LEGAL STUDY SKILLS

A Teaching Version — Prof Samba Online University of Nigeria

Under the supervision of Prof Samba
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IMPRINT

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Formats: this book stands as a PDF on the university's Law Library page, with DOCX and Markdown masters held in the university's records.

How to use this book: read a chapter, work the example, answer the discussion questions in writing, then read the summary again before you move on. Law is learned by working, not by looking.

Chapter 1 — How Law Is Learned

Law is not learned like other subjects: it is a craft of texts, cases, and problems. This chapter teaches the student's formation — what legal study actually consists of.

The difference of law

The science student learns a body of results; the law student learns a method of handling authorities. The facts of law — sections, cases, dates — are the method's material, and they change; the method — read, extract, apply, argue — is the degree's permanent acquisition. Study plans that memorise without applying produce graduates who know and cannot do.

Hence this university's rhythm in every subject: read the principle, work the example, answer the questions in writing. The writing is not assessment decoration; it is where learning happens.

The student's week

A working week in law: lectures or lessons taken actively — questions prepared before, notes interrogated after; reading done against questions, not against the clock; one problem answered in full writing; one case read entire; and a revision hour that rebuilds the week's maps from memory. The proportions matter more than the hours.

Attendance without preparation is tourism. The student who arrives with the reading done converts the lecture from dictation into dialogue.

Reading law

Legal reading is slow reading: the statute's section parsed word by word; the judgment read for its ratio; the textbook read against the authorities it cites. Skimming has its place — surveying before,

revising after — but the first encounter with a primary text is a close encounter, pencil in hand.

Mark the text: underline the operative words, margin the questions, star the passages to revisit. A clean law book at term's end is a confession.

Notes that teach

Notes are not transcripts; they are the student's own structure of the subject: the rule in his words, one example, the leading authority, the open question. Notes written in the student's words are already half-revised; notes copied are a debt that revision must repay with interest.

Worked example

A student rereads her lecture notes nightly and scores poorly; her colleague writes one problem answer weekly and scores well. The difference is the chapter's thesis: recognition is not recall, and recall is not use. The colleague's writing forced retrieval, structure, and application — the three acts of which legal knowledge consists.

Discussion questions

• Why is law a method before it is a body of facts?

• What does the student's working week contain?

• What makes notes teach rather than merely record?

Chapter summary

In this chapter you have studied the following ground. Law is not learned like other subjects: it is a craft of texts, cases, and problems. On the difference of law: The science student learns a body of results; the law student learns a method of handling authorities. On the

student's week: A working week in law: lectures or lessons taken actively — questions prepared before, notes interrogated after; reading done against questions, not against the clock; one problem answered in full writing; one case read entire; and a revision hour that rebuilds the week's maps from memory. On reading law: Legal reading is slow reading: the statute's section parsed word by word; the judgment read for its ratio; the textbook read against the authorities it cites. On notes that teach: Notes are not transcripts; they are the student's own structure of the subject: the rule in his words, one example, the leading authority, the open question. Work the discussion questions before you continue; the summary is a map for revision, not a substitute for the chapter.

Chapter 2 — Cases, Statutes, and Problems

This chapter turns the Legal Method volume into daily technique: the case brief, the statute exercise, and the problem answer.

The case brief

Brief every important case on one page: name and citation; court and date; material facts in five lines; the issue; the holding; the ratio in one sentence; the treatment of authorities; and your own one-line verdict — rightly or wrongly decided, and why. The brief is the unit of case learning; a shelf of briefs is a revision course already written.

Read the judgment before the headnote, always: the headnote is another reader's brief, and your skill is the one being examined.

The statute exercise

For each statute studied: state its purpose in one sentence; map its structure — parts, key sections, definitions; work two problems through its sections; and note its amendments and its interpretation cases. Statutes are learned by use, exactly as cases are.

Keep a statute book's discipline: read the current text, never a summary, for the operative words are the law and summaries are rumours of them.

