WRITE AND POST YOUR SCHEDULE; THEN ADAPT IT TO MAXIMIZE PRODUCTIVITY

- Sample schedules for traditional and nontraditional students
- Some people doubt the efficacy of online classes; these doubts are unfounded.
- Days when you do not have bar-review lectures
- Daily schedules versus weekly schedules
- The ingredients of a successful schedule
  - Law study: bar review, lectures, and outlines
  - Self-care (including good nutrition, exercise, and sleep)
  - As you plan your schedule, think about when and how you learn best.
  - Variety
- The daily grind: stick to your schedule of daily disciplined and focused work
  - Dealing with anxiety (it's normal to be nervous)
  - Anxiety while taking practice tests
  - Worry while reading a sample answer
  - Anxiety-reducing tools to use any time nerves hit
“PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE HAVE A MAGICAL EFFECT BEFORE WHICH DIFFICULTIES DISAPPEAR AND OBSTACLES VANISH.”
— JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

This chapter will help you concretize and implement the study-schedule portion of your bar success plan. How hard is putting together a study schedule? That depends. For some very organized people, it’s easy. Sticking to the schedule may be hard, but creating the timetables is simple. Many others are not used to having to fit so much into such a short amount of time, or it’s not intuitive how to determine the most-efficient order of accomplishing tasks.

One might think that calendaring is something basic that everyone knows how to do. Not true. Do you keep a regular calendar? Do you have a system to enter in every obligation you have? If not, you need to begin. Learning to calendar and manage your time well will not only help you pass the bar, but provide you with vital skills you will need to be a successful professional. Clients and colleagues alike will need you to be prepared and on time. If you are working and have a family, your ability to juggle time effectively will become especially indispensable.

Let’s get started with some sample schedules so you can get an idea of what people do and how they fit it in to their day or week. Then, we’ll break down the various ingredients of a successful schedule so you can see the pieces and create your own.

SAMPLE SCHEDULES FOR TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Below are sample daily schedules. Use these, along with your bar review schedule or calendar, as a starting place. Then begin drafting your own schedule, one that works for you.

You may be asking, “Why should I reinvent the wheel if bar review will give me a schedule?” Your course will likely include a schedule of when each lecture takes place, and it might tell you which assignments to do each day. But you need a personalized schedule that specifies the exact times when you will complete those assignments and take extra practice tests if you can, as well as when you will eat, sleep, work if you are still working, commute, and do everything else that must be done.
The more you stick to a routine, the more likely every minute of your day will be productive. Preferably well in advance of starting bar review, sketch at least a tentative daily schedule and post it prominently in your home (for example, on the fridge, above your computer, or some other place where you will see it every day). If you live with a significant other or your family, make sure your schedule is posted where they will see it.

Before studying the sample schedules, it will be helpful to consider some thoughts on prioritizing. To be certain that specific tasks are accomplished, build your schedule around whatever you must get done. Then, do as much as you can of what remains. Your schedule is in many ways the embodiment of your priorities. Schedule around your “musts,” taking into account the most efficient times of day to complete each task.

**SAMPLE DAILY STUDY SCHEDULE FOR THE TRADITIONAL STUDENT**

- 6:30 a.m. — Wake up, drink coffee, take a shower, eat breakfast. (Wake up at 6:00 a.m. if you want to exercise before breakfast.)
- 7:00–7:30 a.m. — Complete daily MBE set of seventeen in thirty minutes. (Complete more if you are a very early riser.)
- 7:30–8:00 a.m. — Review answers to MBE questions.
- 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. — Attend bar review lectures.*
- 1:00–2:00 p.m. — Lunch. While eating, identify and review any rules you didn’t know or understand in morning lecture. (If you can’t write and eat at the same time, take twenty minutes after the lecture to type or handwrite all the key points you do not want to forget, examples that made sense, areas your instructor said would likely be heavily tested, etc. Then, eat for twenty to thirty minutes. After that, get back to work!)
- 2:00–6:00 p.m. — Complete any bar review reading or writing assignments. Write extra essays and study sample answers, or complete a PT. Look up any rules you do not understand.
- 6:00–8:00 p.m. — Take a break to exercise and eat dinner.
- 8:00–10:00 p.m. — Do passive work. Review lecture notes and flashcards, or answer a few practice questions lying down. (Many of my students have all of this information on their smartphones and do certain tasks in bed each night while they are resting and winding down.)
- 10:00 p.m. — Relax and go to sleep.

*If you are taking a traditional, in-person bar review course, the classes will be scheduled at certain times, in certain places, and on certain days. You may have flexibility if the course offers more than one lecture per day, but most often the times will be fixed. This is fine as long as the times and locations work for you. But sometimes the commute is too far. Or you will find yourself in a class that meets in the mornings—a time when you could more effectively complete practice tests on your own. You will have to adapt. So meet with a mentor about how to make the situation work for you. (If you are a morning person, get up at 5:00 a.m. and take two hours of practice tests before bar review. Get recordings to listen to while commuting. Think creatively about how best to plot your time.)

Online classes may be more adaptable to your schedule. You may have live online classes that you want to attend synchronously, presenting you with timing issues. However, a key advantage to online study is the flexibility it offers. Courses may be recorded and thus available asynchronously as well, so you can listen whenever (and as many times) as you like.

