



MSLAW Academic Support

Successful Strategies for Briefing Cases

- First and foremost, spend ample time reading and briefing cases. Simply making notes in the margins of your textbook is not enough. Make sure you're including all pertinent information about the case in your brief. Typically, your brief should at minimum answer the following three questions:
 - What happened in the case?
 - What rule of law is the case trying to impart?
 - Why did your professor assign this case?
- Leave ample space in your case briefs for class notes. One strategy is to have two columns for each section of your brief: one column for reading notes, and the second for class notes. This way, you can take organized notes on each case during class, ultimately making outlining and studying easier.



- Check your case briefs periodically to ensure you aren't missing anything important. For example, are you culling the right rule of law from the case? Are you continually missing information that your classmates seem to be getting? Are you missing information that your professor indicates you should have gotten from the cases? If you find yourself continually missing the boat, get help—ask your professor, a tutor, or your law school's academic support office to review your case briefs and advise you on changes you may want to make.
- Don't get hung up on format. Case briefs are subjective; they are for your own purposes, and there are many different ways to structure them. Consider various case brief formats, find one that works for you early on in your law student career, and stick to it throughout law school.

- Tailor your case briefs to the class, and to your professor's teaching style. You must be able to discern what concepts, facts, and parts of a case are important in the course: for example, dates from the case are important in your Contracts class, whereas location and jurisdiction are important in your Civil Procedure class. Also figure out what your professor wants you to know about each case—when the professor calls on students, does he or she expect students to begin with the legal issue? Know the facts very well? Start with the holding? Focus on the court's analysis? Adjust your case briefs accordingly.
- Tailor your case briefs according to your needs—not those of your study group buddies or the guy you sit next to in class! To get you started, the following is a checklist of suggested information to include in your case briefs:

Checklist: What Should Be Included In a Case Brief?

- ✓ Citation: the names of the parties; the volume number and abbreviated name of the reporter, and the page number in the reporter where the case begins; the year of decision.
- ✓ Facts: the relevant factual background to the case—what happened that brought the parties to court?
- ✓ Procedural history: any prior procedural issues and decisions in your case. For example: a procedural decision on a motion that was brought at the lower court.
- ✓ Issue(s): the legal question(s) that the court is considering in the case.
- ✓ Applicable rules of law: the rules of law and cases that the Court focused on when addressing the legal issue(s).
- ✓ The parties' objectives: a brief description of the parties' contentions or what each party hoped to obtain or accomplish in the case.
- ✓ The holding: the court's resolution of the legal issue(s).
- ✓ Reasoning: the Court's analysis (application of the law to the facts) and reasons behind holding the way it did.
- ✓ Disposition: the ultimate procedural outcome of the case—for example, the appellate court's reversal of the trial court's decision.

Excerpted from *1L BootCamp* by Michael L. Coyne, Joseph Devlin, Ursula Furi-Perry and Peter M. Malaguti.