

## **TOP 10 KEYS TO SUCCESS IN LAW SCHOOL**

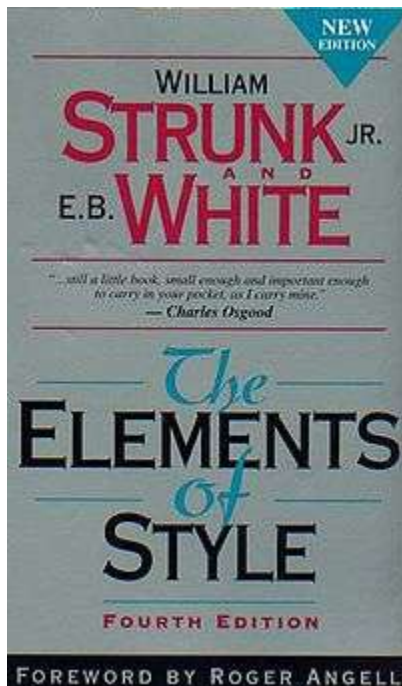
### ***1. Focus on Academic Achievement and Superior Performance on the LSAT***

- How well you perform academically will either widen or narrow your choice of law schools and employment opportunities. This should not be news to you. In fact, the standard seems to be increasingly higher and the barriers to entry greater as the economy becomes more competitive.
- By all means, take an LSAT preparation course. A high grade point average alone, may not be enough if you have your eye on a Top 20 law school. In fact, a high LSAT score and good GPA will likely trump an average LSAT and very good GPA.
- Only your very best will do . . . .

### ***2. Master Writing and Verbal Communication***

- Focus on and hone your writing and public speaking skills. These skills will serve you well in the applications and admissions process (e.g., your essay and interviews) and will place you in the best position to garner a place on Moot Court or Law Review. Speak up in class.
- Clear, concise and thoughtful writing is essential to your performance on law school exams. Focus on the analysis of the issue(s) and not just the final answer.
- Actively participate in class. This forces you to become more comfortable with the material and builds your self-confidence. It is not always important to be right, but you should always be thoughtful. Law professors often have the ability to award grade bonuses to active class participants.
- Keep abreast of major legal cases and issues in the news. These may serve as the basis of classroom exercises in law school and will provide you with a general understanding of the legal process.
- Outline before you write. While many types of writing don't require outlining, you will need to outline facts and arguments before writing in order to argue a legal point effectively.

- Required reading.....NOW



### 3. *Be Fiscally Responsible*

- Manage your debt and finances wisely. This will allow you to follow your passion without regard for the "check". It will also allow you to pass the extensive background/fitness to practice examination which you will go through in order to become a member of the Bar.
- Did we mention that a good credit rating will be essential to your ability to finance your education (in the event you do not get a "full ride")?

### 4. *Select the Right Law School . . . for You!*

- In these uncertain times, it is more important than ever for you to carefully consider the cost of law school. Do a cost-benefit analysis as between your law school options and determine which one provides the most benefits at the most competitive cost (taking into account scholarships of course). Most graduating law students carry a significant debt load. While you may want to attend and get into a highly ranked, private law school, they tend to want everyone to pay something to get in the door; therefore, they tend to offer more partial scholarships than full scholarships. You may want to consider a state law school instead. In all but a few cases, a high debt load will reduce your career flexibility

(and life style) after law school. [Note: The conventional wisdom is that you go to the best school you can get into. Just don't forget to define "best" in your own terms.]

- Law schools provide education and a networking platform. Other than the Top 10 law schools, it may make more sense to attend a law school in the state or region where you wish to practice law, have established contacts and/or have political aspirations. (If you have global or national business or political aspirations, internationally known schools such as Yale or Harvard make sense.) But, wherever you go, do take advantage of the professional and personal networking opportunities.
- Contact the career placement offices of the law schools you are interested in attending to determine which schools offer the best prospects for assisting you in getting a good job after graduation. Also look carefully at the schools which offer the internship, externship and clinical or other experiences you desire. There is no substitute for hands-on experience and this typically leads to one or more job opportunities.
- Understand the focus of the law schools you apply to as they, like most practicing lawyers, have specialties. For example, New York University and the University of Chicago have an abundance of corporate and transactional courses, whereas Emory University is more litigation focused. You are paying for it so get what you want out of this educational experience.
- Look carefully at the average LSAT scores and GPAs for the current classes at the law schools which interest you. Apply to schools which you have an honest chance of getting into and a couple of "stretch" law schools – those with average LSAT and GPA scores which are higher than what you have achieved. Be honest with yourself about your prospects for getting admitted and avoid the emotional roller coaster. Remember, getting in is but a small part of the journey.