Some doubt the efficacy of online classes, but these doubts are unfounded.

If a quality course is offered and students are committed to learning, they can and will achieve, whether they are sitting in a physical building or a virtual classroom. It is true that some people lack the discipline to turn on their computers and follow the course schedule in a dedicated manner. Some people prefer and benefit from a live bar review course, and that’s fine. Others need the accountability that comes from having to show up somewhere each day. But the method of the content delivery should not make or break your paying attention and getting the most out of the program. That is on you. My motto, having taught in an online law school for more than a decade, is “Distance learning does not mean distant learning.”

Online lectures can be live online and synchronous, or prerecorded and asynchronous. The same is true with many bar review courses offering “live” locations. Often students go to a physical classroom, sit together, and watch a video lecture; the professor is not always there lecturing in person. They are synchronous, but by no means live.

Some would say that students are more apt to go to a class every day when they have to be at a physical location than to have the self-motivation to independently follow an online curriculum. Even if it were true that students physically attend lectures more regularly in live locations, it is just as easy to tune out a video in a live location as it is at home. In fact, on your own computer, you can rewind and listen again to what you missed. So you may end up getting more out of an online lecture.

In addition, lectures are only one part of most bar review courses. There are also outlines, practice tests, writing workshops, and more. Students enrolled in live locations often have access to much of this material online, and students who are enrolled in online classes are often shipped paper books (in addition to having electronic copies
of materials.) So, the learning is often done in a hybrid fashion (part live, part online) whether you are in a so-called online bar review or a so-called live-location bar review.

Bottom line: however you study, you must be actively engaged, committed to doing the work, and accountable (to yourself if you are self-motivated, or to a mentor or faculty supporter if you need an extra kick in the pants).

Beyond studying, live courses may be good places to find camaraderie and support. On the other hand, some students find fellow applicants competitive and unsupportive. These students attend class and then leave as quickly as possible.

If you are either studying independently or do not have helpful people in your live classes, reach out proactively for support. Connect by phone or e-mail with a mentor, meet a reliable study partner over coffee or a meal, or attend a bar mentoring group. Just be sure that whoever you reach out to is truly supportive. (Review Chapter 6 for how to enlist positive support.)

Days when you do not have bar review lectures
Plan these days carefully so you don’t waste time. Make sure to include practice tests and time to learn rules and concepts you don’t understand well or at all. Schedule time to work on memorizing rules and plan to increase that time as the exam approaches.

Most important are the practice tests; they will help you to both learn and memorize the law. Learning in the context of fact patterns helps you recall the rules. Have you found yourself saying when you approach a new problem, “Oh yeah, that’s like the one I did before in which the only ten acres of land with access to water were not included in the deed?”

Select the practice exams you will complete ahead of time. Avoid spending time deciding which exams to complete on a given day. Knowing what you will do each day leaves no open window for procrastination. If a schedule of practice exams to do on weekends is listed in your bar review calendar, follow that. If not, or if you are doing more than what is assigned, either mark the pages of the exams you plan to complete (noting the date and time you will complete each one), print copies of the exams ahead of time, and put them in a dated folder. Each night, put the next day’s folder on your desk. Before you call it quits for the week, choose the practice exams you will write out in full or outline each day of the following week.

Eventually, in July, you’ll switch to adding more outlining of essays and less writing them out in full, but not until July. And, even in July, you will still need to write out several essays each week.

SAMPLE STUDY SCHEDULE FOR NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS
From twelve to three months before the exam (that is, during your last year of law school), devote three to six hours per week studying. Each week do at least the following:

- Fifty MBEs—reviewing explanatory answers, writing flashcards for difficult-to-remember rules, and updating your outlines.
- Three essay questions—writing outlines for your answers, reviewing the explanatory answers, writing flashcards for difficult-to-remember rules, and updating your outlines.
- Study a bar review outline (and draft your own condensed version of that outline) for one of the testable essay subjects.
- Take one PT.

Starting three months before the exam (that is, after or near the completion of classes) each weekday do the following:

- One hour before work: do seventeen MBEs in thirty minutes. Review the explanatory answers for thirty minutes, writing flashcards for rules you missed.
- One hour at lunch: read and outline one essay, and study the model answer. Do compare-and-contrast “self-critique” to find ways to improve your analysis and writing.
- One and a half hours immediately after work: write out one full essay and review and study the model answer. (It can be very helpful, especially if being home is distracting, to stay at or near work and get an hour or two of studying in before you head home.)
- Use commute time to listen to bar review lectures or review and memorize rules.
- Dinner
- Listen to bar review lectures or review notes from bar review lectures.

While some people can work a full day, eat dinner, and then study productively for four to five hours straight, many working students find it easier to spread tasks throughout the day, putting in at least some time before, during, and after work. Try both approaches and see which one is more effective for you. (But don’t think that because you have to work, you can’t also study. People work and pass the bar in great numbers all the time. You can, too. Remember that every hour adds up.)

