

Outlining for Closed-Book Exams

Although the mechanics of outlining for closed-book exams are not drastically different than those for open-book exams, a few additional comments are warranted. If your exam is closed book, you will want to prepare an outline that will assist you in studying until the day of the exam. You will need to know and understand the general principles of law relevant to the subject matter. And as with all law school exams, you will be required to apply those principles to a fact pattern in a relatively short period of time.

1. Start With The Big Picture: You should try to understand what the whole course is about before you start to think about where to place a specific case in your outline. Spend some time thinking about an overview of the material—this will assist you in placing the cases and principles in context.
2. Don't Get Bogged Down in Specifics: Sure, the cases are important. But are they indispensable to understanding the material or succeeding on an exam? Probably not if the exam is closed book. Familiarize yourself with the determinative facts and holding of the key cases, but don't sweat the details.
3. Think Of The Concepts And Not Necessarily The Cases: As a corollary to #2, think of why each important case has been put in the casebook. Understand the concept it seeks to illuminate and work that into your outline instead of a full case brief.
4. Use Mnemonic Devices To Help You Remember The Concepts: Try to use as many memory devices and tricks as you can since the amount of material you will have to know can seem overwhelming.
5. Length Has Little Correlation With Quality: For obvious reasons, the leaner the outline, the easier it is to not only remember the material, but also understand and process. This is not an invitation to short-change your studying; you will still want to make sure your outline is "complete."
6. The Scale-Back Strategy: One way to create an outline for a closed book exam is to prepare an outline as you would for an open book exam and then revise and condense the outline. You can use this strategy to create a short mini-outline or a checklist outline. As you condense, begin to excise the cases while retaining the key concepts from them.