

SURVIVING THE BAR EXAM WITH YOUR SANITY INTACT

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For many of you the Bar exam is the last test you will HAVE to take. It will probably also be the longest, most comprehensive and totally exhausting exam you will ever have faced. Everyone has their own method of preparing for exams, but here are a few things you can do to make the experience a little less painful:

(1) Treat it Like a Full-Time Job (and not the end of life as you know it)

Yes, the Bar is scary and it is difficult, but ignoring it or killing yourself doing all-nighters is not (for most people) the way to be successful. I know several people who failed it the first time solely because they put off getting "serious" about reviewing until it was too late. Likewise, there are people who go overboard and work themselves up so much that they over study. For most people the answer, obviously, lies somewhere in the middle.

Consider trying this: from day one treat Bar review like it's your full-time job. Go to the "office" at 8:00 a.m., take an hour lunch, and leave the "office" at 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. Then have a life!! Realize, however, just like in real life, you may find that you have to "work" late and on the weekends part of the time.

The majority of first time Bar reviewers take a Bar prep course. Classes usually begin at 8:30 a.m. and last until noon or 1:00 p.m. That pretty much fills up your morning at the "office." Use the afternoon to review what you went over and what will be covered the next day.

Self-study works well if you are the disciplined type. These two months will go by in a flash and procrastinators will be well advised to opt for the structure of a Bar review course.

When it comes to study habits, do what worked for you during law school (and avoid what didn't). Now is not the time to try "new" study methods unless your old ones were particularly unproductive.

A comment about working while studying for the Bar Exam. I understand the economics facing many graduates as they prepare for the Bar Exam—you may absolutely have to work, at least part-time. As you head into July, be sure you are really devoting the time you need to prepare. I have, over the years, seen a significant number of people fail the Bar the first time because they could not get enough time away from work to study. Talk to your employer and see if there is a way to reduce your work load and/or to take at least few weeks off before the exam.

(2) Don't Completely Ignore the Rest of Your Life

Granted, most people taking the Bar have to put a lot on the back burner. But don't completely ignore other aspects of your life! Never will personal time be more valuable. If you treat Bar prep as your full-time job, you should have some evenings and weekends for family and free time. In the last two weeks before the exam you may have to put in extra hours, but until

then stick to a reasonable schedule.

(3) Remember the Bar is Also a Physical Endurance Test

Reviewing and understanding the substantive material is obviously the name of the game. But the Bar is also physically demanding. Unlike a law school final, which usually lasts three to four hours, the Bar is at least a twelve hour exam over the course of two to three days, depending on the jurisdiction. Exercising during Bar review is a great outlet and may help get you prepared physically. The best advice, though, is don't radically change your routine during this time. If you never exercised during law school, don't start a new, intense program. Likewise, don't try to stop smoking or drinking caffeine during Bar review-you already have enough stress!!

(4) Two Days and Counting. . .

The two days just prior to the Bar can be particularly agonizing. Should you study round the clock or totally goof off? Studying round the clock will probably result in diminishing returns. Better to opt for any easy schedule-as they say, by now you either know it or you never will! Lots of Bar takers go to the movies the night before the multi-state. Some people have also been known to get a massage either the night before or after the multi-state! Whatever relaxes you a little. However, I wouldn't suggest drowning your anxiety about the Bar at a bar!

Whatever you do, don't drive yourself crazy comparing yourself to others. When you finish Day 1 of the exam, get out fast! Don't even start talking about the exam--you will invariably get depressed (no matter how well you did). Same holds true for after you finish the exam. I made the fatal mistake of listening to two of my fellow grads talk about the property essay question-it set me up for weeks of feeling like I failed (which I didn't). Just get out and start celebrating (even if your idea of celebrating at that point is taking a nap).

(5) Give Yourself Something to Look Forward to

For most Bar reviewers, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is knowing that the Bar is probably the last test they will ever HAVE to take. That's pretty good incentive (not to mention that it is vital to getting that "ticket" to practice). But try giving yourself something else (no matter how small) to look forward to after you've finished the last question. As you go through the days of preparation, it helps to know in the back of your mind that after it's all over you get to ...(go on a short vacation; do nothing but watch TV and eat Oreos; play with your kids all day; stay in bed for three days). Nothing motivates more than a waiting reward (you'll still have to wait a month or so for your Bar results).

GOOD LUCK!!