On weekends during the three months before the exam:

- study full days, from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. or longer if you can still focus, with at least one hour for lunch. Combine bar review lectures and looking up rules with additional practice exams.
- Take off evenings for rest and relaxation so you don’t burn out and so you will have just as much energy the next day.
Daily Schedules Versus Weekly Schedules

Most people prefer daily schedules. For those studying full-time, daily schedules leave no time to waste deciding what to do. You get up, do your work at the same time each day, and fall in to a productive routine. Even if you are working, write a daily schedule for yourself if your schedule is consistent each day. If you have to adapt it, write down any changes so that they also become tasks that must be completed. But for working students whose commitments vary from day to day, a weekly schedule may be most effective. Let’s say you plan to complete seventeen MBEs in a half-hour each morning during breakfast and thirty-three questions in an hour on weekend days, plus allow time following each practice session to review. If you can’t always commit to this because some days you have more work than others, consider a weekly schedule with at least 200 MBEs per week plus review time. (Note: these numbers may be minimum! You can always do more. But it is more effective to do a consistent number on a regular basis than a marathon session once a week.)

One former student whose work schedule interfered with accomplishing everything on a daily basis felt like a failure because he wasn’t getting anything done each day. (The person had multiple engineering degrees and decades of experience in demanding jobs.) He decided to switch to a weekly schedule. He completed more on lighter work days and less on busier ones, and got everything on his list done by week’s end. This allowed him to once again think of himself as the success he was, and still is.

Simply changing when you do things may make you think of yourself in a different light. Try out scheduling variations as early as you can before or in the beginning of intensive bar review so that you can hit the ground running in June and July.

THE INGREDIENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL SCHEDULE

What goes into an effective bar schedule? Ideally, you should build in law study, skills training, self-care (including exercise, sleep, and good nutrition), and a little bit of relaxation and fun to "replenish the well."

Bar review courses will likely send you a calendar with a class and homework schedule for June and July. Numerous tasks should be detailed in your bar review course. If they are, excellent! Just follow this schedule. But if your course schedule is not sufficiently comprehensive, modify it to include all the required tasks and the specific times you will complete them. You may want to add the following:

- When you will exercise, sleep, and relax
- When you will complete a simulated bar exam if your course does not include one
- Time after each lecture to review rules you did not understand and make flashcards (or other memory tools) for heavily tested areas

Law study: Bar review lectures and outlines

Attend all bar review lectures and workshops. Listen attentively. Make sure you are awake and alert. If you are attending lectures at a time of day when you are exhausted, consider switching to attend online or via video at a time when you are more energized. (For some students, lectures keep them awake. If you are one of them, schedule those when you are tired and do active independent work when you have more energy. Many of my students find they are most alert in the mornings, so choose to listen to bar review lectures at night when they are too tired to take practice tests, for example.)

To get the most out of the lectures, review the table of contents for the outline before each lecture and look up any terms you are not familiar with. (Review the discussion of bar review lectures in Chapter 5.) For some students, taking notes while listening to a lecture helps them learn the material. Others get more out of a lecture by listening intently and then going back and creating notes by either condensing the main outline or expanding the table of contents. Determine which approach is most effective for you.

Self-care (including good nutrition, exercise, and sleep)

Are you running? Jogging? Lifting weights? Punching a punching bag? Playing tennis? You may think it’s nuts to suggest that your schedule allows you to take time off for such leisure. But exercise is critical, especially as you prepare for this final stretch. You must let off physical steam (release stress) and keep your body in shape. Exercise is not time off. It is a key piece of your ultimate study effort. (If you feel guilty any time you are not studying, listen to bar review lectures or recordings of rule statements while you exercise.)

If you have a sport you love and do regularly, play a bit of it daily if you can. If you are not “an exercise person,” add a half-hour walk to your study day. Do this now. And if you can push it to an occasional jog, or swim, or carry weights with you, all the better.

During each session of your bar exam, your mind will be on. And it will work better if oxygen is flowing efficiently through your body. Some nervousness—that which keeps you sharp and alert—is good. But you must shake off the excess nerves that can send you into panic or paralysis. Exercise helps you lose the bad stress while keeping the good energy.
As you plan your schedule, think about when and how you learn best.
You can take one of the many learning-style assessments available online, or your ASP faculty may offer learning-style questionnaires. In the meantime, take the following short quiz to begin thinking about how you learn best. Remember, though, that you don’t have to be pigeonholed—or pigeonhole yourself—into one style of learning. Chances are you learn in many different ways, and you may learn best when you are working with more than one sense or modality at the same time. (Hence my continued recommendation to read aloud, under your breath, while pointing at each word so that you are using your senses of sight, touch, and hearing simultaneously.)

Think back on other situations when you had to learn and memorize a great deal of material (perhaps a math class with many formulas or a language class with extensive vocabulary). What helped you the most? Studying is more effective when you do it in ways that fit your personality, your time constraints, and your learning styles.

Take the quiz below to start thinking about how you learn best.

**QUIZ**

Q: When studying for class, you learn best by:
A:

1) Silently reading your notes, rereading hornbooks and casebooks, looking at flowcharts, etc.
2) Listening to a taped lecture, reading your notes aloud, having someone test you aloud.
3) Drawing diagrams to track issues and rules, writing notes, and outlining material on your computer.

Q: When you go on an interview, what stands out most in your mind afterward?
A:

1) How people looked.
2) The names and qualifications of people you spoke with.
3) What rooms you were in, what you said and did, what you ate, etc.

