



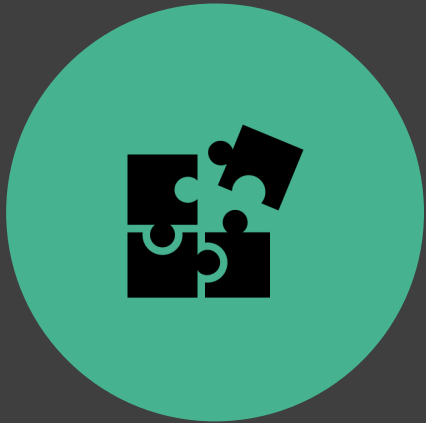
# LEARNING FROM PAST EXAMS

BERKELEY LAW ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAM

*This workshop was adapted in part from materials created by the ASP team at UC Irvine School of Law.*

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# FIRST THINGS FIRST



LAW SCHOOL GRADES ARE A  
SNAPSHOT OF ONE  
MOMENT IN TIME; THEY DO  
NOT DEFINE YOU



THERE IS NO CORRELATION  
BETWEEN LAW SCHOOL  
GRADES AND SUCCESS AS A  
LAWYER



FOCUS ON SKILLS, NOT  
GRADES

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## TOOLS & MATERIALS: WHAT DO YOU NEED TO LEARN FROM PAST EXAMS?

- A copy of the exam
- A copy of your answer (with or without prof comments)
- If available, a model answer or exam memo
- Self-assessment worksheet (see “How to Learn from Past Exams” handout on Academic Skills Program website)
- If possible, a meeting with your professor or, if not, with an ASP team member
- Grit and resilience

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## THREE-STEP PROCESS

01

Self-assessment

02

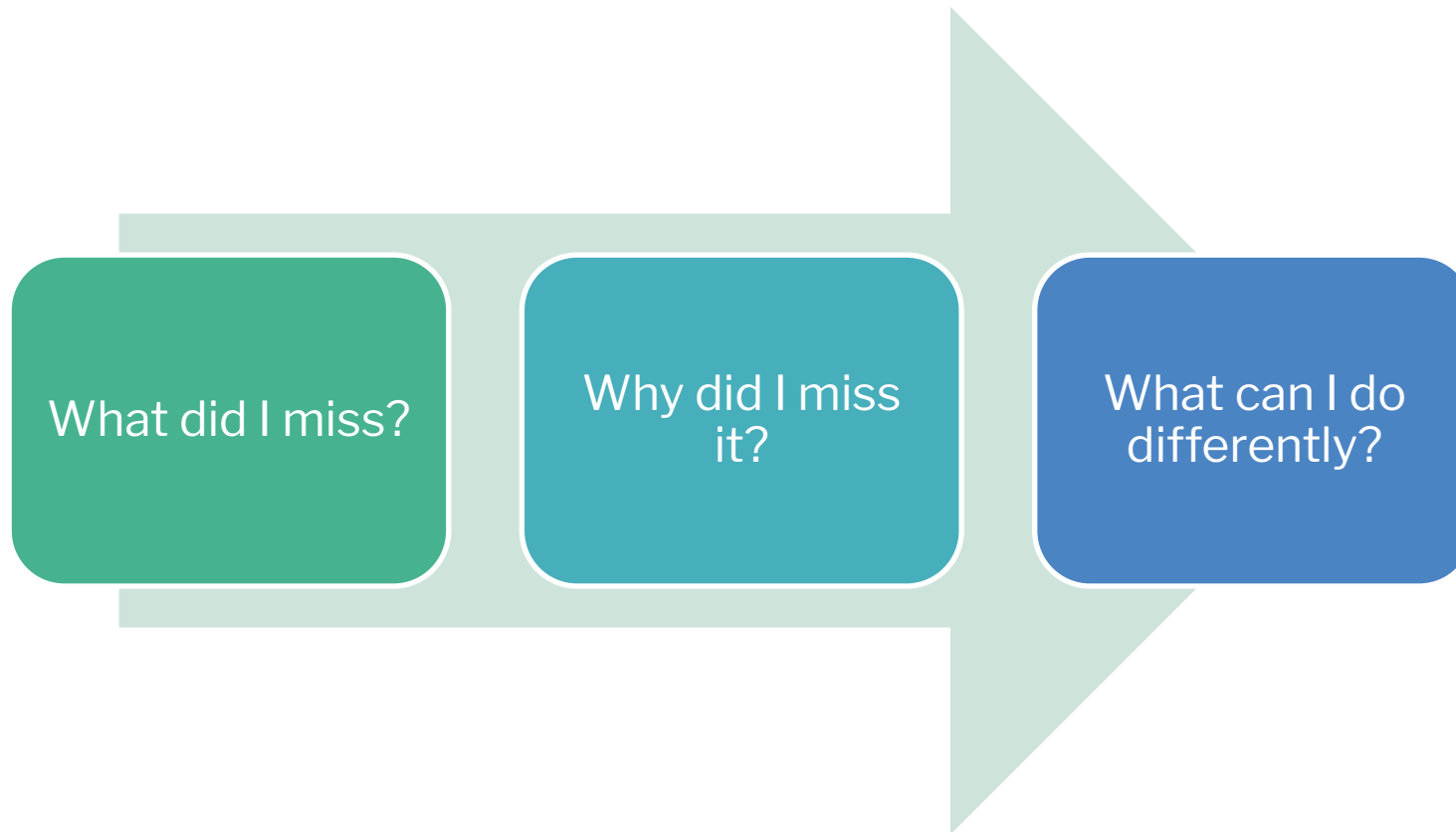
Meet with your  
professor (if  
possible) or ASP  
team member

