

State Bar Professional Licensing Process

This document outlines the basic steps to obtain your license to practice law. Each state bar exam has different registration requirements and testing procedures. Please visit the website for the Board of Law Examiners for each state in which you have interest. The examiners post detailed current information regarding the requirements for licensure in that state. Information includes registration procedures, deadlines, filing fees, exam format, special rules, etc. The National Conference of Bar Examiners provides comprehensive web information at www.ncbex.org with a link to all 50 state bar examiners.

Please review the information below to be more fully informed as you get started. You have spent much time, effort and committed significant financial resources to earn your law degree. Please give ample time and effort to the bar application process. You must pass the written exam and the character and fitness review. It is possible to pass one but not the other portion, and both are necessary to be licensed.

1) Determine whether your jurisdiction has multiple registration or application requirements; that is, whether you must take action more than a few months before the exam is administered.

- a. Sixteen states (AL, CA, FL, GA, IL, IA, MD, MO, MS, LA, ND, OH, OK, TN, TX, and VA) have some type of dual application/registration process.
- b. See information designated as:
 - “law student registration,”
 - “early character and fitness determination,” or
 - bifurcated process: “application for admission and petition to take bar exam”
- c. Registrants may save hundreds of dollars in fees through early registration.
- d. Failure to register early will not necessarily prohibit you from applying to a particular state bar if you are unsure of the jurisdiction where you will be working or will desire membership.
- e. Some jurisdictions now allow bar candidates to take the exam on a laptop. Determine whether your state allows laptops and what steps need to be taken in order to avail yourself of this option.

2) Determine which professional responsibility requirements apply.

- a. Each jurisdiction has a specific professional responsibility requirement (MPRE, a professional responsibility course, and/or attending ethics session).
- b. MPRE is required in all states except MD, WA, WI, and PR.
 - Offered in March, August, and November, separate from state bar exams
 - 60 questions in two hours and five minutes
 - Passing scores vary from state to state
 - Plan to take the MPRE if you plan to waive into another jurisdiction where it is required (that is if you are sitting for MD, WA, WI or PR and are going to waive into another jurisdiction).
 - Students may sit for the exam before graduation
 - Visit www.ncbex.org to register for the exam
- c. Professional Responsibility course with a minimum grade requirement (MD).
- d. Some states test professional responsibility on the essay portion of the exam (WA, WI).

3) **Bar Application.**

- a. Visit the Board of Law Examiners website for your state via www.ncbex.org.
- b. Request or download the bar exam application.
- c. *Allow at least 6-8 weeks to complete the application, which is similar to security clearance in detail and scope. You will need ample time to secure information, to be fully accurate and complete, as an incorrect application will lead to difficulties in the process and may cause character and fitness questions to arise.*
- d. Application fees vary for first-time applicants.
- e. Some employers provide assistance with the fees. Many do not.
- f. Select references carefully and provide sufficient time for reference submission.
- g. Secure assistance from Records and/or University Registrar in a timely fashion.
- h. Fingerprints, handwriting samples, and/or notarized documents may be necessary. Allow ample time.

4) **Bar Exam.**

- a. Scoring varies by state: determine the minimum passing score for your jurisdiction.
- b. Components vary by state:
 - MBE - Multistate Bar Exam (six subjects, 200 multiple choice)
 - MPT - Multistate Performance Test (two-90 minute practical problems)
 - Essays - subjects tested vary by jurisdiction
 - MPRE - Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam (see above)
 - MEE - Multistate Essay Exam (standardized, timed essay exam)
- c. Exam may be up to three full days in duration.
- d. Possible in limited circumstances to sit for two state bar exams at one time.

5) **Character & Fitness.**

- a. Each state determines its own standards for character and fitness.
- b. Thoroughly disclose *all* information requested. Failure to do so could result in a failure to be licensed.
- c. Allow ample time to secure all relevant documents, including driving records, address and employment history, college records, law school application/records, information pertaining to fines, penalties, disciplinary action, misdemeanor or felony convictions.
- d. Take this component of the bar exam seriously, very seriously! When in doubt, consult with the state bar examiners for clarification, the professor from whom you took Professional Responsibility, the Dean of Students Office, an attorney, or other competent official.

6) **Other Requirements for Admission and Practice.**

- a. Determine whether your jurisdiction has other requirements for admission and practice.
- b. Examples include: mandatory skills courses after passing the bar exam, Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits, mandatory physical presence at swearing-in ceremony, etc.

7) **Bar Review.**

- a. Determine your style of study and select an appropriate method: in-class, on-line, self-guided, etc.
- b. One size does not fit all. Research carefully all of your options.
- c. Use time wisely to study effectively and actively engage in stress management efforts.
- d. Be certain to take practice exams.