Checklists for Issue Spotting on Law School Exams

- A checklist is a bare-bones word list of course topics covered; no details, just the basic concepts
- One to two pages at most
- Use your professor's syllabus and your text's Table of Contents to craft a checklist
- Outlines are personal and have more details; a checklist is generic with no details
- A checklist is a memory trigger (like a grocery shopping list) that helps recall core concepts when fatigue or exam nerves affect recall
- Memorize your checklist
- When permitted, write your checklist from memory onto the inside cover of your Blue Book when the exam begins or onto the exam packet
- Read critically: ask why certain facts are mentioned in each sentence; make notes in margins
- Refer to your checklist for additional issues/defenses that you might have missed
- Reread the exam hypothetical, referring to checklist again for missing issues
- Craft an outline chart in preparation for writing your exam response. (See essay exam attack plan handout) You can write this in the Blue Book, if allowed, or on exam packet
- Begin writing your exam, putting meat on the bones of your detail-free outline chart
- Signpost, underline, and visually organize your written responses according to parties and causes of action
- Respond in IRAC format

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When finished, reread the exam hypothetical again; refer to your checklist one more time to see if any issues were missed.

Professors test most, but not all, of the possible content areas covered in class. If a checklist topic does not appear to be in the hypothetical despite diligent and careful reading, relax. It is more than likely not covered in the exam.

See handout for Torts and Contracts “checklist” samples.