

# Developing a Game Plan for the Bar Exam

# Goals for This Session

- Give you a sense of what your bar review schedule will look like
- Provide you with some time management strategies for your bar review period
- Share advice from past takers
- Provide you with strategies for maintaining your mental health and well-being during bar study and the bar examination

# Learning for the Bar Exam

- Differs from learning in law school – Much clearer
- 50 – 60 Hours per week (minimum)
- Most Popular Bar Prep Providers – BarBri, Kaplan and Themis
- Bar exam learning, particularly for the Multistate Examination (MBE), involves mastery of legal rules and principles in particular contexts and formats.
- Course-spotting (not just issue-spotting) is required.
- Uncertainty as to what will be tested.
- Requires both global (“big picture”) and sequential learning (“small details”).

# Your Winning Game Plan

What distinguishes those students who pass?

- A firm intent to take and pass your bar exam
- Advance planning for the bar review and bar exam process
- Planning for your exam logistics
- A consistent investment of time
  - Studying for the bar exam is a full-time job
  - Most students spend somewhere between 8-10 hours a day studying during the bar review period
  - Stay ahead of schedule so that, if a crisis arises, you will have some cushion for taking time to deal with the situation

# Your Winning Game Plan

What distinguishes those students who pass?

- A financial plan
- An academic check
  - During your third year, do a realistic self-assessment regarding your knowledge of the subjects tested on the bar exam
- Stress management
  - Your likelihood of success on your bar exam will increase if you can be focused, mentally tough and confident during your review and exam

# The Big Picture

- Before your bar review course begins, sit down with a blank calendar:
  - Bar review is typically a ten-week process – late May until late July
  - Mark all the weeks from the start to the end of the bar preparation period
  - Block out any days that you will not be available for bar preparation – for example, for a wedding, a family member's birthday, etc.
  - Do not take more than one day a week off
  - You should study 8-10 hours per day

# Day-By-Day Calendar

- When determining how to use your time during bar review, on your calendar you should mark:
  - **Your bar review:** Blocks of time when you will be in your bar review course and the subjects covered during each day of your course
  - **Time to refresh:** Block of time you want to take off to refresh (include one-hour break per day and at least two three-hour breaks per week)
  - **Study time:** Blocks of time you will have available for studying (structure your study time in two- or three-hour blocks with ten minute breaks every hour or so)

# Time Management During Bar Review

- 50-60 hours per week – Study schedule will evolve over the course of bar review period.
- Study in two to three hour periods – take a five to ten minute break every hour
- Give yourself personal time each day (an hour or so)
- Give yourself two longer periods of time per week to refresh (two to three hours)
- Reward yourself
- Continually remind yourself why you will pass the bar exam



# One Month Before Your Bar Review Starts

- Begin reviewing MBE subjects
- Contact all the people who are significant to you, explain to them the importance of passing the bar exam and the study time needed (at least 50 hours per week)
- Do at least one thing that you enjoy that you will not have time to do while you're studying for the bar exam
- Remind yourself why you will pass the bar exam

# First Four Weeks of Your Bar Review

- Get into a routine right away, including attending class, studying your bar review outlines, reviewing the material covered in class for reinforcement, and doing practice test questions
- Routine will likely include:
  - Reviewing/preparing for class
  - Attending class
  - Making sure you understand and memorize the law
  - At least 34 multiple choice questions per day
  - At least 2 essays per week
  - At least 1 performance question per week (if applicable)
- Do not fall behind – You will be learning new material **every day**

# Second Four Weeks of Your Bar Review

- This is the time when students start feeling overwhelmed
- A study plan helps control anxiety - Take it one step at a time and concentrate on completing the tasks in front of you
- There will be both victories and setbacks— For example, graduates noted that everyone earns a 4 on their first graded practice essay
- Continue to take time to refresh – Take planned breaks
  - One hour daily
  - Two three-hour breaks per week
  - Reward yourself

# Last Two Weeks of Your Bar Review

- Most bar review schedules leave the last two weeks open for students to study on their own
- This time frame should be devoted to self-testing to make sure your recall of the law is as automatic as possible
  - Review substantive law
  - Do just enough practice question to stay in the flow - Do mixed MBE sets
- Take care of yourself
  - Continue to take at least two three-hour breaks per week to engage in activities you enjoy
  - Start going to bed early enough to wake up at the time you will need to wake up for the bar exam
  - Do your studying during the hours you will be taking the bar exam

# Last Two Weeks of Your Bar Review

- Confirm that you know where your exam will be administered, how you will get there, and where you will park
- Confirm any hotel reservations
- Pack what you need to take with you to the bar exam – Make sure you read exam instructions - Bar examiners are often very specific as to what you can bring, wear, use when taking the exam, etc.
- Plan what you will eat
- Plan to take layers of clothing along so you can adjust if the exam-room temperature is uncomfortable

# Last Two Weeks of Your Bar Review

- Plan how you will manage your stress on your exam days
- Plan how you will celebrate the end of all your hard work after the bar exam is over
- Remind yourself why you believe you will pass the bar exam

# Advice from Prior Takers

- “The exam is one part knowledge and one part strategy – staying calm throughout the process is key.”
- “It’s a marathon not a sprint. Keep it steady. Know there will be good day and bad days.”
- “Start early; the sooner you start post-graduation, the less you will have to cram into each day. Do exactly what you are told to do each day in your schedule, and you will be fine. Don’t get behind. Treat it like a job. Allow yourself something fun each week to look forward to – a reward for working that week. It help to keep you motivated and give you a short break.”

