# USING OUTLINES & STUDY GROUPS EFFECTIVELY

Berkeley Law Academic Skills Program & Advanced Degree Program

# WHAT IS "OUTLINING"?

Outlining is a roadmap to an exam answer. Your outline provides an *outline* for your answer.

~~Outlining is a summary of the class.~~

~~Outlining is a collection of case briefs.~~

~~A substitute for practice exams.~~

# FIRST ASK: "WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO ON THE EXAM?"

In an issue-spotter (essay) exam, you will be asked to:

1. Identify legal **issues** in a fact pattern

2. For each legal issue, state the **rule(s)** relevant to resolving that issue

3. For each legal issue, **apply** the rules to the facts (perform legal analysis)

4. For each legal issue, state your **conclusion**

**[IRAC or CRAC]**

# THEN ASK: "WHAT INFORMATION DO I NEED TO DO THOSE THINGS?"

1. Identify legal **issues** in a fact pattern → create a one-page checklist of issues

2. For each legal issue, state the **rule(s)** relevant to resolving that issue → put the rules in your outline exactly the way you will write them in your exam and in the order that you will use them (e.g., basic rule first, then sub-rules)

3. For each legal issue, **apply** the rules to the facts (perform legal analysis) → include case names with key facts (2-3 sentences max) and policy considerations

4. For each legal issue, state your **conclusion**

# MAP OUT YOUR EXAM ANSWER IN YOUR OUTLINE

<u>ISSUE</u>

Basic Rule: X and Y

<u>Sub-issue X</u>

Sub-rule for X

Key cases/examples (briefly)

Key policy considerations

<u>Sub-issue Y</u>

Sub-rule for Y

Key cases/examples (briefly)

Key policy considerations

# EXAM ANSWER

<u>ISSUE</u>

The issue is _____. The rule is X, Y.

## Sub-issue X

The rule for sub-issue X is _____. Here, [discuss the facts relevant to sub-issue X]. The facts here are similar to [case], where the court held _____, because _____. [More discussion of the facts and more case comparisons.] A court would likely conclude [conclusion on sub-issue X]. This outcome would be consistent with the policy considerations underlying rule because _____.

## Sub-issue Y

The rule for sub-issue Y is _____. Here, [discuss the facts relevant to sub-issue Y]. The facts here are similar to [case], where the court held _____, because _____. [More discussion of the facts and more case comparisons.] A court would likely conclude [conclusion on sub-issue Y]. This outcome would be consistent with the policy considerations underlying the rule because _____.

Conclusion

# HOW TO GET STARTED

1.  Use another student's outline or the course syllabus as a template. Make the outline specific to your professor.

2.  Choose a format that makes sense to you. Then start filling in the details.

3.  Review your class notes and pull out the important stuff → *what will you need on the exam? Outline your exam answer in your outline.*

4.  Include cases, but <u>not</u> lengthy case summaries.

5.  Don't get lost in too many resources. It might be helpful to consult a commercial study aid, but you probably don't need more than one. Same thing with sample outlines from other students.

6.  Remember that an outline is a very personal tool; its value lies solely in how useful it is to *you* on the exam.

# I CAN BARELY GET THROUGH THE READING! HOW DO I FIND TIME TO OUTLINE??

1. Now is the time to transition to spending less time preparing *before* class and more time reviewing, outlining, and practicing *after* class.

2. Create a schedule. Block out time on your calendar for reviewing and outlining and, later, for doing practice questions.

3. Use larger chunks of time (two hours) for outlining. Use smaller chunks of time or times when you tend to be less productive for reading.

4. Ask friends, family and/or your study group to hold you accountable.

# WHEN SHOULD I START OUTLINING?

1. This weekend!

2. Don't wait until late October or early November.

3. Goal: finish your outlines by the end of classes so that you can spend the reading period practicing and reviewing.

# STUDY GROUPS: WHY?

- A study group can help you learn and understand legal concepts by talking through them

- A study group can also help hold you accountable and provide moral support

- Community is important, and one of the best ways to learn material is to teach it to someone else!

- Productive activities include:
  - Review and discuss the past week's material
  - Ask questions and answer each others' questions
  - Designate time for individual work on outlines and compare outlines
  - Discuss hypos and practice exam questions after writing out the answer individually
  - Exchange and provide feedback on written practice answers

# STUDY GROUPS: HOW?

1. **Size.** Your study group should be anywhere from two to four people total (including yourself).

2. **Discuss your goals.** A shared set of goals is essential to having an effective study group.

3. **Determine a meeting schedule.** When and how often will you meet? Meeting once or twice per week often works well.

4. **Determine the activities/agenda for each meeting.** Plan specific activities or tasks to accomplish at each group meeting. Group meetings that lack specific objectives may get sidetracked or lose focus.

5. **Multiple study groups?** Consider whether it makes sense to have a different study group for different classes.

# OTHER TIPS FOR STUDY GROUPS

- Be sure to create your own outline that works for *you*

- Be sure to write out answers to practice problems on your own

- Invite respectful discussion and disagreement about all sides of an issue; consensus is not the goal

- Make sure study group sessions are focused and productive; appoint a group leader charged with sticking to the agenda and refocusing the conversation when it starts to get off track

- Don't hesitate to go to faculty office hours for further clarification

# RESOURCES

- **Where can you find more tips and advice?**

→ Academic Skills Program website

- **Where can you find hypos and practice exam questions?**

→ Academic Skills Program website

- **Who can help?**

→ ADP Advisors, Academic Skills Program, Student Services, Berkeley Law Staff Psychologists, Tang Center