Q: When you are studying in a library, coffee shop, or bookstore, you are most distracted by:

A:

1) Looking at things on the walls, the people nearby, etc.
2) Listening to the conversations of people nearby, music playing, other sounds.
3) Your feelings, whether you are thirsty or tired, how comfortable your clothes are, etc.

Q: When you are trying to figure out some concept you don’t understand, you:
A:

1) Read until you get it.
2) Ask someone to explain it to you.
3) Review the problem in your mind, and diagram it out.

Did you answer with mostly 1 responses? If so, you might tend toward the visual. If you chose mostly 2 answers, you might be more of an auditory learner. Primarily 3 responses might suggest that you lean toward kinesthetic learning styles. Those who wanted to answer with all three responses may like variety, and might learn in different ways in different situations. Some people also learn some concepts better by listening or talking and others by reading or diagramming, depending on the subject or area of law. Again, there is no need to pigeonhole yourself into a specific learning style. Simply being aware and knowing that the way you receive and process information may vary can be empowering.

You can’t change the way a bar review lecture is conducted, but you can adapt your own independent study according to how you learn best. Think about this as you plan your study schedule. If you tend to be a visual learner, make more time for drawing charts and diagrams, using flashcards, and color-coding material. Build in more listening or talking time if you learn best through hearing. If you are more of a kinesthetic learner, get up and move around, take breaks at regular intervals, study standing up sometimes, diagram things in vivid colors, and consider joining a study group. Allow your studying time to work for you by knowing how you learn best. You are fighting the bar. Don’t fight yourself. (A song I like to play in bar mentoring goes, “I fought the law and the law won.” Of course, I change the ending to “... and I won.”)
Draft Schedule
Drawing upon what you now know, try to sketch out an effective schedule. Further scheduling variations will then be discussed, and you will update your draft.

6 a.m.
7 a.m.
8 a.m.
9 a.m.
10 a.m.
11 a.m.
Noon
1 p.m.
2 p.m.
3 p.m.
4 p.m.
5 p.m.
6 p.m.
7 p.m.
8 p.m.
9 p.m.
10 p.m.
11 p.m.

Variety
As noted, studying in different ways can help appeal to the diverse ways you learn. Shaking things up can also prevent burnout and get you through the long, tough days.

Change locations once or twice a week. As a reward for studying well in your regular study spot, take a stack of practice exams outdoors (somewhere with a great view). Or bring work to a favorite coffee shop or bookstore and sit in a comfy chair. (Make sure it’s a place where you can focus.)

Vary your studying techniques. As we said, variety alone may help you stay on course, but making your studies fun is even better. (Do you still think preparing for the bar exam has to be torture? Come on. Really? Try to make it as enjoyable as possible.) Working in a different manner may enhance your learning. If you’re tired of the same old listening to lectures and reading outlines:

- Talk through concepts or rules you don’t understand with a friend, study buddy, or mentor (perhaps over coffee). If it is someone who will stay focused and not distract you, the person doesn’t have to have a legal background. (As noted previously, if you can explain something clearly to a layperson, you are ready to use that concept in an essay on the bar exam.)
- Set some of your mnemonics, checklists, or summary outlines to music. Memorize rules by singing them to the melody of a popular tune. (One of my professors set all of civil procedure to music and had my section do a singing review for all of the other first-years.)
- If you’re a visual learner, make charts and diagrams.
- Include some funny images (perhaps a cartoon that makes you laugh) in your study materials, or maybe place a picture of James Bond with his gun pointed near the portion of your crimes outline that mentions the deadly-weapon doctrine.
- Make a recording of yourself reading key rules out loud. Hearing your own voice confidently stating rules may have an empowering effect, even if you were reading the rules when you made the recording. (A student recently shared a unique study strategy: recording her own voice reading rule statements, but in a thick and funny stage accent. Somehow adding the accent triggered her memory such that it helped her retain all the rules. It also made her laugh a bit along the way.)

What are your ideas for making bar study an enjoyable experience? Yes, you must take this time seriously and be fully committed to success, but that doesn’t mean that it has to be painful or you must feel sorry for yourself. Find ways to see the light at the end of each day, and each week; add some light and levity of your own to the process!
THE DAILY GRIND: STICK TO YOUR SCHEDULE OF DAILY, DISCIPLINED, FOCUSED WORK.
If the sample schedules above look doable, that’s great! Often people follow them fairly easily the first few days, but fall behind within a couple of weeks and get discouraged. (Others stay on pace, but get exhausted.) “Keep a list,” I tell my students so often and so loudly they hate it. But they thank me later. After their exam, they say, “I needed those reminders to keep on going.” When they pass, they say, “I heard your voice in those dark moments when I was tired and drained. When I was ready to give up, I just kept moving forward.”
You may also hate me for this chapter, perhaps for the entire book. But if any of it helps to keep you studying and taking practice tests, you, too, may find that the anger subsides amidst the great celebrations of bar passage. (And please take a moment if you can to drop me a note and share your success stories.)

