



A U S L S S

AUSTRALIA SINGAPORE LAW STUDENTS' SOCIETY



THE LAW STUDENT'S GUIDE TO LAW SCHOOL 2.0:

Everything We Wished We
Knew Before Starting Law
School

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FOREWORD AND CONTENTS

Dear Reader,

The Publications Team has put together a second edition of our ‘Law Student’s Guide to Law School’. In the first edition, we have addressed some broad, common questions that prospective law students might have, such as whether studying law is truly challenging, the types of classes available in law school, and whether legal writing requires a whole different skill-set. You may access the first edition [here](#).

The second edition builds upon the tips previously provided. It contains seventeen pieces of advice, divided into four sections:

- 1. Navigating the Law School Environment**
- 2. Studying the Law**
- 3. Finding Interests in Law**
- 4. Balancing Law School and Life**

A key difference from the first edition is the inclusion of resources and reflective questions, alongside certain pieces of advice. This guide is intended to offer both prospective and current law students pointers and insights into the reality of law school and studying abroad—while also providing strategies to overcome the challenges one might encounter.

We hope you enjoy reading this piece as much as we enjoyed putting it together!

Warmest Regards,
2024/ 25 Publications Team



NAVIGATING THE LAW SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

ADVICE #1: RUN YOUR OWN RACE


The environment of law school can feel intimidating, largely due to its rigour, the feeling of being surrounded by type-A students, and perhaps even a dose of imposter syndrome. Such feelings are common, and therefore our first piece of advice is to do things at your own pace. This includes experimenting with study techniques that work best for you, joining extracurriculars and electives that interest you, to allow yourself to obtain the most out of your law school journey.

An important aspect of running your own race is consistently reflecting on your goals, interests, and intentions—both for law school and for the future you envision after leaving it. Use your time in law school to develop the skills, knowledge, and experience needed to bridge this gap. It is normal not to have a concrete idea about which area of law you wish to pursue, and thus law school is the perfect environment to help you figure that out.

However, keep in mind when your tentative clerkship or training contract application seasons might be. Having a sense of how much time you have will greatly assist in planning how you might accumulate relevant experience to best position yourself during application season.

On a separate note, for law students intending to return to qualify in Singapore, we suggest drafting timelines to have a gauge of when you will need to complete your Relevant

Legal Training and Part A exams prior to undertaking Part B and the Training Contract.



PLEASE SEE UKSLSS'S ARTICLE FOR MORE DETAILS:
<https://www.ukslss.com/guidetopartaandrlt>



ADVICE #2: DON'T BE INTIMIDATED

Studying law in a new country can feel overwhelming, particularly when you are surrounded by people who speak with a different accent and generally are a whole more extroverted and comfortable with speaking up. Know that you have earned your spot in law school and you deserve to be there. Be confident when answering questions and in turn, when you have questions, raise them in class. It sounds cliché, but there is really no such thing as a 'stupid question'. It is extremely likely that some of your classmates will have the same queries too. Law schools are educational institutions after all, and you are there to learn. By being engaged in class this way, you get to clarify your questions along the way, and build rapport more quickly with your professors and classmates.

ADVICE #3: FIND YOUR TRIBE

You will find that the bulk of your time in law school will be spent on reading, reading and more reading—an exercise that only you can undertake and perhaps that is why law school can feel isolating. But the good news is: it doesn't have to feel that way! It is our advice that you find your group of law school friends to lean on each other. This could mean splitting up the readings and sharing notes, asking each other questions about an aspect of a case you can't quite grasp. By participating in a discussion, you will gradually find it easier to articulate a legal concept you were previously less familiar with and understand how the concepts fit together big picture-wise.



