

# Time Saving Study Techniques For Studying Law

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## Time Saving Study Techniques and Tips

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## **Introduction**

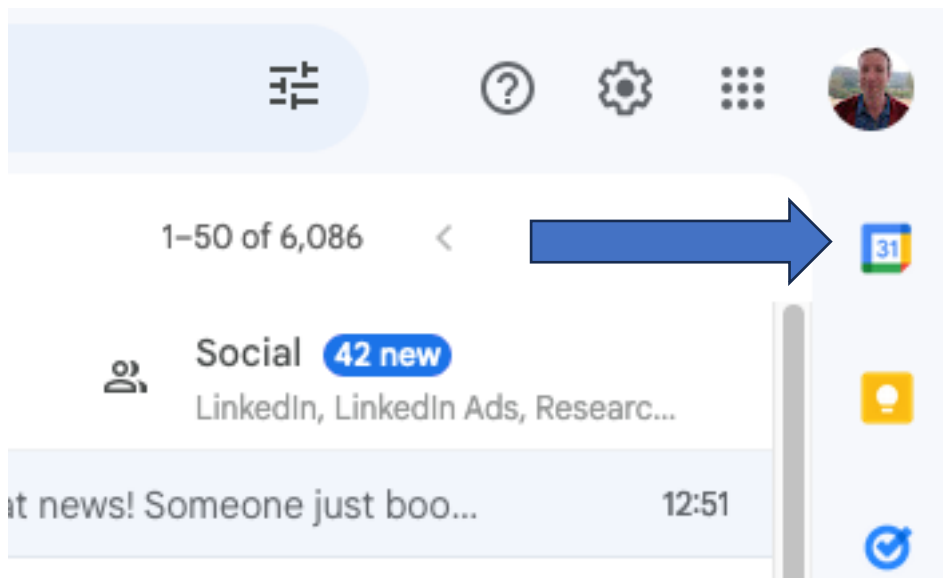
Studying law is tough. Each week for each subject you are typically expected to read 50 pages of a textbook and several cases, watch a two hour lecture, attend a one hour tutorial or seminar, summarise all this material in your notes, and somehow have time to work on assignments and prepare for exams. There is so much to do it is difficult to know where to start. You might try different methods—highlighting, rereading, summarising—but usually little is retained and you don't gain an understanding of how to answer assessment questions. This means many students freeze when they read their exam questions, no matter how much time they spend studying. In short, without the correct study strategy it's easy to spend hours each week studying and still achieve poorly on assessment tasks. However, following a step-by-step approach to studying law ensures each piece of knowledge clicks into place. It's a bit like looking at a complicated LEGO design on the box, tipping the pieces on the floor, and hoping the pieces will somehow fit together. You can try and try but get nowhere trying to assemble the complex design. However, with a step-by-step instruction manual it is easy to assemble even the most complicated designs. Studying law is exactly the same. If your notes provide you with a step-by-step template for answering assessment questions you know exactly where to start, and how to provide legal advice for the most complicated scenarios.

This study guide provides practical strategies for managing the heavy workload of law school efficiently. It is structured into several sections, each offering techniques to optimise study habits, develop your legal research skills, and master assessment preparation.

## Establishing Good Study Habits

### Make a Weekly Schedule

To keep on top of course content and have sufficient time to prepare for assessment tasks it is essential to first establish a weekly schedule. Online calendars accessible by your computer and phone are the best tool for the job as you can easily view your daily schedule from your phone each morning or at any other time of the day. If you have a Gmail email address then you will also have access to an online calendar that you can use for this purpose. To open the calendar click on the number representing today's date under your profile image:



To manage your calendar on your phone download the free Google Calendar app and link it to your Gmail account. Once you do this you can manage your calendar and receive notifications on your computer and your phone very easily. There are many alternative apps you could use for this purpose too if you prefer.

Once you have your calendar open you can add single or repeating events. Before the semester begins, or as soon as you have access to the relevant due dates of assessment tasks, you should add events for:

- All your classes (lectures and tutorials/ seminars)
- The due date of all assessment tasks with a reminder two weeks before the due date, and two days before the due date. This step may not be possible at the start of the

semester, but should be completed as soon as you are told the due date of assessment tasks.

