurisdiction without having to take the bar exam again. Of course, there are other factors and rules, including distinctions by the type of law being practiced, the level of court involved, and so on. Additionally, there are a number of parameters and distinctions made state to state. For more info, check out www.ncbex.org.



REMEMBER

Plan ahead. Different jurisdictions have different requirements, deadlines, and fees. The rules, timing, costs, and so on are subject to change. As an example, some jurisdictions require that you register during your first year of law school.

The bar exam isn't something to stress out about extensively (I know, that's easier said than done). But the truth is that most students pass the first time. Taking a bar review course (see Chapter 24) and diligently studying its material can make a huge difference in your confidence levels come test time.

The following sections introduce some of the major bar versions. See Chapter 24 for more details.

Uniform Bar Exam (UBE)

Many jurisdictions have adopted the UBE, which is the standardized bar exam developed by the NCBE. It was designed to test the skills and knowledge that every lawyer should have before becoming a licensed attorney. It consists of three parts:

- » Multistate Essay Examination (MEE)
- » Two Multistate Performance Test (MPT tasks)
- » Multistate Bar Examination (MBE)

Note: The MBE will be phased out with the introduction of the NextGen Bar Exam I cover in the following section. The final administration in jurisdictions fully transitioning to the NextGen Bar Exam is expected by February 2028.

As of February 2025, 41 jurisdictions have adopted the UBE, including 39 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

NextGen Bar Exam

The NCBE is developing the NextGen Bar Exam to test a broad range of foundational lawyering skills, using a focused set of fundamental legal concepts and

principles relevant to modern legal practice. By July 2028, 29 out of the 56 U.S. jurisdictions are expected to implement the NextGen Bar Exam.

Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination (MPRE)

The MPRE remains a separate requirement in most jurisdictions. The purpose of the MPRE is to assess the knowledge and understanding of established standards related to a lawyer's professional conduct.

The importance of attending an ABA law school usually comes up at this stage. To be able to take the bar exam in other jurisdictions, you must be a graduate of an ABA law school.

Graduating and preparing for your life as a lawyer

The moment you've been waiting for: You're a lawyer! Esq loading.

I know you want to celebrate, but you may need to keep it short for now. If you graduate in May or June and are taking the July bar exam, you need to turn your attention to bar prep.

You want to start thinking about your postgraduation life. Have you saved or borrowed enough money to ensure you don't have to work while preparing for the bar exam? Where will you live during bar prep? If you must move, you want to do so right away because prep begins right after graduation. You want to make sure you don't have too many distractions. If you have a job offer, when do you start? Do you have anything you need to handle before the bar exam? If you don't have a job offer, what's your plan for seeking employment that doesn't interfere with your bar prep?

What are your plans as you await bar results? Did you budget for a vacation (you deserve it!)? Or are you getting started on your career pending bar results? Either way, have a plan.



REMEMBER

Even after you pass the bar, your work is far from over. In your job, you need to spend your first few years extensively learning the trade, putting in long hours, and attending continuing legal education seminars. Your life as a lawyer may not always be easy, but it usually is intellectually stimulating and very fulfilling!