“RARELY DO WE FIND MEN WHO WILLINGLY ENGAGE IN HARD, SOLID THINKING. THERE IS AN ALMOST UNIVERSAL QUEST FOR EASY ANSWERS AND HALF-BAKED SOLUTIONS. NOTHING PAINS SOME PEOPLE MORE THAN HAVING TO THINK.”
— DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. —

Be determined. Keep your goal, your “endgame,” in mind. You are in training. It’s not supposed to be easy. Learn as you go, one day at a time. Trust that if you put in what it takes, you will get where you need to go. Use every good moment you have to study, sleep, or otherwise prepare. Don’t waste anyone’s time fooling yourself; if you aren’t effectively using your time, get on the ball. Don’t spin your wheels. When you hit a wall (and you will!), change gears or stop and take a break.
Don’t quit or get discouraged at the first signs of losing focus. You need to build your stamina. Push yourself. It’s not easy. But when you find yourself reading the same thing over and over, looking out the window and not “hearing” yourself, take a break. Maybe take a nap. Sometimes after just twenty minutes of shut-eye, you can get back in gear and be more productive. Above all, remain patient. Keep moving forward.
Work hard. Work steadily. Work smart. Work when others are goofing off. (And do not waste one moment feeling sorry for yourself that you have to work while others play. You get to work. And you will get to reap the future rewards of that hard work.)
Pace yourself and don’t burn out. Do what it takes to keep moving forward, slowly but steadily, on this road to success. The following suggestions are offered to help you press on when you are dragging.

Dealing with anxiety (it’s normal to be nervous)
When I describe study schedules to students who are further away from the bar exam, they are usually fine and able to calmly think through things. When I have the same discussion with people about one week into bar review, they panic: “There is too much material to learn. I can’t do it. I will never learn all of this.”
Of course you can! And you will. How? One day at a time, improving slowly but surely.  
Put your nerves in a box. And get to work. Instead of spending time and energy on worrying, put it into studying. It’s too early in the first weeks of June to stress out. That is the time to focus on getting into a study routine. Don’t expect to get practice questions right! Just keep answering them and studying the sample answers. Walk away from every study session having learned something. Keep improving. Keep moving forward. And you will be fine.
I understand that it’s easy for me to say, “Just don’t worry.” I tell myself that every day, and I still worry! But there are tools to help you “put the worry in boxes” and keep it contained when it does surface. Ultimately, if you can actually learn to channel your nerves into adrenaline, they can become powerful tools rather than paralyzing traps. That’s the goal!
COURAGE IS A SPECIAL KIND OF KNOWLEDGE: THE KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO FEAR WHAT OUGHT TO BE FEARED AND HOW NOT TO FEAR WHAT OUGHT NOT TO BE FEARED.

— DAVID BEN-GURION —

What should you do when you’re blocked by anxiety? That depends on when the nerves hit. Let’s consider different strategies for different times you find yourself getting nervous.

Anxiety while taking practice tests
If paralyzing anxiety prevents forward movement while you are taking a practice test, the immediate mission is to get the intellectual flow going again—take the edge off. Try simply reading and outlining if answering the question in full right now feels too stressful. Read the sample answer.

Many states release sample passing answers; your bar review may offer model answers. After trying to analyze a question (and preferably writing out your own answer, unless you are too panicked to do so), read the sample answer. See how your answer compares. (See “Self-Assessment Tools” in Chapter 8). Now take this one step further. Copy the sample answer. (Write it out longhand or retype it, word for word.)

Copying good sample or model answers can be especially helpful when even looking at those answers stresses you out (when you fall into “I could never write something like this” thinking), or when you are too tired to fully analyze a question and answer by reading alone. It is easy. It is simple and low-stress. You can tell yourself that all you are doing is copying. But as you write or type, your mind will sync with your hands, and your brain will register what a “complete” and passing answer sounds and feel like. What often happens is that you begin typing and you see that this answer adds one more sentence where you might have stopped, helping you correct a problem of writing in too conclusory a manner. Or, you may find the opposite; you see that the answer stops after making a point where you would have gone on and on—writing in a too-verbose or disorganized manner, sometimes even undermining your own logic that would have scored points had you written more clearly and succinctly.

When you are nervous or overtired, copying answers is one of the best tools. It is not stressful; it just involves retyping. It calms students down because it’s not demanding, but it often works wonders to bolster their understanding.

Worry while reading a sample answer.
You might find yourself overwhelmed or intimidated when self-assessing a completed practice question by studying a model or sample answer. It may feel like you will never be able to write that thorough of an answer. You must lift yourself out of that thinking immediately. Copying the answer, as noted above, is one way to begin to believe that you could write something like that, and get yourself acclimated. Another effective way to unblock these sorts of nerves is by “reverse engineering” the question.

Many educators suggest this sort of “looking backward” approach, which involves deconstructing your thinking, and there are different ways of doing this. My approach is to start by simply reading an essay-question fact pattern and model answer aloud. Then, looking at the answer, write an outline. Outline the answer, asking yourself as you do, “What would I have needed to outline this kind of an answer?” Then, look back at the facts. “Where in the facts do I see words that trigger the points in my outline?” Sometimes, studying the answer and working backward helps you see what was important in the question. Outlining sample or model answers in this way will not only usually help you relax and see how certain facts were significant, but should also help you recognize logical ways to organize your analysis of the key issues.