The problem answer

The problem answer is the examination's and practice's common coin: issue, rule, application, conclusion — IRAC — issue by issue. The marks live in the application: facts matched to elements, the other side's argument stated and answered, a conclusion that does not tremble. Answers that recite the chapter earn the chapter's pity, not its marks.

Time in examinations is allocated by marks, not by affection for the topic; the unfinished strong answer outscores the finished weak one only in the student's imagination.

The essay answer

Essays ask judgment, not coverage: take a position in the first paragraph, marshal the schools and authorities as evidence, answer the strongest objection, and conclude without retreat. The essay is advocacy to a sceptical reader who has read everything you cite.

Worked example

Given a case to brief, a student copies the headnote and stops. Set beside it the one-page discipline: his own ratio sentence, tested against a changed fact, exposes in ten minutes whether he understood the case or merely visited it. The brief is a mirror; that is its cruelty and its use.

Discussion questions

• What are the case brief's eight elements?

• Why must the judgment be read before the headnote?

• Where do the marks live in a problem answer?

Chapter summary

In this chapter you have studied the following ground. This chapter turns the Legal Method volume into daily technique: the case brief, the statute exercise, and the problem answer. On the case brief: Brief every important case on one page: name and citation; court and date; material facts in five lines; the issue; the holding; the ratio in one sentence; the treatment of authorities; and your own one-line verdict — rightly or wrongly decided, and why. On the statute exercise: For each statute studied: state its purpose in one sentence; map its structure — parts,

key sections, definitions; work two problems through its sections; and note its amendments and its interpretation cases. On the problem answer: The problem answer is the examination's and practice's common coin: issue, rule, application, conclusion — IRAC — issue by issue. On the essay answer: Essays ask judgment, not coverage: take a position in the first paragraph, marshal the schools and authorities as evidence, answer the strongest objection, and conclude without retreat. Work the discussion questions before you continue; the summary is a map for revision, not a substitute for the chapter.

Chapter 3 — Examinations and the Student's Character

The final chapter teaches examination craft and the professional character that study is really forming.

Revision

Revision is reconstruction: rebuild each subject's map from memory — the six questions of evidence, the five of contract, the elements tables of crime — then verify against the text and repair the gaps. Spaced repetition, past questions answered under time, and teaching the subject aloud to an empty room are the techniques with evidence behind them; rereading is the technique with comfort behind it.

The revision timetable counts backward from the examination, subject by subject, weakest first — for the timetable written by preference revises the strong and abandons the weak to the paper's mercy.

In the examination hall

Read the whole paper first; choose by strength and marks; plan each answer in skeleton before writing; state conclusions early; and leave the final minutes for the review that catches the dropped element and the misread question. The hall rewards the same virtues as the subject: structure, candour, and the courage to conclude.

Answer the question asked — the examiner's oldest lament is the answer to the question the student wished for. Every sentence should be traceable to the question's words.

Integrity

Examination malpractice is the student's first professional misconduct, and it is treated as the profession will treat its adult form. The degree's value — to the holder and to every other holder — is the trust that the certificate certifies. The student who cheats has purchased a document and sold the education it pretends to record.

The same integrity governs citation, collaboration's boundaries, and the honest statement of what one does not know — in the hall, in the brief, and one day in the courtroom, where the habit will be called ethics.

The long formation

Study skills end where character begins: the lawyer being formed in these years will hold clients' money, liberty, and secrets. Diligence in small authorities is fidelity in training. This university's last study word is its first: law is learned by working — and worked honestly, or not at all.

Worked example

Two students enter the hall with equal knowledge. One writes answers in the order the questions occur to him; the other plans skeletons, allocates time by marks, and concludes each answer. Their scripts differ by a class of degree, though their knowledge did not — examination craft is not a trick added to learning, but learning made visible under pressure.

Discussion questions

• What is revision as reconstruction?

• How is time allocated in the hall?

• Why is examination malpractice called the first professional misconduct?