- A period of time to study for each subject at the same time each week. The amount of time you allocate is dependent on your availability, other commitments, and personal views on how much time you need to study to achieve your goals. An absolute minimum of one hour per subject should be scheduled to repeat at the same time each week. I would recommend 3 hours per subject per week, but this is ultimately your call. The most important thing is that you get into a routine so that every week at the same time you are studying a particular law subject. Once you establish this habit it will be easy to follow. It is critical that you consistently study and this may require effort on your part. Obtaining weekly tutoring can help you establish and stick to your study schedule, and keep you accountable.
- Additional time needed to complete assessment tasks in the weeks leading up to their due dates.
- Times that you know you will be unavailable to study due to work, family, or other commitments.
- A time each day to exercise, even if it is only a casual walk. Your brain doesn't work if your body is broken.
- Think about a suitable time each week you could fit in some time to do something relaxing and rejuvenating and create an event for that time into your weekly schedule. It is important to give yourself time to refuel each week and to have something enjoyable to look forward to. Prioritise time with friends and family.

Each day you can begin by looking at your schedule for that day, and the following week, and this will keep you on track and ensure you spend time on the most important tasks. Once a routine is established and good study habits are formed it will be less difficult to start studying, and you will find yourself focusing on your studies for prolonged periods of time. Think about it this way. If in your job you are provided a list of tasks to do, and the times to do them, it is easy to get going and stay focused. If instead your job gives you a list of tasks, and gives you the choice when to complete them, you are more likely to lose focus, get distracted, and fail to complete all the tasks in a timely manner. So create a weekly study schedule and stick to it. Not only will your grades improve but you will establish the professionalism and self-motivation needed in your career in law.

## **Make Your Study Space Somewhere You Want To Spend Time**

Unless your study space is inviting and attractive you will find it difficult to be motivated to start studying and maintain consistent study habits. Here are some ways to improve your study space:

### Comfortable Furniture

Invest in a supportive chair and a desk at the right height. Being physically comfortable can make long study sessions more bearable. If you can afford it, a standing desk is a great way to avoid being sedentary for too long.

### Personal Touches

Add items that inspire or relax you, like artwork, plants, items that you find aesthetically beautiful or in other ways inspiring. These can make the space feel more inviting. House plants can give you a reason to keep visiting your desk and help ventilate the air and make you more relaxed. Something that reminds you of your long term goals and the rewards that will come if you achieve them can help keep you motivated. For example, if you have children a photo of them may remind you that your sacrifice is for a larger reason than yourself, and is worth the effort.

### Declutter and Organise

Keep your study area neat and organised to reduce distractions. A cluttered desk results in a cluttered mind. Use shelves, draws, or folders to manage papers and materials effectively. Tidy your desk at the end of each day.

### Lighting Matters

Ensure your space has good lighting. Natural light is ideal, but if that's not possible, use a lamp with adjustable brightness to avoid eye strain.

### Technology Setup

Arrange your computer, charger, and other tech gear ergonomically and within easy reach. Avoid cluttering the area with unnecessary devices. The more monitors you have the more efficient your work flow. I'd recommend one external monitor at a minimum.

### Minimise Distractions

Choose a quiet location and keep distractions like your phone or non-study-related items out of reach or sight. Turn notifications off if possible and stay focussed solely on your study.

### **Make Consistent Studying Attractive By Making It Part Of Your Identity**

To start and keep good study habits it is necessary to make studying attractive and desirable. Good time management and study habits are foundational to completing your degree, working as a professional, and developing into a wiser human being. This means giving yourself small psychological rewards when you study. One way you can do this is by making consistent studying part of your identity. You can think, 'I'm the sort of person who regularly studies because this will result in me achieving my academic, personal and professional goals.' Every time you study you can say this to yourself. It will make you feel good about how you are spending your time, and that will often provide you sufficient motivation to study.

### **Don't Miss Two Days In A Row**

It is ok if events outside of your control interrupt your study schedule. The key to establishing habits and keeping them is not breaking them two days in a row. So don't worry if unexpected work obligations make you miss your study session for criminal law. Just make sure you don't miss the next study period. If you do this you are forming a new habit – not studying. So try your best not to break your study schedule two days in a row.

## How to Study

In one week of content for an average law subject you will have about 50 pages of reading, a two hour lecture or seminar, a list of recommended readings usually including several cases, and a set of tutorial questions. For two thirds of the trimester either a mid-semester assignment or final exam will also need to be prepared for. To actually complete all of these tasks, and retain the information, is impossible. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the material you are required to read is neither assessable nor essential knowledge for practicing law. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the most important tasks and develop study methods that enable you to retain a large amount of often dry and complex content effectively.