# Advice from Prior Takers

- “Pace yourself. Take a break from time to time to digest the information. Remember IT IS ONLY A TEST.”
- “If the system urged by your bar prep company doesn’t fit the way you learn best, give yourself permission to deviate a little and use strategies that target the way you learn best.”
- “Don’t get discouraged – studying and preparing for the bar is difficult. Do as many practice essay questions as possible and get as many graded by the bar review course graders as possible. I think this was a huge help to me – This was especially important for Maryland since the essays are worth 66.67% of your score.”
- “Approach studying for the bar exam like you would approach a job. Make a schedule, get into a routine, take it seriously, attend all classes. However, make sure you are leaving enough time each day or week to do things that you enjoy: go the gym, watch tv, get fresh air, etc.”



# Advice from Prior Takers

- “The exam is one part knowledge and one part strategy – staying calm throughout the process is key.”
- “Once you pay for your bar review course in full, they will send you all of the materials. In addition, BarBri has a pre-bar program which allows you to start reviewing topics months/weeks before the actual bar review course starts. Honestly, I would recommend this to students because it gives them more time to refresh their memories on topics they have already taken instead of trying to squeeze everything in with new materials they will be learning.”
- “One thing that surprised me was how different from law school [studying for the bar exam] was, and how much more straightforward the material and presentation is.”

# Advice from Prior Takers

- “It’s okay to do more work than they give you, but never, ever do less. Surround yourself not only with people of similar study habits, but people who are taking the same bar. Also, bar exam study time is not the time to be looking for jobs, apartments, etc. Do not even try.”
- “If I had to take the bar exam again, I would at least start reading the short outlines before the bar review course (during the time between graduation the review course start date).”
- “Put in the time, work the program, you’ll be fine. Exhaust all practice materials. Attack the test, and do MBE practice questions. You won’t know everything but you won’t be expected to either. If you feel like you failed the MBE after taking it, you did just fine.”

# Advice from Prior Takers

- “On average, I would start work at 8:00 and finish between 5:00 and 6:00 Monday through Friday. I would take 5-10 minute breaks every hour and a half (that was the critical mass point for me to retain information) and a 45 minute lunch break. I would occasionally do work on Saturday to catch up, do some MBE questions or an essay, but never more than half a day and I always took the whole day off on Sunday. My studying ramped up two weeks out from the bar as I review but went down to around 40 hours a week the final week and I did nothing the day before.” (NOTE: This student studied 51-60 hours per week)
- “Though the hours I spent per week changed as the test neared, I was spending about 8 hours per day, 5 days a week until July 4. After that, I was spending 10-12 hours a day 6-7 days a week.”

# Advice from Prior Takers

- “Generally, I would recommend over-studying. For three months all you have to do is study for the bar exam, treat it as a job, not just a 9-5 but one where sometimes you work late. Set a schedule and stick to it. Do everything your bar review course tells you and then more. One thing someone told me which was extraordinarily helpful was when doing practice MBEs write down why you selected each answer in a separate notebook and review your thought process on all wrong answers. Additionally do all the practice tests and essays, it seems like a lot to do but August 1 will be there before you know it. Over prepare and never have to worry about the exam again.”

# Advice from Prior Takers

- “Trust the bar exam course. At the beginning, it might not seem like you’re doing enough. Don’t worry, they will give you a lot more soon. Don’t try to work ahead too much – they have paced the program in a particular way for a reason. It’s also likely that there will be time when it’s just impossible or impractical to get through everything the course tells you to do in a day. Just do as much as you can and try to catch up on the weekends, but don’t feel like you’re going to fail because of it. Take breaks throughout the day. Taking some time off on 4<sup>th</sup> of July and Memorial Day won’t kill you, either. Eat well.”
- “Do not get behind. Measure yourself against the benchmarks provided by your course. Do everything your course says to do – do not skip assignments because you’ve heard that it “over prepares” you. Do the essays and even if you don’t submit them to be graded, grade them yourself.”

# Advice from Prior Takers

- “Watch the videos that are “reviews” of practice tests. It seems like they’re something you could just skip because they’re not the formal lectures on given subjects. But really, they were sometimes more helpful than the substantive lecture. Some of the professors gave really, really helpful tips when they went over the practice tests. They point out the common fact patterns and teach you how to narrow down the answer choices and pick the correct answer.” (NOTE: This student took BarBri).
- “I would also advise not thinking of the MBE as just another standardized test that you can “game.” Based on my experience with it, that will only get you so far – knowing the MBE’s tricks is not a substitute for knowing the law. So don’t think that doing a million practice MBE questions to get comfortable with format is sufficient. You need to make sure you know the substance as well. I saw a lot of people this year make that mistake while studying and then get thrown when the MBE tested specific points of law.”