Chapter summary

In this chapter you have studied the following ground. The final chapter teaches examination craft and the professional character that study is really forming. On revision: Revision is reconstruction: rebuild each subject's map from memory — the six questions of evidence, the five of contract, the elements tables of crime — then verify against the text and repair the gaps. On in the examination hall: Read the whole paper first; choose by strength and marks; plan each answer in skeleton before writing; state conclusions early; and leave the final minutes for the review that catches the dropped element and the misread question. On integrity: Examination malpractice is the student's first professional misconduct, and it is treated as the profession will treat its adult form. On the long formation: Study skills end where character begins: the lawyer being formed in these years will hold clients' money, liberty, and secrets. Work the discussion questions before you continue; the summary is a map for revision, not a substitute for the chapter.

Chapter 4 — Memory, Revision Systems, and Working Under Time

This chapter adds the memory sciences to the student's craft: how retention is actually built, and how timed writing is trained.

How memory keeps law

Memory keeps what it retrieves: the testing effect — recall attempted and checked — builds retention as rereading cannot. The student therefore studies in questions: close the book and write the elements; open and repair. Spacing those retrievals across days multiplies them; massing them into one night spends them.

Interleaving — mixing subjects and problem types within a session — feels harder and retains better, because the brain must choose the doctrine, not merely repeat it. Examinations interleave by design; practice should match the performance.

Building the system

A revision system has three parts: the maps — each subject on a page; the briefs — cases and statutes on their cards or pages; and the problem log — every problem attempted, its mark scheme's points, and the points missed. The log is the system's intelligence: it converts failure into curriculum.

Review the log weekly. The missed points repeat across subjects — a burden misplaced in crime reappears in evidence — and the pattern, once seen, is half repaired.

Timed writing

Timed answers are trained like any performance: skeleton in three minutes, writing against the clock, review against the outline. Begin untimed for accuracy, then at examination pace, then slightly faster — the pace that feels brisk in practice feels calm in the hall.

Handwriting, where the hall requires it, is a physical skill: legibility at speed is practised, and the student who cannot read his own script at page ten has a problem no doctrine will fix.

Health and the long term

Sleep consolidates memory — the all-night session spends the very faculty it borrows against. The student's duties to rest, food, and movement are not indulgences but study techniques with evidence, and the professional being formed is a marathoner, not a sprinter.

Worked example

A student moves her revision from rereading to retrieval: every evening she writes one subject's map from memory and repairs it in red. In three weeks her problem answers double in element-accuracy — not because she learned more law, but because she could finally reach the law she had learned. Memory is a door; retrieval is its handle.

Discussion questions

• What is the testing effect, and how is study rebuilt around it?

• What three parts make a revision system?

• Why is sleep a study technique?

Chapter summary

In this chapter you have studied the following ground. This chapter adds the memory sciences to the student's craft: how retention is

actually built, and how timed writing is trained. On how memory keeps law: Memory keeps what it retrieves: the testing effect — recall attempted and checked — builds retention as rereading cannot. On building the system: A revision system has three parts: the maps — each subject on a page; the briefs — cases and statutes on their cards or pages; and the problem log — every problem attempted, its mark scheme's points, and the points missed. On timed writing: Timed answers are trained like any performance: skeleton in three minutes, writing against the clock, review against the outline. On health and the long term: Sleep consolidates memory — the all-night session spends the very faculty it borrows against. Work the discussion questions before you continue; the summary is a map for revision, not a substitute for the chapter.

Chapter 5 — Mooting, Clinics, and Learning by Doing

Law is finally learned by doing it under supervision. This chapter teaches the student's practical formation: moots, clinics, and the ethics of practice before admission.

The moot

A moot argues an appeal on agreed facts before a bench of teachers or practitioners. Its disciplines are the advocate's: the skeleton argument exchanged in advance, authorities marshalled by weight, the bench's questions answered directly — a question from the bench is a gift, for it shows the judge's mind while there is still time to serve it.

Mooting teaches what lectures cannot: that advocacy is a conversation with a sceptical mind, conducted under time, on a record that cannot be changed.

