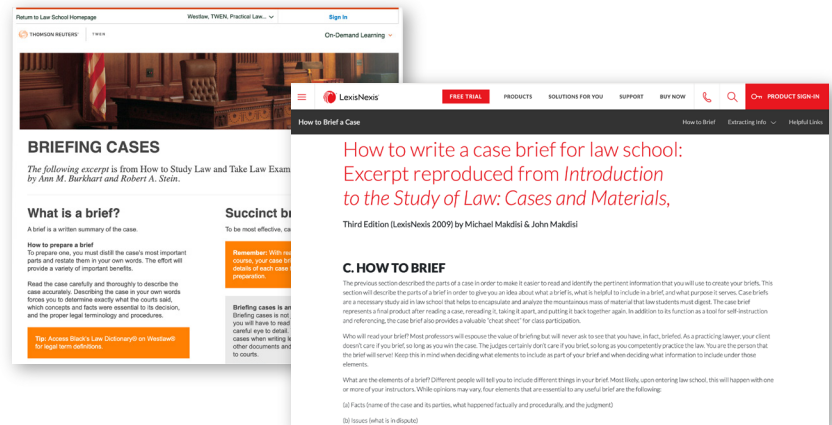


FIRST YEAR LAW SCHOOL CLASS



Law school classes are usually formatted differently than your typical undergrad or high school class. Many law school professors, particularly first year or (1L) professors prescribe to the Socratic Method as a teaching style. The Socratic Method involves a shared dialogue between the professor and law student, wherein the law professor will select a student and ask that student a series of probing, continuous questions. Law professors often have the student stand for the duration of the series of questions, which may range from a few minutes to the entirety of the class. The questions may consist of some fact-based questions with a specific answer, but more often the questions are open ended and designed to make the student think on his or her feet and discuss the underlying purpose or reasoning of a particular law or court opinion. Different professors have different styles of exercising the Socratic Method. Some professors will call on students at random, while other professors will call on students in a particular order or assign students a day for his or her turn.

The questions and classroom discussions are often based on readings that are assigned prior to class. Much like an undergraduate class, most law professors will utilize a syllabus that outlines the topics to be covered and particular reading assignments. The reading assignments may involve some explanatory passages, but the majority of the assigned readings in the first year of law school will be published court opinions that make up what is known as “case law” as well as statutes. As part of the homework, a first year law student may be tasked with drafting “case briefs”. A case brief is usually a short summary of the main points of a court decision. Resources are available to law students including Westlaw, LexisNexis, etc. that can help students format and learn how to write briefs including the following links:



<https://lawschool.westlaw.com/marketing/display/SG/3>

<https://www.lexisnexis.com/en-us/lawschool/pre-law/how-to-brief-a-case.page>

Often the classroom discussion and questions will center around the case briefs and reading materials. Depending on a professor's preference, the case briefs may be required to be turned into the professor or utilized during the lecture. Even if turned in, the case briefs are often not graded as homework might traditionally have been graded in an undergrad course. More typically, law school class grades are determined by just one final exam or maybe just a midterm and final exam. The case briefs and Socratic Method are often aimed at helping prepare you for a final exam by teaching you how to “issue spot.” Issue spotting is the skill wherein a law student can be given a set of facts or hypothetical situation and determine how the law might apply and identify any legal issues or disputes within the fact scenario provided.

While movies like “Paper Chase” may portray law school lectures as a scary prospect, the reading, lectures, Socratic Method, and on-your-feet involvement are a common experience that will prepare you and instill in you the confidence to become a successfully practicing lawyer.

Many law schools allow prospective students to attend and observe a law school class, and those considering law school should take advantage of that opportunity.