For some ideas as to how you might find your tribe, you could consider joining law orientation camps, the law student society or extracurriculars specific to your interests that allow you to find like-minded people

ADVICE #4: SMALL PREPARATIONS TO GIVE YOURSELF A HEAD START

Getting ready for law school doesn't have to be overwhelming. Here are some simple steps you can take to feel more confident about starting your journey:



1. Explore introductory resources: Books and journal articles can help you understand what to expect from law school, introduce basic concepts and provide practical insights about pursuing a legal career. Some examples include:

Laying Down the Law (2023, 12th edn) by Belinda Smith, Tristan Taylor, Judith Jones, Patrick O'Mara and David Hamer. This is often the recommended introductory textbook for Australian law students. It provides an overview of the Australian legal system, its history, sources of law (case law and legislation), technical legal skills such as statutory interpretation, and transferable skills like legal research and writing.

Studying Law at University: Everything You Need to Know (2020, 2nd edn) by Simon Chesterman and Clare Rhoden. This underrated but comprehensive guide covers essential study skills for law students, including time management, reading cases, writing law essays and preparing for law exams.

2. Familiarise yourself with studying applications and softwares. Tools like OneNote are fantastic for organising your notes and improving their structure. While some students may prefer Notion, others may annotate readings on an iPad before transferring them into a good old Word Document.

3. Explore legal research platforms like Westlaw, LexisNexis, and JADE. Spend time learning about the different types of cases you can find on each platform, how to search effectively using key terms. Being familiar with these databases will save you time when looking up cases during classes and assignments. You can read our guide on 'Mastering Legal Research in the Australian Jurisdiction' [here](#).

STUDYING THE LAW

ADVICE #5: HAVE A SENSE OF THE LAW SCHOOL'S CURRICULUM AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

To get the most out of your law school journey, it is imperative to familiarise yourself with the types of subjects and extracurriculars offered.

Law school subjects

In Australian law schools, students must complete the 'Priestley 11'—a set of compulsory subjects covering foundational areas of law like Contracts, Criminal Law, Dispute & Ethics, Property Law, Constitutional Law, Legal Theory and Administrative Law. Beyond these mandatory subjects, you will have the opportunity to undertake elective subjects, which delve more into niche areas—such as Family Law, Immigration Law, Trademark Law, International Arbitration and, Indigenous Law. Depending on your law school, you will have the opportunity to participate in legal clinics as part of experiential learning and put your theoretical knowledge into practice while interacting with real clients. These electives and practical experiences are excellent avenues for you to explore your interests and make your studies more engaging and meaningful.

Extracurricular activities

Beyond helping you find your tribe of people, extracurricular activities in law school can help you in developing and sharpening your soft skills as a lawyer in many ways. For instance, taking part in mooting in the capacity of a counsel can assist you in building confidence with your advocacy and public speaking skills. If you wish to focus on honing your research and written advocacy skills, you can participate in the moot in the capacity of an instructing solicitor, which will allow you to contribute without having to speak before the bench.



ADVICE #6: LEARN HOW TO STUDY EFFECTIVELY BEFORE STUDYING HARDER

A common mistake made is thinking that we must know the material inside out before attending class—including every detail of every case in our reading list. That is not true. It is far more effective to develop a broad understanding of the key concepts that would be covered in class and understand how they differ or interrelate. For example, if your tutor follows the structure of the prescribed textbook closely, you could summarise the content under the corresponding headings and add your tutor's comments to your notes. Some tutors release their tutorial slides beforehand, which can be helpful for annotation during class. If you find that focusing in class is easier when you're not transcribing everything in real time, consider compiling your notes after class instead.



In your first few classes, have a sense of your tutor's teaching style, and think about how you might study for the subject most effectively.

ADVICE #7: READ YOUR CASES

During your time at law school, you may encounter students who claim that reading cases is a waste of time. But it is our advice that you should always read your cases. Of course, this doesn't mean reading every single one if you're short on time, but at the very least, you should read the important cases that have been repeatedly flagged in your tutorials.

Reading a case does not mean that you have to read the whole case word for word till the end (nor do you have to brief it), but it is an important exercise if you wish to know how the arguments have been constructed in the case in relation to the material facts, which is crucial for your hypothetical exam questions.



Rather than briefing the case you read, keep in mind there are two essential takeaways from reading cases:

- (a) Finding the legal principle
- (b) Understanding how to construct arguments when presented with a similar or different set of facts—by drawing on the arguments made by the parties in the case.

