

Best Practices for Online Exam Taking

Dear GW Law Students,

Online exams create challenges for essay writing, particularly when you will not have a printed version of the essay question. The lack of paper likely affects your essay writing strategies in a few specific ways, including issue-spotting, essay organization, and using all of the facts. As you prepare to take your final exams, we offer you some advice for taking exams online.

The Dean of Students Office has created a website (<https://www.law.gwu.edu/exam-information>) with important exam-taking information, and we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with the protocols for taking a GW Law exam. You can always contact our office by telephone (202-994-8320) or email (deanofstudents@law.gwu.edu) if you have follow up questions.

Complete practice in the same way you will take the actual exam. Keep the essay question on your computer, rather than printing it out. Silence the notifications on your electronic devices. Create a disruption free environment. Develop your exam taking strategies and practice them until they are second nature.

Create checklists or roadmaps in advance for commonly tested complex issues. The process of creating a checklist will help you reinforce in your memory how you want to organize the analysis of that issue, helping you to write in an organized way during the actual exam.

Follow this six-step process for answering essay exam questions:

1. Read the call of the question first, which sometimes clues you as to what issues you should be addressing. If the question is merely “discuss” then remind yourself what you are being trained to do: identify and analyze legal issues.
2. Skim through the fact pattern to get a basic understanding of the problem being posed. Only a couple minutes will have passed by the time you finish skimming.
3. Reread the entire exam prompt in great depth. Identify key facts and make notes regarding possible legal issues.
4. Outline your answer. Make sure you understand the question as posed, and have a comprehensive response planned before you begin drafting it. Note that if you typed your outline to the response, the professors only give points for your prose-written response.
5. Draft your response. Follow the outline you created in the previous step, and avoid spelling and grammar errors.
6. Move on. Time management is incredibly important. If the professor provides suggested time allocations, use them. If the professor instead provides the point allocations for the questions, you can create time allocations based off of that.

Keep sending oxygen to your brain! Stand up out of your chair at least once or twice during your exam to keep the blood moving in your body. Take a sip of water, too.

Continue to abide by the Academic Integrity Code. While your exam-room has shifted from inside the GW Law building to a remote location, you are still bound by the GW Law Academic Integrity Code. Do not let at-home shortcuts compromise your academic integrity.