



# MSLAW Academic Support

## Successful Strategies for Effective and Efficient Note-Taking

Note-taking is crucial, both in law school and in preparation for the bar exam. To do well in law school, you have to understand what information is key, and how you need to take down that information in and outside of class.

- Ideally, you should be taking notes before class (on your reading and materials,) during class (on class discussions, lectures, and helpful nuggets of information that your professor offers,) and after class (consolidating your reading and class notes into one organized, condensed, unified document, such as an outline.)
- Before you get to class, you should be reading the materials and taking notes on the readings. If you're unsure of something that you read, look it up so that you have some understanding of what it is or what it means.
- Then, come to class ready to listen and take diligent notes—but not to such extent that your note-taking prevents you from being engaged in class discussion. If you can't seem to take notes during class, then sit down immediately after class and make notes of the most important points you've culled from the class discussion and your professor's lecture.
- Look for clues from your professor as to what important information you should be writing down. For example, when your professor tells you that there are five parts to the test for injunctions, or that there are three types of injunctions, you should be writing down the list that the professor is giving you. You should, of course, write down what the professor writes on the board.



- Learn to separate the wheat from the chaff when it comes to taking notes during class discussions. Some of your classmates will have valuable information to share during class discussion; others may bring up irrelevant or even incorrect points. Learn what you should write down, and what's best to leave out of your notes. Look for clues from your

professor: when the professor mentions that a student asked a “good question,” for instance, write that question (and any ensuing points of discussion) in your notes.

- After class, go home and get your class notes down to just a few sentences of what the discussion was about and why it was significant. Then, incorporate your class notes into your reading notes so that you have one unified document.
- Don’t record everything. The first year of law school means lots of new materials, but understanding which parts of the material are most essential – and being able to cull that essential information – is crucial not just for academic success, but also for success in preparing for the bar.
- As with anything else in law school, you must figure out what works best for you when taking notes. Do you rely on elaborate notes to prepare for exams, or does a bullet-point, short approach work better for you? Are you comfortable developing and using abbreviations? Does it help you to tape classes? Discern the best way to take notes for your study style, and stick to it throughout law school.

Developed by Ursula Furi-Perry and Michael L. Coyne