

Tips for Online Exams

To maximize your chances of success, here are some tips and strategies for online exams.

1. Reduce Distractions

Prepare ahead by finding a quiet place with minimal distractions for you to complete your exams. Set boundaries with your roommates and family by ensuring they know the importance of the exam. Take time to clear physical distractions – clear your workspace in advance. Physical clutter can lead to decision fatigue every time you reduce the urge to get up and clean.

Ensure you have everything you need to get through without interruption. This is not the time to troubleshoot your technology or figure out how to search for words in your notes.

2. Know the Material

Although you will have more time, this does not mean you can leisurely deconstruct an area of law you do not understand while the clock is ticking. You will not have time to “figure it out” or “study” if you do not know an entire sub-topic on the exam. You will not have time to read and understand the entire semester’s materials or watch entire lectures.

Still, online exams are open book, open note, open universe. You should use your study time to approach these exams strategically. Plan to use your tools in ways that will help you. If the casebook publisher had a deal allowing you to download the book for electronic viewing, consider taking advantage of the offer. This allows you to search for keywords in the book on your computer.

Take the time to organize and synthesize your materials in advance to avoid finding yourself in a situation where you cannot find the answer or rule during the exam.

3. Follow the Instructions

Know the honor code and any administrative rules—and adhere to them. Know the expectations of your professor regarding the exam. This includes knowing the Honor Code (rules regarding communicating with your classmates or professors, for example), logistics (rules regarding timing for completion, page limits, format requirements, and turning in the exam), as well as the instructions in the exam questions individually (i.e., answering the call of the question asked).

4. Follow Best Practices for Exams

You may have more time, but don’t expect the exam to be easy. Because there is less time pressure, professors may expect a deeper understanding of the material. Memorizing rules will not be enough. Analysis is key! Since you will not have to memorize, you must demonstrate your ability to make excellent arguments, which requires completing practice questions in advance. You should practice using the materials you will use during the exam so that you can test your ability to efficiently locate the rules and concepts you will need on exam day.

If you are given extra time, consider that you may not need to use it all. Professors draft exams with specific issues in mind. They do not want to spend time finding a needle in a haystack because you included everything you learned in the course rather than answering the specific question asked. As a reminder, be sure you adhere to any word limits in the instructions—with more time, staying within the word limit can be challenging. Be warned that some professors stop reading at the word limit or deduct points for going over the limit; thus, never underestimate the importance of adhering to the rules and limitations of the exam.

5. Keep Track of Your Time

Avoid procrastination! Time goes by quickly, even if it seems like you have more than you need. If given a long window to complete your exam, you should not wait until the last moment to get started. Avoid thinking that you have plenty of time. If technology (or something else) goes wrong, you will suffer for your procrastination. Getting an early start may also provide extra time to review and edit your answers.

Time Management is key. When you begin your exam, create a schedule for the time allotted. Be sure you are realistic. You will not perform at your best if your schedule requires you to work for 48 hours straight. Make a time chart for the exam that matches the time allotted. For example, if you are given two hours to complete 60 multiple-choice questions, you should check in every 20 minutes or so to be sure you are only taking 2 minutes per question. If you are given a lengthy period to complete the exam, your time chart should include time for eating, sleeping, and breaks. Divide the remaining time proportionately among the total questions, taking into consideration the format of the exam.

6. Focus on the Benefits

Mindset and emotions can influence your ability to learn. As much as you can, focus on the positives rather than the negatives to increase your chances of success. There are many benefits to online exams. Among them, you may have the benefit of being able to read your exam answer aloud to clue you in to how your writing sounds, help you catch critical grammatical errors, and jog your memory in a new way. You might have a more relaxing, private environment that may provide fewer distractions than a busy exam room. You may be able to schedule your exam time around the best distraction-free time for your productivity. You have the ability to study in the same environment that you will be taking the test, which might create visual cues to trigger memories during the exam. Finally, you are getting practical experience—this type of exam replicates what attorneys do in practice, giving you a chance to look up laws, identify issues, and evaluate facts in light of applicable rules without the need to memorize anything.

7. Remember -- Self-Care is Key to Exam Success

Exam period is no time to skimp on self-care. Be sure you get enough sleep, as it is directly related to memory and cognition. Sleep improves focus, attention, and decision-making, so you are not doing yourself any favors missing sleep before an exam. Fuel your body with healthy foods that will give you sustained energy rather than a sugar crash mid-IRAC. Be sure

you are drinking enough water. Take short breaks if you need to (and do not feel bad about it—research shows that short breaks between longer working sessions results in an improvement in mental awareness and focus). Be sure to get movement and sunshine every day. This primes your brain for learning and reduces anxiety. Taking a 10-minute walk around the block at the mid-point of a lengthy exam can help keep your brain sharp for the rest of the exam.