03

Adjust your study  
strategies

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## STEP ONE: SELF-ASSESSMENT



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# WHERE DID I MISS POINTS?

For each of the following skills, assess where/why you missed points:

- Spotting the issues
- Knowing the relevant rules
- Applying the rules
- Conclusions
- Writing technique (organization, clarity, etc.)

# SPOTTING THE ISSUES

- Did I miss any issues?
- Did I miss any related issues (e.g., defenses)?
- Approximately what percentage of the issues did I spot?
- Did I include any non-issues (*i.e.*, issues not raised by the fact pattern)?

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## KNOWING THE RELEVANT RULES



Did I state the correct rule, and did I state it accurately?



Did I miss any sub-rules?



Did I include unnecessary/irrelevant info?



Did I include all relevant sources of law?



## APPLYING THE RULES

- **Responsiveness.** Did I tailor my answer to the call of the question?
- **Factual detail.** Did I discuss the relevant facts in detail?
- **Inferences.** Did I explicitly state the inferences drawn from the facts? (Did I explicitly say what the facts *mean*?)
- **Counterarguments.** Did I include *all* the relevant facts? Did I mention and address possible counterarguments?
- **Proportionality.** Did I spend more time/space on sticky issues and less time/space on clear-cut issues?
- **Efficiency.** How much time/space was spent on unnecessary background material?
- **Case comparisons.** Did I support my argument with case comparisons?
- **Policy.** Did I address any relevant policy considerations?



Clear and easy to read



Sentence length no more than 2-3 lines



Use of key terms – use and repeat terms of art



Use of transitions to signal logical relationships (however, nevertheless, ultimately)

WRITING  
TECHNIQUE:  
CLARITY



IRAC structure with mini-IRACS for sub-rules



Headings



Topic sentences



Short paragraphs

WRITING  
TECHNIQUE:  
STRUCTURE

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## STEP TWO: MEETING WITH YOUR PROFESSOR OR AN ASP TEAM MEMBER

- Know that your professors might not be able to meet individually with every student.
- Focus on identifying skills you can improve and implement in other classes.
- Keep an eye out for patterns of strengths and weaknesses.
- If your professor is not available, schedule a meeting with an ASP team member

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING



Review your exam and conduct the self-assessment outlined above.



Isolate a representative portion of the exam for discussion. (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.



Provide the professor or ASP team member with a copy of your exam and bring additional copy for yourself.

## HOW SHOULD I APPROACH THE DISCUSSION?

- Be mindful that you will have limited time.
- With faculty, be clear that you are not there to dispute your grade.
- Take notes!
- Rephrase what you are hearing in your own words to make sure you understand what they are saying.
- 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?
- With faculty, send a follow-up email thanking the professor for their time.

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# STEP THREE: ADJUST YOUR STUDY STRATEGIES

- Using your self-assessment and any feedback you receive, 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.
- 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 an ASP team member if you feel stuck.

## SAMPLE SELF-ASSESSMENT CHART

What did I miss?	Why did I miss it?	What can I do differently?
Missed an issue	Ran out of time	Develop a system for managing time; practice under time pressure
Missed an issue	Forgot about that issue	Create a one-page checklist of issues
Incorrect rule	Didn't know the rule	Work with study group; check your outline against your class notes
Incomplete rule	Your outline was not helpful	Structure your outline differently
Incomplete analysis	Didn't include all relevant facts	Practice with feedback
Incomplete analysis	Too conclusory; insufficient factual detail	Practice with feedback
Incomplete analysis	Too few case comparisons	Structure your outline to include cases; practice with feedback