## Study techniques

The first thing to realise about studying is your brain is not capable of retaining information if it is overworked or fatigued. On the other hand, if you do not develop the capacity to dedicate focussed and prolonged attention on difficult tasks it will not be possible to complete all the tasks required of you in law school. Therefore, a balance must be struck between prolonged concentrated study without distraction and periods of rest to prevent fatigue. Research suggests these techniques strike that balance:

**Pomodoro Technique:** This method involves 25-minute study sessions followed by 5-minute breaks. After four cycles, a longer break of 15-30 minutes is taken. This structure helps maintain concentration and reduces mental fatigue.

**50/10 Rule:** This strategy recommends 50 minutes of focused work followed by a 10-minute break. A longer break of at least 30 minutes is taken after two cycles. This schedule aims to optimize productivity by aligning with the brain's capacity for sustained attention.

**Spaced Repetition:** This technique involves reviewing information at increasing intervals over time, which has been shown to improve long-term retention. For example, after the initial study session, subsequent reviews might occur after one day, then one week. Having small sessions dedicated to revising past material is essential for retention and understanding.

During study breaks, it's highly beneficial to step away from screens and incorporate some physical activity. Even a few minutes of standing outside, breathing fresh air, and moving around can significantly boost your mood and refresh your focus. Allowing your mind to wander and taking a moment to fully relax is essential for recharging your mental energy, helping you return to your work with renewed clarity and productivity.

### **How to Read Effectively: Working Smarter Not Harder**

#### **Focus on What Matters Most:**

You cannot possibly retain all the material you are assigned to read. Recognise this early and approach your studies with a targeted plan.

#### **Active Reading Over Passive Reading:**

Simply reading without taking notes is ineffective. Engage with the material actively by summarising key points and connecting your reading to assessments or tutorial questions. If a section of a text book chapter is not relevant to a tutorial question you can safely assume you need not read it.

#### **Be Strategic with Your Reading:**

Start by reviewing your tutorial or seminar questions before diving into the readings. This allows you to tailor your focus to what's most relevant.

Use your reading time to simultaneously prepare for tutorials as assessment questions are often derived from tutorial content.

#### **Align Your Reading with Assessments:**

Weeks 2–6: Focus on content tied to your mid-semester assessment. Carefully review the assignment details to pinpoint which topics are being tested.

Weeks 7–12: Shift your attention to materials that will likely feature in the final exam.

#### **Efficient Reading Practices:**

Not everything you read is equally important, nor is it always assessable. There's no need to read every word of a chapter or delve into exhaustive case histories and judgement excerpts unless directly relevant to answering tutorial problem question or essay questions.

## **Design your study techniques to develop summaries of law and commentary for assessment tasks**

About 70% of law school assessment are problem questions where you are provided with a set of hypothetical facts and are required to apply the relevant law discussed in your course to the situation. Approximately 20% of assessment tasks are essay questions usually requiring a deep and at times critical analysis of the law discussed in the course. Occasionally you will have a moot, or a negotiation assignment, or group assignment, but the vast majority of assessment are problem questions and essays. Therefore, your study notes should be designed to be used for answering predominately legal problems, and occasionally legal essays.

When writing your assignment or exam legal problem, your course convenor will usually combine the content of 2-3 tutorial problem questions together. It is very rare for an assignment or exam to cover a legal issue that you have not addressed in a tutorial legal problem. For this reason it is essential to prepare a set of notes that is capable of answering your tutorial problem questions. This means having two sets of notes – one that is large and summarise all the content you learn about, and the second is a condensed summary of law written in the style of a template that can be used to answer problem questions on specific legal issues.

### **What tasks to give priority to each week**

Read the tutorial questions and prepare by focusing on any problem questions or essay-like questions. Develop a summary of the weekly material that is capable of answer these questions. This can be done by:

- a. Asking yourself, what law would be necessary to answer this problem question?
- b. Skimming the lecture slides and looking for any relevant law
- c. Skimming the text book chapter and looking for sections relevant to answer the tutorial questions
- d. If your summary is still lacking check Halsbury's Laws of Australia

Your notes should: