



Law School Outlining— Why, When and How to do it

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Almost immediately upon starting the first semester as a 1L, the final exam looms large in every law students' mind. And rightly

those outlines do have some value, if they are used correctly. A commercial outline is a good first step to helping you understand an area of the law that you might not otherwise fully comprehend from just your materials alone. Don't forget that your professor is the best resource for having your questions answered, but there are times when you just need a little clarification, and a commercial outline might be a good source for supplementing the materials you have.

Some people prefer to outline alone, and some prefer to outline with their study group. Outlining with a study group can be a very effective way of reviewing the materials, so long as it is done correctly. Each member of the study group needs to participate in creating each section of the outline. Some groups will designate one student to type out the outline while they all discuss and work through the materials together, other groups will create one document, such as a Google Doc, which all members can edit at the same time, and each will add to it as they go along. If you do choose to outline with your study group, be sure not to use the "divide and conquer" method—where each member will be assigned an area of the law to outline, and then the individual outlines will be copied and pasted together. That will ensure that each study group member understands one area of the course very well, and the rest of the course not well at all! Make sure each person actively participates in the creation of the entire document.

It is important to note that, while the word "outline" typically brings to mind a very structured document, with Roman Numerals, and capital and lower case letters labeling each section, it doesn't have to be. Traditional outlines work for certain types of learners—those who learn by writing and making lists and can understand things when written out in such a linear format. However, for some people, this does not work. Rather, visual learners might benefit from something in flow chart form. Kinesthetic learners might prefer making flash cards. Keep in mind that the format of the "outline" doesn't matter, so long as it functions like an outline—a way to organize and summarize the law you have learned over an entire semester, so that you have a document(s) from which you can easily study and refer back to. Understanding your learning style will help you choose with method of outlining will work best for you.

Outlining may seem hard and cumbersome once you begin, but it is a necessary skill to be learned and mastered as a law student. Once it is, you will reap the benefits of good outlining practices for the rest of your time in law school.

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