ADVICE #8: CITE PROPERLY!

When completing law-related assignments, always adhere strictly to the Australian Guide to Legal Citation 4 (AGLC4). We recommend you to bookmark commonly used sections, which future-you will thank you during crunch times. Please avoid using online AGLC4 tools to help cite as they are often inaccurate and can result in serious referencing errors.

Many seniors have shared cautionary tales about using AI-generated citations, only to discover significant mistakes just before submission deadlines. Most importantly, allocate sufficient time for citations, as the process can take longer than expected—sometimes an entire afternoon or a sizable portion of your day depending on the length of your assignment. To prevent careless mistakes under last-minute stress, approach referencing methodically and well in advance of your assignment deadline.



ADVICE #9: EXAM PREPARATION

Achieving success in law school exams requires effective strategies, especially when completing them under time constraints.

1. Understand the exam format and assessment requirements. Pay special attention to hypothetical problem-based questions, which make up a significant portion of law school exams. Using the IRAC (Issue, Rule, Application, Conclusion) method can help you structure your answers clearly and logically. And always include a brief introduction before laying out your IRAC analysis.
2. Master time management during exams. Allocating the right amount of time to each question will allow you to complete the exam paper efficiently while maximising your marks.
3. Use past exam papers. Reviewing past exam papers can provide an insight into the exam format, frequently-examined topics, and help you practice under timed conditions.

FINDING INTERESTS IN LAW



ADVICE #10: ENTER LAW SCHOOL WITH AN OPEN-MIND

Entering law school with an open-mind is essential, as our understanding of the legal field is often incomplete until we explore its many facets. While some students might have a particular area of interest, we encourage you to use your time in law school to explore diverse areas of law that you may not have previously considered. Staying flexible and open to change will allow you to make the most of your legal education and uncover opportunities that align with your evolving interests.

For example, if you are drawn to advocacy, participate in mooted competitions to test

your interest in litigation. Attend lectures, seminars, and workshops featuring guest speakers from various legal fields to broaden your perspective. Additionally, read widely from law journals—check if your school offers free subscriptions—to deepen your knowledge and identify what truly sparks your curiosity. By engaging with these opportunities, you will develop a more comprehensive understanding of the legal profession and refine your focus within the vast field of law.

ADVICE #11: EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY YOUR SCHOOL

Exploring the Australian legal system

Although Singapore and Australia both follow the common law system inherited from the United Kingdom, their legal frameworks have evolved differently since gaining independence. To gain a deeper understanding of the Australian legal system, consider attending court proceedings, which are often open to the public to observe. By witnessing hearings firsthand, you can gain valuable insights into how the justice system operates in Australia. This experience will help you appreciate key nuances—such as the emphasis on Aboriginal rights—that distinguish Australia’s legal system from Singapore’s.

Taking advantage of resources available

There is no better way to explore your interest in law than during your time at law school!

LET'S GO

ADVENTURE

ADVICE #12: CONTINUE TO READ UP AND INFORM YOURSELF BEYOND LAW SCHOOL'S CONTENT

Ironically, studying law means ensuring that law isn't the only thing you study. Since the law is deeply intertwined with society, an excessive focus on technical legal knowledge can obscure its human dimension. Ultimately, rules and regulations affect individuals, businesses, families, and various social groups. For instance, when studying criminal law, drawing from criminology, sociology and psychology studies could help one understand the underlying socio-economic factors that contribute to criminal behaviour. Similarly, when learning about torts—especially in relation to medical negligence—reading up on medical protocols and professional standards can provide insight into how such incidents occur and whether a practitioner's actions fell short of the expected standard of care.



ADVICE #13: BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Building a strong professional profile is a crucial step towards a establishing a successful legal career, and can simultaneously help you discover your interests in law.

1. Internships provide invaluable hands-on experience and allow you to gain insight into different practice areas. These experiences can help you discover where your interests truly lie.

2. Networking is an essential skill that plays a role in every aspect of your professional career. Building meaningful relationships with peers, mentors, and industry professionals can open doors to new opportunities while also providing valuable guidance on navigating your legal career.

ADVICE #14: REFLECT ON YOUR PROGRESS

Finally, take time to regularly reflect on your studies, extracurricular activities and work experiences. Consider keeping a reflection log to identify specific aspects of what you enjoyed or disliked about each experience. These records will prove invaluable when updating your CV and preparing for interviews in the future.



Some reflective prompts you can consider:

- What motivated you to study law? Was there a particular experience that inspired this decision, or did you discover your interest along the way through certain activities?
- What are your strengths?
- What areas do you wish to develop further?
- What are three core values that guide the decision-making in life?
- Can you find alignment between your values, strengths and motivations to identify a job or area of law that suits you?

As you progress throughout law school, have a think about...

- What did you enjoy or not enjoy about a subject or internship? Was it the type of work, the environment, or the clients you worked with?
- Did this experience make you feel fulfilled?
- Did it make you feel like your skills and strengths were being well-utilised or underappreciated?
- Can you see yourself doing this long-term?

BALANCING LAW SCHOOL AND LIFE

ADVICE #15: PLAN WELL

Establish clear priorities

Balancing law school and life starts with setting clear priorities and planning accordingly. Reflect on what you want to achieve both academically and personally—whether it is excelling in your studies, maintaining a vibrant social life, or dedicating time to self-care. By defining your goals, you can create a structured plan to manage your time effectively and ensure a well-rounded law school experience.

Plan and stay on track

Once your priorities are established, commit to them! Break large tasks into smaller, manageable steps to make them feel more achievable. When you reach your milestone, reward yourself with a break and do something from your 'dopamine list'—whether it's going for a walk with a friend or indulging in your favorite meal. This approach will keep you on track while maintaining motivation through a sense of accomplishment. Remember, law school is a marathon and not a sprint—pace yourself and avoid burnout!

ADVICE #16: BUILDING AND MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS

Building a support network

Meeting new people can be daunting, but platforms like Facebook and Reddit are great for connecting with first-year student communities, exchanging advice, and making friends.

Joining clubs and societies is another excellent way to explore your interests and build friendships beyond the classroom. If possible, we recommend staying at the university dormitories during your first year, as shared living experiences often lead to developing closer friendships. Additionally, joining local communities from your home country can provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, helping you navigate the challenges of studying in a foreign environment.

Staying connected to home

Homesickness is a common challenge for international students, but small steps can ease the transition. Bring pictures of friends and family, or meaningful keepsakes to create a comforting environment in your room. Schedule regular calls with loved ones to maintain close relationships despite the distance. Additionally, incorporating cultural practices—like playing mahjong or even re-creating local dishes—into your routine can provide comfort and a sense of home in a new setting.



ADVICE #17: TAKE CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

This sounds intuitive, but we must emphasise the importance of taking care of your physical and mental wellbeing, especially leading up to finals period. In the midst of your studies, prioritise adequate sleep, regular exercise, and a well-balanced diet. These habits can significantly boost your concentration, energy levels and resilience during stressful periods. Most importantly, don't hesitate to reach out for help when needed. Speak with a trusted loved one or utilise your university's counseling services if you feel overwhelmed. Taking proactive steps to care for yourself ensures a more fulfilling and enjoyable law school experience.



WRAPPING UP...

Our final piece of advice is not to be too hard on yourself. In law school, there will be moments when you feel like your efforts are not paying off. If that happens, schedule a meeting with your tutor to understand why that might be the case, vent to your friends, or even have a good cry if you need to. But remember that almost every law student experiences this emotional rollercoaster, and it is precisely what makes law school challenging yet rewarding. Keep persevering, and try to enjoy the process.

That's all the advice we have for this second edition—we hope that it has been helpful!



If you have any questions about this guide or suggestions for the types of publications you'd like to see more of from the AUSLSS Publications Team, please feel free to email us at publicationsdirector.auslss@gmail.com. We'll be more than happy to hear from you!

