

## Preparing for Closed-Book Exams vs. Open-Book Exams

When you first read your syllabus, you may be very excited when you see that the final exam is open-book. However, you should proceed with caution. Open-book exams are often not as luxurious as you may think they may be. Preparing for open-book exams looks a lot like preparing for a closed-book exam, so we will start with how to prepare for a closed-book exam.

### How to Prepare for a Closed-Book Exam

- ★ **Start Memorizing Early.** You should begin memorizing content as soon as you can. A helpful way to start studying early is to create flashcards weekly. Set aside some time either at the end of every week or every weekend and write out flashcards pertaining to the material from the previous week. You can do this in each one of your classes. Then, during the following week set aside some time to review these flashcards. This will help you start memorizing a couple of concepts at a time early on before the amount of work piles off. Other ways to memorize material include rewriting your outline, speaking your outline out loud, and whiteboard. See *Study Techniques* for more tips on how to study.
- ★ **Pre-Write Rule Paragraphs (and Case Illustrations).** An extremely helpful study tip is to write out all your rule paragraphs for the exam. Assuming your exam is a typical issue spotting exam, there is no reason for you to craft your rule paragraphs for the first time while taking the exam. You know you will have to write a rule paragraph, and the rules you learned throughout the semester will not change before the final exam. It will save you so much time and stress to pre-write your rule paragraphs to then memorize. You will not have to think “What are the rules for battery?” “Which rule should go first?”, but rather you will be able to quickly type the rule, and then get to spend most of your time on your analysis. This is important because typically the analysis section is where the most points lie. You can do this same exact technique with case illustrations as well.
- ★ **Focus on Understanding, Not Just Memorization.** There are two key components to law school exams: memorizing and understanding. Most law students do not perform as well as they expect to because they are so focused on memorizing the material that they forget to work on understanding what it is they are memorizing. It is one thing to know what the definition of intent is; it is a completely different thing to be able to apply that definition of intent to any given set of facts. The best way to bridge the gap between memorization and understanding is to complete practice hypotheticals. You can find many online, oftentimes professors give them out, and you can reach out to anyone on the academic success team for some.

### How to Prepare for an Open-Book Exam

You might think open-book exams are easier because you can have your notes with you. However, it is this mindset with open-book exams that often results in students performing poorly on their open-book exams. For open-book exams you should prepare the same way as you would prepare for a closed-book exam. Often on open-book exams you will be crunched for time

*\*\*\*Disclaimer: If any law used in this handbook differs from how your professor discussed the law, always defer to your professor. The law used in this handbook is meant to serve as a vehicle for teaching the skills, only. Likewise, if any exam writing advice differs from your professor's expectations, always defer to your professor.\*\*\**

and not have the time to go back to your notes and read something. Any time you spend flipping through your notes is wasted time you could be spending analyzing an extra issue, or checking over your answers. You want to ensure that you know the material to the same detail and degree as you would the material for a closed-book exam. This means that you should use the same tips as above to prepare for your open book exams, in addition to a few extra.

- ★ **Emphasize Organization.** For an open-book exam, it is critical that you have organized notes. Once again, you most likely will not have the time to scramble through your notes to find one specific sentence. You need to walk into the exam with an idea of where information is located. This way, if you have to look through your notes to find something, you will not be wasting time flipping through hundreds of pages. One tip is to flag the important pages. This will save you time because you will be able to flip to that specific page instead of having to flip through and read every page. Another tip is to make a table of contents for the documents that you prepared yourself to bring in. This will save you time because you can read the table of contents to see what you are looking for rather than reading whole pages in your document trying to find something.
- ★ **Be Strategic.** Another helpful suggestion for open-book exams is to only bring the material that you believe is critical. If you show up to an open book exam with your entire outline, your casebook, and all of your notes for the semester, you will likely get lost in the information you brought, misplace something, and ultimately waste time. Be strategic about what you bring.