

Berkeley Law
Academic Skills Program

How to Learn from Past Exams

Step One: Self-Assessment

Use the following chart to help you compare your exam answer to a sample answer or exam memo. Once you have identified where you missed points (*e.g.*, gaps in skills, knowledge, or writing technique), you can implement study strategies that specifically target those gaps.

Issue-Spotting
Did I discuss all/most of the issues raised by the fact pattern?
Did I discuss any non-issues (<i>i.e.</i> , issues not raised by the fact pattern)?
Rules
Did I include all of the relevant rules and sub-rules?
Did I state the rules correctly?
Did I understand the rules?
Did I include irrelevant information?
Did I address all the relevant sources of law (<i>e.g.</i> , statute vs. common law, any persuasive or binding restatements, etc.)?
Organization
Did I analyze each issue and sub-issue using the IRAC structure?
Did I analyze the issues in the correct order? Was there a foundational issue that I missed?
Analysis
Did I address all of the relevant facts and counterarguments?
Did I use specific factual details rather than general/conclusory statements?
Did I explain the inferences drawn from those facts?

Did I explain <i>why</i> specific facts point to a particular conclusion?
Did I include defenses?
Did I identify relevant cases and analogize to/distinguish those cases by comparing the specific exam facts to the facts of the cases?
Did I address any relevant policy considerations?
Did I briefly dismiss clear-cut issues that did not need further discussion?
Did I discuss in depth the “meaty” issues that required a thorough analysis?
Did I respond to the “call of the question”?
Conclusion
Were any of my conclusions incorrect?
Writing Technique
Were any parts of my exam difficult to read?
Did I use headings?
Did I use topic sentences?
Did I keep my paragraphs short?
Did I use short, easy-to-read sentences?
Time Management
Were any of my answers incomplete because I ran out of time?

Step Two: Request a Meeting

In small classes, your professor may be able to meet with you to discuss your exam. In large classes, however, faculty often are not be able to meet with students individually. Professors may instead offer an exam memo or a lunchtime session to debrief the exam. If you would like to discuss your exam individually, email your professors to ask whether they can meet with you. Be sure to note that you understand if they do not have the capacity to do so.

How should I prepare for the meeting?

- Review your exam and conduct the self-assessment outlined above. A version with your professor’s comments may be available through the law library. If not, review your personal copy.
- Isolate a representative portion of the exam for your professor’s review, as

you're unlikely to have time to review the entire exam.

- Use your self-assessment to create a short list of specific questions to ask and know why you are asking each question (*e.g.*, Question: did I use sufficient factual detail in my application/analysis? Why I'm asking: this will help me understand whether my analysis is conclusory.)
- Provide the professor with a copy of your exam and bring additional copy for yourself.

How should I approach the discussion during the meeting?

- Be mindful of the professor's limited time.
- Be clear that you are not there to dispute your grade.
- Listen carefully to your professor's feedback on how to improve your exam answer. Your professor's suggestions will help you discover what types of strategies and techniques may work best for improving your analytical, exam-taking, or exam-writing skills.
- End with a catch-all question: Do you have any other advice on what I can do to improve my legal analysis or exam writing?
- Rephrase what you are hearing from your professor in your own words to make sure you understand what they are saying.
- Write down each professor's feedback to help you identify common weaknesses and strengths across your exams. By identifying the specific skills that you need to improve, you can better target your improvement strategies.
- Send a follow-up email thanking the professor for their time.

Step Two: Adjust Your Study Strategies

- Using your self-assessment and your professor's feedback, for each missed point: (a) write down why you missed the point and (b) identify specific study strategies that you can adopt to avoid missing those points in the future. For example:

What did I miss?	Why did I miss it?	What can I do differently?
Missed an issue	Forgot about the issue	Create a one-page checklist of issues
Incomplete analysis	Too few case comparisons	Include key cases (holding + key facts only) in course outline
Did not use IRAC structure	Got lost trying to discuss multiple sub-issues	Structure course outline like a template exam answer

- Rewrite the exam (or a portion of it) to test your understanding of the feedback and to practice the new approach. Practicing the new approach right away will help you learn it and be able to repeat it later.
- Create a schedule and concrete plan for implementing new strategies.
- Consult with ASP faculty and staff if you feel stuck.