Creating a Course Outline

Purpose

1) To master large amounts of material in a manageable, organized format.
2) To summarize and synthesize course knowledge.
3) To condense information for effective exam study.
4) To understand the overview and structure of the course.

When to Begin

1) Early; after each topical section the case book covers.
2) 3-4 weeks into the semester.
3) Never wait until Reading Week.

Tools Needed

1) Course notes/class power point slides.
2) Case book.
3) Study guide/hornbook.
4) Borrowed outline as guide (optional).

Length of Outline

1) It depends. 4 pages of notes x 30 classes = 120 pp notes. Outline = 25-30+ pages?
2) Outlining, like note-taking, is personal. Craft the length that works that will help you understand and memorize the material.
3) Each class’s notes might vary in length; thus length of outline may vary with each respective class.
4) Outline should be comprehensive, but not too much detail.

How to Start

1) Set aside part of your study week or every two weeks for outlining.
2) Craft skeletal outline from general topic areas listed in the following:
   a) course syllabus
   b) course text’s table of contents
   c) commercial course outline as a guide
3) Fill in the shell with definitions rules, elements, exceptions, jurisdictional differences, professor’s hypos, remedies, etc. from class notes. Include case names if it triggers memory to help you link the concept/if professor requires it. In some courses (Con Law, e.g.) case name recall is important. Ask your professor.
4) Limit detail.
5) Type or hand-write; whatever is easier and quicker.

6) Flow chart format can be effective depending upon learning style preference. Download free trial from [www.Inspiration.com](http://www.Inspiration.com) or use other flowchart software.

7) Borrow outlines. It is useful to see what others include. *Use only as a supplement or guide to craft your own. But do not use instead of your own:* another student may be incorrect with his understanding of a concept and may not highlight what you need. Outlining is studying. If you use someone else’s in place of your own, you have not gone through the “study” process. It is the **process of review** in crafting an outline that is important. Doing it – not substituting others’ outlines for yours – is critical to understanding and memory.


**Outlining for Open Book exams**

1) Index and tab your outline and related reference materials for quick access.

2) If exam is code-based and code book is allowed in exam, take time to tab efficiently. Memorize rule concepts, not the rule numbers unless required to do so by professor.

3) Understand and memorize as much of your outline on key course concepts as possible. Looking up information during an exam is time wasted.

4) Make an issue spotting checklist on the first page of your outline. A checklist is a summary list of all issues possibly covered on exam that will help in issue-spotting.

**Outlining for Closed Book exams**

1) See general guidelines above. Condense voluminous notes into general outline with key concepts in enough detail to trigger your memory. Review it. Memorize it.

2) Closer to exam, condense outline into a digest – a detailed checklist (5-10 pages) of key concepts (issues, rules, exceptions, defenses) likely to be covered on exam. Memorize it.

3) When exam begins, write a bare-bones checklist (1-2 pages) on inside cover of Blue Book to serve as a memory jogger for issue spotting during the exam.