

Extract from the Laws Handbook – produced by Dr Peter Jepson.

STUDY SKILLS for LAWS and LIFE...

It is important that as a student of Laws you master a number of key study skills. Without these skills you will find it difficult to remember and apply properly the large amount of information you need to successfully answer examination and homework questions.

During the course itself your Laws Lecturer/Teacher will help you develop the appropriate study skills at the relevant time in the course. Also your Personal Tutor may well introduce you to some useful skills in Tutorial time, but it is still important that you understand from the outset what skills you need.

During the AS Laws 'Induction Week' you will be introduced to some key Study Skills. These will include: Research, Reading & Note-Taking (get into the habit of producing a précis of what you read), use of Internet/College Intranet and Essay Writing Skills. The following list gives the major areas of study skills you must develop for Law, Citizenship, and/or Politics.

1. Studying in your own time

You cannot hope to do well simply by sitting in class and hoping to somehow absorb the information like some weird form of sponge – this does not work. Law, Citizenship and Politics require active learning. You only have 5.00 hours a week in AS/A2 Laws classes (3 hours for AS Citizenship) and you spend most of that time (we hope) participating in class discussions with some note-taking.

By electing to study a Laws subject you have committed yourself to a course that requires you – the student – to take responsibility for your own learning. This means that you will need to spend some of your own time – in the evenings and at weekends, as well as your undirected time at college – getting to grips with the subject. At times you will be given homework that needs to be done (homework must be handed in on time – if it is late, you 'Fail'), while most of the time you will be expected to undertake independent study. This means that you may not be told do some extra reading – but extra reading is necessary if

you wish to obtain a reasonable to good grade in the examination.

So, how much extra time will you need to give? There is no specific guideline or rule – some weeks may be very busy indeed. However, you can expect to do at least one hour of study outside of class – for every hour inside the class. REMEMBER, YOU ARE A FULL-TIME STUDENT.

2. Read and précis the textbook BEFORE you attend Class

Laws subjects can be complex subjects that you are studying possibly for the first time. The textbooks/workbooks are designed to provide you with some basic information and it is vital that you read and précis the subject area of discussion BEFORE you attend the classes.

To many students this often seems odd, since at best they may read the textbook after class. However, the subjects require much discussion and analysis and this can seem difficult if you are considering material for the first time. If you read before you attend class you will be able to follow the lesson. Indeed, if you read and précis first, you will have more time in class to listen and play a constructive part in the lesson – contributing to the debate or discussion. This helps bring life and fun to the subject and the class. REMEMBER, READ AND PRECIS BEFORE CLASS (staff check précis notes). When you go on to University you will be expected to read before Lectures, we are simply preparing you for this methodology.

3. Taking notes in class

Before we look at this, let us quickly examine what you need to BRING TO EVERY CLASS.

(a) A pen – Yes, it sounds obvious but it is truly amazing how many students forget to bring a pen. The College does not supply you with one so bring one to every lesson!

(b) Paper – Again it sounds stupid, doesn't it? But experience shows that students seem to think that a day in College requires neither pen nor paper!

(c) Your law dictionary and textbook – Often you might not be called upon to use it, but bring it anyway.

(d) Something to keep your notes safe – ideally a ring-binder (see later under 'Organising Your Notes') Handouts and the College Intranet form the basis of class work and provide a fair amount of information. However they are NEVER to be regarded as all you need! They must be supplemented by other information sources. One of the most obvious of these is the information that your Laws Lecturer/Tutor will give you in the lesson – this will usually be explanations, examples, facts and figures which are additional to the handouts. It is vital that you take this information down. You will probably not be told "write this down please" – it is not like GCSE – you will just be expected to do it. A lot of the time you will have to take it down on another piece of paper. In short you will not be spoon-fed – you will only get from a lesson what you put in it. If you sit there and let the lesson wash over you, you may think that you are learning. However, if you don't take notes – even if you haven't been told – you will leave the lesson with just a handout and this will not be enough.

4. How will you be taught?

Most lessons will be based on handouts, the Intranet, and notes taken from the PowerPoints and relevant discussions. But it is not just a question of reading the handouts/Intranet and taking a few extra notes. Our topics are designed to provide auditory, visual and kinaesthetic learning styles, with differentiation evident and to enhance important skills (please see our Learning Skills and Styles information). The handouts/Intranet will often contain several exercises and questions for the class to discuss (sometimes in heated fashion!) and answer. Other topics lend themselves to role-play exercises to be done in Law Firms (small groups) and some exercises require research and/or assessment outside the classroom in the Library and/or via a P.C.. Above all, lessons are used to encourage students to actively discuss and debate contentious issues and to develop the important legal skills of expressing one's own argument and – equally as importantly – listening to and understanding the arguments of others. It will be at these times of debate and discussions that Key Skills Assessment may be evident.

Where possible, lecture notes will be displayed on the Intranet site to assist students. Students should print off Intranet materials BEFORE attending class (take them to class with you).

5. What about Homework?

Please note that Dr Jepson is of the opinion that any student who fails to do scheduled homework and/or have a poor attendance record should be withdrawn from the examination.

Read and précis is compulsory for all Laws Students. Details will be posted on the Intranet. In addition a wide variety of homework exercises – including essays and computer networked assessments – will be set at different times during the academic year by your Laws Lecturer/Tutor.

EXCUSES – are NOT acceptable? If you have been ill you may ask for an extension (but illness generally means you have more time to do your homework). If you are ill and offer the excuse that "I did not know that there was work set" – this is not acceptable and your work will be recorded as being handed in late and fail. If you miss a class it is your responsibility to find out if you missed anything, not your Laws Tutor's responsibility to find you and tell you what you have missed.

* If you hand in an essay/assignment late – you will fail the assignment (which will be recorded on your file) and you could be given some additional work.

* If you fail to hand in work, or fail to sit assessments, a 'Cause for Concern' or 'Verbal Warning' may/will be issued and your Personal Tutor may become involved to decide whether you may continue on the course.

6. Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

Your Laws Lecturer/Teacher will hold a one-to-one tutorial/review with you to discuss your essay (and your Individual Learning Plan/Progress) when they return marked essay homework.

7. Organising Your Notes

It is important that you keep a well-ordered file filled with appropriate notes. Every year students lose large chunks of their notes on trains or around college or at home or wherever. Losing your notes severely hampers your chances of success in examinations, as does having a badly organised folder, which takes a week to sort through before you can even start revising. If you miss a class and miss some work, or lose it, is your responsibility to catch up again (either with the help of a fellow student or via the Intranet). It is NOT your Laws Tutor's responsibility to replace the work. If you know you're going to miss a lesson because of an appointment, make arrangements with a 'Study-Buddy' to collect any handouts and notes that you need. It is advisable to copy those notes up by hand before putting them in your folder.