Copying answers, outlining, and reverse engineering are all tools that will help you get the juices flowing again when you feel stalled. They seem easy because you are working from answers, so they tend to reduce anxiety. But somehow they often empower people. The very act of retyping and understanding the words coming from your own hands will build skills you need to learn to write similar answers on your own. Likewise, seeing both how an answer flows from a question and how pieces of the question trigger components of the answer helps build your test-taking skills. And, this process works effectively to deconstruct MBEs and performance tests as well as essays.

As you work, tell yourself, “I can do this. I see the organization. It makes sense. When I’m in the exam, this is how my analysis will flow.” Smile, and force yourself to take a deep breath. Keep yourself in as positive a frame of mind as possible to keep your brain energized.

Anxiety-reducing tools to use any time nerves hit
As we explored previously, some techniques work particularly well during an exam or at other specific times. Other strategies are helpful any time you feel anxious. (You may feel nervous when you go to your bar review class and find yourself confused, and you may feel overwhelmed reading the outline and seeing concepts you do not know.
or understand. Go back and review the sections in Chapter 5 on getting the most out of bar review; you will see tools that will not only help you learn, but help calm you during the process.)

Intensive bar preparation lasts for two tense, crazy months. These simple steps will help when nerves hit:

- Breathe deeply and slowly. Slow, steady, deep breaths will often release the nerves and "paralysis" that comes from them. We tend to tense up when we are nervous, and often forget to breathe properly. You will read more clearly and think more clearly when the oxygen is flowing freely.

- Visualize yourself in the exam setting. Picture yourself thinking and your words flowing. As you take practice tests, imagine taking them in a room full of palpable stress (perhaps picture the place you took the LSAT, SAT, FVLSE, or any other standardized test). Recall the nervous energy and how you prevailed in spite of it. (Maybe part of you thrived on the challenge!) Envision yourself now and on your upcoming exams reading questions; bubbling in multiple-choice answers; writing essay and performance-test responses; and feeling calm, confident, and in control.

- Talk to yourself, calmly and positively. Positive thinking is critical! Tell yourself every day that you can do this. Say it aloud several times each day. Banish from your mind any past test-taking experiences that were negative. Replace them with empowering images of you conquering challenges. Ban phrases such as, "I'm not good at standardized tests." That is hogwash, and you know it! You got into law school, and may even have successfully completed law school by the time you have read this chapter. You are not only good—you are excellent at taking these tests. Rid your speech (and mind) of all that is not positive and strong. Ultimately, remember that you will be alone on the exam. So figure out how to talk yourself down from the ledge. (One former student said she got through several mini panic attacks during the bar exam by telling herself that it was "just another practice test." When she felt the pressure mount, she whispered to herself, "This is just another practice test. You've been doing these all summer. No big deal. You know what to do. Just keep reading and thinking. It's a puzzle. It all fits together. You'll see.")

Notice that the strategies above can be employed without "props." There are many things you can do to de-stress in June and July, before the exam, such as drink a cup of tea, take a walk, go to a yoga class, meditate, take a hot bath, or talk with someone who loves and supports you. But none of those can be done during the exam. It is important to develop some effective calming habits that you can employ during practice tests that will also be useful if you find yourself panicking on the actual exam. These techniques will help.

But by far the most effective tool to combat nerves is adequate preparation. The better your training, the more prepared you are, the less your nerves will hinder you. If you do feel nervous, which is normal no matter how hard you have studied, you will be much more able to turn the nervousness into adrenaline so it serves, rather than defeats, you.

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**CONTAGIOUS ANXIETY.**

If anyone tells you "don't be nervous" or suggests that it is stupid to be nervous, he or she is either ignorant, needs a "reality check," or is just plain full of garbage. It is normal to be nervous. If you are not a little nervous, you likely do not appreciate the seriousness of what you are doing. You might find it helpful when others share that they too are nervous. (And whether they tell you so or not, they are.) It makes you feel you are not alone. That's great, unless their nerves are contagious and cause you to stress out further. (If that's the case, do not talk about being nervous with classmates or others who share their own anxiety.)

Similarly, sometimes you can talk yourself out of panic, but other times talking about it just gets you worked up further. If that sort of nervousness hits, it may be better to switch gears or take a break (or go to sleep). Figure out now if you are someone who lets go when you talk, or someone who obsesses further and gets more stressed out. And protect yourself as you prepare.

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**WORK HARD, BUT WORK EFFICIENTLY. REASSESS YOUR SCHEDULE.**

After a week or two of intensive bar preparation, ask yourself whether the location and timing of your studying are maximizing your productivity. Where you study can mean the difference between focusing well and not. Are you studying in your home? Is it quiet? Do you have a dedicated study space? Some people simply cannot focus at a cluttered desk. Some determine their homes are not conducive to study, so they find a good spot elsewhere. You don't have to move out or rent an office to focus effectively (though those things work for some people). Just find a place that works for you. It
may be a coffee shop or public library. Many find their law school libraries distracting because classmates stop to chat.