Clinics and attachment

University law clinics advise real clients under supervision; vacation attachments place the student in chambers, firms, and courts. Both teach the profession's unwritten curriculum: files, clients, registries, and the patience of practice. The student treats every placement confidence as the profession's own — the ethics begin before the call.

Observation is a skill: watch how the magistrate manages a list, how counsel concedes a point to win a case, how the registrar's stamp decides a deadline. The courtroom corridor is a classroom with no syllabus.

Building the professional self

Keep a formation record: cases briefed, moots argued, placements served, problems logged. At the end of the degree it is the true transcript — the one the graduate can speak from at interview, and the one this university's students carry beside their certificates.

The student's last skill is the first professional virtue: to know what he does not know, and to say it in time. Every other skill in this book is machinery in that virtue's service.

Worked example

At her first moot, a student reads her argument beautifully and collapses at the bench's first question, which she had not imagined. By her fourth, she keeps a page titled 'questions I fear' for every argument — and answers the feared question first in her own preparation. Advocacy's growth is exactly that: the feared question, welcomed early.

Discussion questions

• Why is a question from the bench called a gift?

• What does the courtroom corridor teach?

• What is the formation record?

Chapter summary

In this chapter you have studied the following ground. Law is finally learned by doing it under supervision. On the moot: A moot argues an appeal on agreed facts before a bench of teachers or practitioners. On clinics and attachment: University law clinics advise real clients under supervision; vacation attachments place the student in chambers, firms, and courts. On building the professional self: Keep a formation record: cases briefed, moots argued, placements served, problems logged.

Work the discussion questions before you continue; the summary is a map for revision, not a substitute for the chapter.

PRACTICE PROBLEMS WITH GUIDED OUTLINES

Four problems follow, one for each of the first four chapters' ground. Attempt each in writing, under time, before reading its outline. The outline names the points a full answer must reach; it does not write the answer — that labour is yours, and it is where the learning is.

Problem 1 — How Law Is Learned

Advise on a dispute raising the ground of this chapter. A full answer must reach, in order: The difference of law; The student's week; Reading law; Notes that teach. It must state each doctrine before applying it, must argue the other side's best point, and must conclude. Compare your attempt with the chapter's worked example: "A student rereads her lecture notes nightly and scores poorly; her colleague writes one problem answer weekly and scores well. The difference is the chapter's thesis: recognition i..."

Problem 2 — Cases, Statutes, and Problems

Advise on a dispute raising the ground of this chapter. A full answer must reach, in order: The case brief; The statute exercise; The problem answer; The essay answer. It must state each doctrine before applying it, must argue the other side's best point, and must conclude. Compare your attempt with the chapter's worked example: "Given a case to brief, a student copies the headnote and stops. Set beside it the one-page discipline: his own ratio sentence, tested against a changed fact, exposes in ten minutes..."

Problem 3 — Examinations and the Student's Character

Advise on a dispute raising the ground of this chapter. A full answer must reach, in order: Revision; In the examination hall; Integrity; The long formation. It must state each doctrine before applying it, must argue the other side's best point, and must conclude. Compare your attempt with the chapter's worked example: "Two students enter the hall with equal knowledge. One writes answers in the order the questions occur to him; the other plans skeletons, allocates time by marks, and concludes each..."

Problem 4 — Memory, Revision Systems, and Working Under Time

Advise on a dispute raising the ground of this chapter. A full answer must reach, in order: How memory keeps law; Building the system; Timed writing; Health and the long term. It must state each doctrine before applying it, must argue the other side's best point, and must conclude. Compare your attempt with the chapter's worked example: "A student moves her revision from rereading to retrieval: every evening she writes one subject's map from memory and repairs it in red. In three weeks her problem answers double in..."

A LAST WORD TO THE STUDENT

You have finished this teaching book. Finish is the wrong word: a law book is a tool, and it earns its place only when you return to it with a problem in your hand. Keep it beside the other books of this library, work the questions again after a month, and let each return teach you what the first reading could not. That is how lawyers are made — by return, by work, and by patience.

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