## **5. Evaluate Peer/Alumni Connections and Relationships**

- Seek out and meet with or speak to as many alumni as you can. While it is nice to speak to established alumni, it makes great sense to also connect with recent graduates. A good start may be alumni of your undergraduate institution who are attending or have recently graduated from your selected law schools. It is important to hear what they have to say about their academic and social experiences, what they think about the faculty and administration, etc. Find out "the ropes to skip and the ropes to know."
- Look at the career choices, civic and political involvement of the alumni. Are these consistent with the vision you have for yourself?

- Carefully determine the social climate at your prospective law schools. Make sure it is a fit for you. Development of positive relationships is critical to your success during and after law school. If you don't thrive in an environment that is "cut throat" versus collaborative, you may want to avoid institutions with environments with negative competition.
- Law school is a great place to create an academic and social "think tank." You will need to understand and respect the insights and views of others throughout your legal career if you want to be an effective advocate.
- How you respond to the social and competitive environment is how you will likely be remembered for the rest of your professional career.

## **6. Be Prepared Every Day (Study)**

- Getting behind the curve in terms of preparation will lead to grades well below the curve. There is no room for this.
- In most cases, particularly in your 1L Classes which are the key to your career options, your ENTIRE grade is based on the final exam. Speak with successful alumni or 2Ls and 3Ls about how to best prepare for a particular class/professor. Also, take a look at some websites for practical tips (e.g., Master the law school exam process: <http://www.leews.com/> and Getting To Maybe: How to Excel on Law School Exams).
- Law school exams are like no others. It is not just about getting the "right" answer. You are getting graded on spotting issues and then analyzing the potential outcomes in an organized and insightful manner. Law school exams often focus on nuanced facts so you need to know the general rule and the established exceptions to the rule. If you don't correctly spot the issue, you lose the opportunity to get points for either the analysis. A very simple way to think of a law school answer is set forth by the IRAC Method: Issue, Rule of Law, Analysis, and Conclusion.
- Outline your courses. My view is that you should seek out an A students outline and make it your own by reviewing, improving and updating it. The key is not that you have an outline, but that you have put the work into understanding the underlying content. I also think that commercial/bar review outlines and timed completion of prior class exams are very helpful. You must pay attention in class in order to develop the best outline possible.
- Technology can and will fail you. Back up your work religiously. Email yourself documents that you are working on at the end of each day. Back your laptop up to external drives.

- Get to know your professors and law librarians. They can be excellent resources.
- Consider joining a study group. Make sure that you and each of your study group partners have a similar work ethic and prepare before your group study sessions. While explaining concepts to others helps your mastery of the topic, doing so in excess will impede your ability to complete your exam preparation. This is a great bonding opportunity, but it can devolve into a "grip" session and this will not help anyone.
- Treat law school like a job. Keep a schedule, stay organized and make time for rest and relaxation.

## **7. Manage Fears and Stress/Avoid Burnout**

- Spend time each weekend to plan out your schedule and prioritize your activities. Time management and efficiency are your friends.
- Let's be clear, law school is extremely rigorous and stressful. But you must find the balance. If you don't find it in law school you may not ever find it.
- Put down the books sometimes. Spend time with people who are not in law school. Have fun. Take advantage of the student lifestyle and explore your new environment. Get away from campus. Maintain perspective and enjoy yourself as much as you can. Remember, it's not the workaholics who succeed in law school – save that for your first job after you graduate.
- Practice positive thinking . . . everyday. Do not allow a bad classroom answer or performance to shake your confidence.
- Please do seek help when you feel lost or overwhelmed.

## **8. Seek Opportunities for Community Service or Externship/Internship Experience**

- This will increase your political and business acumen and provide you with a better idea about the area of law you wish to focus. Community and civic service remains the calling card of effective lawyers.
- Participating students gain hands on experience and make connections. Remember that many of your classmates will already have exposure to the legal environment and this will allow you an opportunity to close the opportunity and experience gap.
- In addition to providing the foundation of knowledge and skills essential for taking the bar examination and beginning practice, the curriculum and co-

curricular activities are designed to prepare students for leadership and service in the twenty-first century. Problem-solving skills, ethical behavior, and professional responsibilities extend beyond the practice of law to all aspects of the community.

- 9. Start looking into scholarship options very, very early.**
- 10. Seek out activities and opportunities which will prepare you for law school.**

Online references and resources:

<http://www.top-law-schools.com/success-in-law-school.html>  
<http://resipsablog.com/2008/08/04/ten-tips-for-future-law-students-how-to-succeed-in-law-school/>  
[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/999228/how to select the right law school.html?cat=4](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/999228/how_to_select_the_right_law_school.html?cat=4)  
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<http://www.princetonreview.com/law/outline.aspx>  
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<http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=599>