“ADAPT OR PERISH, NOW AS EVER, IS NATURE’S INEXORABLE IMPERATIVE.”
—H. G. WELLS—

Your goal is to find a place where, and discover the times when, you are most focused. It is excellent training, though, to take at least a few practice tests or try to study at least a few days in the most distracting place imaginable. I urge all of my students to do this so that they don’t get so used to the quiet of their home or a library that they are unable to concentrate during the actual exam, when keyboards will be clacking and other applicants will be coughing, sneezing, sighing, groaning, or making other noises. One former student who passed the bar the first time around was determined to overcome his concern about being distracted on the actual exam. How did he do this? He decided to train by completing practice tests each week at the noisiest place he could think of—the top of the stairs in one of the most crowded shopping malls in Los Angeles. He figured (correctly) that if he could focus there, he could focus anywhere. And he did! (By the way, the exam he took and passed the first time around had a rule against perpetuities issue!)

Is my schedule maximizing my efficiency?
Not getting done each day what you need to? Look critically at your schedule. What is, and what is not, working? When are you getting distracted? Are you a working student whose daily schedule varies? If so, try a weekly schedule so you can fit more into days when you have more time, do less on busier days, and still keep up.

Think about when and what you are eating on study days, and whether you are exercising. Those are factors that can help you work more efficiently or slow you down.

Are people interrupting you? When are you working? Are you too tired to focus? Maybe shifting the time of day can help you focus. Or consider changing locations.

Every challenge can be surmounted if you see where the hang-ups are.

Adapt your schedule as the bar approaches, and make more time for memorizing.

Much of early start and bar review may be about learning. Practice exams help you learn the law in context, and help you recall rules when you encounter analogous fact patterns. The best way to retain everything you need to know for exam day is to continuously build on your foundation; learn, refine, and practice throughout the summer, and increase your focus on memorization the closer you get to the exam. (If you had all the rules you needed to know memorized in May, you would likely forget them by the end of July. And you will likely be stunned at how little you remember in August!)

Your goal when you walk into that test is to know each element of each important rule as well as you know your most frequently used password. Your schedule must include adequate time for memorization. The more simply rules are phrased, the easier they will be to memorize and use on the exam. So a main goal throughout early bar review and intensive bar review is to assemble and organize all key rules into memorizable form.

How to memorize? Break out the flashcards, write it out fifty times, do whatever works for you!

Read and reread rule statements aloud. Look at them, listen to them, write them out repeatedly, test yourself, and have others test you. Engage fully in the memorization process. In the age of speed dial, our memories often take the backseat. We don’t need them as much as we used to when we walked around with critical numbers in our heads. But by the end of July, your mind needs to act as a sort of Wikipedia for legal rules. When you need the definition of homicide and forms of malice, or a statement of Rules 10b-5 or 16b or UCC Section 2-207, you need them right away. You need instant recall.

Sometimes we need a kick (or trick) to help us recall rules for an exam. Mnemonics are memory-aid techniques that have likely been helping people since ancient times. They can be verbal—perhaps a short rhyme or a key word that helps you remember something. They can be in song. (How many people sing the alphabet song when they need to alphabetize?) They can be based on lists. People often choose the first letter of each word in a list; for example, IRAC is a common mnemonic for Issue, Rule, Analysis, Conclusion. They can also be visual, such as associating arrows to recall how one concept stems from or links to another.
EXERCISE: How do you memorize best?
You are a student. This is not the first time you have had to memorize. Think back to science (memorizing the periodic table), math (memorizing formulas), history (memorizing dates and names), and foreign languages (memorizing vocabulary). What worked best for you? What made things stick? Did you: 1) Write out, maybe even 50 times, whatever you needed to memorize? 2) Write a flashcard and test yourself, or have others test you? 3) Say it out loud? 4) Put it to song or rhyme, or create a mnemonic? What are your favorite memory tools? (A number of the books and resources on surviving and thriving in law school listed in the Bibliography have helpful suggestions about how to effectively memorize.29)

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Preventing burnout: Add incentives and levity.
Studying for the bar exam is a test of endurance. You have to put in many high-gear days and pack into your brain more learning than you ever thought you could absorb, and you have to do this day in and day out for a minimum of about sixty days. This section provides suggestions to help stay on course.

Reward yourself.
During intensive bar prep, give yourself a small but consistent reward each day for doing your best, and a slightly bigger one each week. What is your secret pleasure? What is your not-so-secret pleasure? What makes you smile, feel happy, or comforted? What works for you?

If it's music, buy yourself one new song each evening after you have honestly put in a good, solid day's work. Once a week, give yourself an hour or two off to listen to live music somewhere—maybe on a weekend evening, after having put in a productive study week. Is it movies or TV? Allow yourself a half hour of mindless TV each evening, and go out to a movie theater or watch a movie at home once a week, with popcorn! Is it food or wine? Give yourself some special treat once a day, something at the end of a hard day's learning—chocolate, ice cream, sautéed mushrooms in truffle oil? (Well, I said whatever works for you!) And, once a week, go out to a special restaurant or cook, or have someone else cook, a special meal at home.

The point here is to positively mark each day and each week. You need to stay in the game and not get worn out too early. Expect these months to involve hard work. Do that work with as much energy and focus as is humanly possible. Then, acknowledge and give yourself credit for what you have done. This also helps you count down the weeks and pace yourself. Studying for the bar exam is a long haul. (Note: It is a long haul for your family or significant other, too. If you are a person who uses good food as an incentive, think about possibly taking your family or significant other out for a great meal once per week—a reward for you and them!)

