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FREE RESOURCE

Your First Semester Survival Guide

What to Expect and How to Manage Your First Year

KNOW THE LAW. OWN THE ROOM.

NOTE TO STUDENTS

These notes are a study aid produced by The Legal Vault. They supplement but do **not** replace your lecture notes, prescribed texts, relevant statutes and legislation, and reading the cases in full. Always verify citations and section numbers against the primary sources before relying on them in assessment.

2025 Edition ♦ University of Botswana LLB

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The Truth About Your First Semester

Your first semester of LLB will almost certainly be harder than you expect. Not because the concepts are beyond you -- they are not. But because the volume, the pace, and the nature of the work are unlike anything most students have experienced before.

Here is what first-year law students consistently report about their first semester:

- The reading load is heavier than any other degree at the university.
- Cases are long, dense, and written in formal language that takes time to decode.
- Lecturers expect you to have done the reading before you arrive -- lectures build on the reading, they do not replace it.
- Tests come earlier than in most other faculties.
- Students who do well in high school sometimes struggle in first year because the skills required are completely different.

None of this should discourage you. It should prepare you. The students who know what is coming and prepare accordingly consistently outperform those who discover these realities after the first test.

THE CORE TRUTH

Law school rewards consistent, organised effort above all else. The students who succeed are not necessarily the most naturally gifted -- they are the most consistently prepared.

What to Expect in the First Four Weeks

WEEK 1

Orientation and overload

- Obtain course outlines for all modules
- Buy or borrow prescribed textbooks
- Set up a weekly study timetable
- Read the first assigned reading for every module
- Register for UB Library access and SAFLII

WEEK 2

Finding your feet

- You will receive your first substantial reading assignments
- Lectures will move faster than you expect -- keep up daily
- Start a case brief book -- write a brief for every case you read

- Form or join a study group with 3-4 classmates
- Visit at least one lecturer during office hours

WEEK 3*First reality check*

- Many students fall behind in week 3 -- do not be one of them
- Review everything covered in weeks 1 and 2
- Begin practicing IRAC on past problem questions
- Check your CA schedule -- tests may begin as early as week 3 in some courses
- If you are struggling, seek help now -- not in week 10

WEEK 4*Building momentum*

- You should now have a clear picture of what each course demands
- Identify which courses need the most work and allocate your time accordingly
- Consolidate your notes for weeks 1-3 into a single summary per module
- Write at least one full IRAC answer per week for practice
- Check your progress against the course outline -- are you on track?

Managing the Reading Load

The single biggest challenge for most first-year law students is the reading load. Here is how to manage it.

1

Prioritise assigned readings

Not all reading is equal. The readings assigned in the course outline for each lecture are compulsory. Complementary and optional readings can wait until you have mastered the core material.

2

Read actively -- not passively

Passive reading (just moving your eyes across the page) produces very little retention. Active reading means: underlining key passages, writing notes in the margin, asking questions as you read, and summarising each section in your own words after you finish it.

3

Brief every case

A case brief is a short structured summary of a judgment: the facts, the legal issue, the ratio decidendi, and the significance of the case. Writing case briefs forces you to engage actively with every judgment and gives you a ready-made revision resource.

4

Read before lectures, consolidate after

Read the assigned material before each lecture -- even a 20-minute read is better than nothing. Then consolidate your lecture notes with the readings within 24 hours of the lecture. This two-stage approach dramatically improves retention.

5

Do not read everything at once

Spread your reading throughout the week. Reading 30 minutes per subject per day is far more effective than reading everything in one long session the night before the lecture.

Managing Your Workload -- A Weekly Template

This template is based on a typical LLB timetable. Adjust it to fit your specific lecture schedule.

Day	Focus
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Monday	Pre-read for Tuesday lectures. Review Monday lecture notes from previous week.
Tuesday	Attend lectures. Take structured notes. Do not try to write everything -- capture key principles and cases.
Wednesday	Consolidate Tuesday lecture notes. Brief cases assigned for Thursday.
Thursday	Attend lectures. Pre-read for Friday if applicable.
Friday	Consolidate the week's notes. Write one practice IRAC answer.
Saturday	Weekly review -- go through all notes from the week. Test yourself on key principles and case ratios.
Sunday	Rest. Prepare mentally for the week ahead. Light reading only if needed.

The 7 Mistakes That Derail First-Year Students

1	Falling behind and hoping to catch up Law material is cumulative -- each week builds on the last. Falling behind in week 2 means being completely lost by week 6. If you fall behind, address it immediately. Visit your lecturer, get notes from a classmate, and put in extra hours that weekend.
2	Treating lectures as the only source of learning Lectures are a guide and a framework -- they are not comprehensive. You cannot pass a law examination on lecture notes alone. You must read the cases, the textbooks, and the articles assigned in the course outline.
3	Reading without writing Reading alone does not produce the analytical skills tested in law examinations. You must write -- case briefs, IRAC answers, essay outlines. Writing forces you to organise your thinking and exposes gaps in your understanding.
4	Studying alone for everything Study groups are one of the most effective learning tools available to law students. Explaining a concept to someone else is one of the best ways to test your own understanding. Find 3-4 serious classmates and meet weekly.
5	Ignoring continuous assessment CA marks (tests and assignments) constitute 40% of your final grade. Many students focus entirely on the final examination and neglect CA. A strong CA performance can save you; a weak one can sink you.
6	Leaving revision to the last week Law cannot be crammed. The volume of material is too large and the skills too complex to develop in the week before the examination. Revision must be a continuous process, not a last-minute panic.
7	Not asking for help Every lecturer has office hours specifically for students who need assistance. Most students never use them. If you are struggling with a concept, ask. There is no shame in seeking clarification -- there is only cost in not doing so.

Taking Care of Yourself

Academic performance and personal wellbeing are directly linked. Students who neglect their physical and mental health consistently underperform relative to their potential. The following are non-negotiable.

Sleep

Sleep deprivation destroys cognitive function, memory consolidation, and the ability to think analytically. An exhausted student reading for 8 hours retains less than a well-rested student reading for 4 hours. Aim for 7-8 hours every night. Do not sacrifice sleep to study -- it is counterproductive.

Exercise

Regular physical exercise has been consistently shown to improve concentration, memory, and mood. It also reduces anxiety. You do not need to be an athlete -- 30 minutes of walking or light exercise three times a week makes a measurable difference to academic performance.

Eating

Your brain requires consistent fuel. Students who skip meals or eat poorly have lower concentration and worse memory than those who eat regularly and nutritiously. Do not skip breakfast before morning lectures.

Social Connection

Law school can be isolating, particularly in the first semester when everyone is adjusting. Make time for friends, family, and activities outside of studying. Social connection is not a luxury -- it is essential for sustainable performance.

Mental Health

If you are struggling emotionally -- with anxiety, depression, or overwhelming stress -- speak to someone. The University of Botswana has counselling services available to students. Seeking help is not weakness; it is the intelligent response to a difficult situation.

FINAL WORD

The first semester is hard. Everyone finds it hard. The students who come out of it well are not the ones who found it easy -- they are the ones who stayed consistent, asked for help when they needed it, and refused to give up. You can do this.