EXERCISE
List how you might reward yourself for a job well done. Some suggestions: watch a mindless TV show; have a great meal with a glass of wine; go out for a movie and popcorn; take a walk outdoors (chant motivational sayings as you walk); drive to a place where you can see the ocean, a beautiful mountain, or some other scenery that takes you out of your day-to-day routine; laugh with a friend who is supportive; eat some Belgian chocolate. (Chocolate won't add brain cells, I know, but it may lift your mood and put a smile on your face.)

What works for you?

After enjoying your reward, get a good night's sleep so you can get back to work the next morning. Slow and steady wins the race.

Above all, be kind to yourself all the way through bar review. This is one of the hardest times in your life, one of the steepest mountains you will have to climb. The good news is, once you pass the bar, you'll have a lifetime license. You'll never have to take the exam again. Just pay your annual dues, complete your jurisdiction's continuing education requirements, and remain ethical, and you'll keep your license for life.
**GIVE YOURSELF A SPECIAL REWARD OR INCENTIVE ON JULY 1**

One nice thing about seeing June become July is that adrenaline will kick in. But the last week of June can be particularly rough. People are normally drained, and sometimes a little depressed or discouraged, as June ends. Prepare for a jolt when you see June become July. It can freak you out if you are not ready for it. (You have been saying the date of your bar exam for years. It felt so far off, but suddenly it's nearly here.) You must make that July 1 rush one of adrenaline, not panic.

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**Bar exam burnout**

We talked earlier about anxiety and how to combat nerves. What about fatigue and burnout? Do you know the difference? It is one of degree. If you are just tired, sleeping more may help. For anxiety, try the tips discussed earlier. (And note that you are a bit more nervous and less able to conquer anxiety when you are tired.) If you are suffering from burnout, recharging your batteries may be a bit more difficult.

Are you burned out? Some people start bar review burned out. Others are really dragging by the end of June. What can you do about burnout? First, admit it. Face it so you can correct it. Allowing yourself to be so “done” that you are blocked from putting in further effort will not result in success.

Next, assess whether it’s a major burnout. Do you need a half day or full day off? Some people need an entire weekend away. If you know that you are too tired to focus, take time off. Get some fresh air. Change the scenery. Clear your mind.

For minor burnout, the best solution is giving yourself consistent small rewards and breaks that you know you can look forward to after every productive study day. It can also be helpful to break up the day. Put in a focused four-hour block in the morning; then take a good, long lunch break. (Most bar exams actually have long lunch breaks.) You can eat and maybe get in some exercise or even a nap if you need it. (I’ve known people who napped during the lunch break at the actual bar exam! They set two alarm clocks and arranged for a wake-up call, of course.)

Take a similar break following afternoon and evening study sessions. Spend time with someone supportive, if you have someone in your life who is helpful. If not, spend any downtime with a good book or movie! (Do not spend time with anyone who saps your energy or keeps you from meeting your goal.)

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**Humor: You gotta laugh a little.**

Some people like to watch a comedy every so often, or listen to silly jokes. I came up with the following “Top Ten List” for how you know you are taking a bar exam. (Apologies to David Letterman.)

**How you know you are taking a bar exam:**

10. Your desk and bookshelves are filled with software and books about bars, but none of them tell you where to get a drink.
9. You care how many multiple-choice practice questions other people answer.
8. You study flashcards at red lights.
7. Your iPod or phone has a playlist called something like “Get that Study Groove On.”
6. You dream about real property fact patterns.
5. You wake from those dreams wondering what the answer is.
4. You know the differences between Notice, Race-Notice, and Race Statutes, and you care about those differences.
3. You have spent more money in the past few months on bar prep than most of your nonlaw friends spend on car payments.
2. Whenever you have to wait for something, you find yourself calculating how many multiple-choice questions you could have done in the time spent waiting.
1. You spend time thinking about whether you will be able to make it through days of three-hour, anxiety-filled testing blocks without interrupting any of those blocks to go to the bathroom.

**Motivate with music**

Every time you feel overwhelmed, overloaded, tired, fearful, or discouraged, play music that makes your spirit sing. Music will lift you right out of whatever you are feeling (those feelings, by the way, are totally normal just prior to taking the bar exam).

Sure, there are a few folks who one week into July are saying, “Just bring it on. I am tired of studying, tired of waiting, and as ready as I’ll ever be.” But they are few and far between. Most people feel overwhelmed and overloaded just before the exam, and want every extra minute possible to prepare.

It’s a long haul, the bar exam. If you’re tired or feel yourself slowing down, play some inspiring music. And sing along! Find the artists that move you. Even on the actual exam, should you find yourself in an afternoon lull or a moment of panic, humming an uplifting tune in your head may be just the secret weapon to pull you through.
WHAT IS ON YOUR BAR EXAM PLAYLIST?

My favorite bar study song is Jimmy Cliff's "You Can Get It If You Really Want." I also play at the beginning of every motivational session Queen's "We Will Rock You," changing the word "rock" to "pass." (Only when celebrating bar passage do we play the second half of that tune, "We Are the Champions.") What is on your bar exam playlist?

FINALIZING YOUR SCHEDULE

You have all the pieces now to create a very effective study schedule. Take a look back at the draft you wrote earlier and update it, or start fresh. Be sure your schedule includes regular disciplined study and regular breaks to recharge your batteries.

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