

The California Bar Exam: Preparation Essentials

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Preparation Essentials

Are you ready to take the California Bar Exam? You will be if you follow these checklists. The following is a list of basic things to keep in mind when preparing for, and taking, the California Bar Exam:

A. Preparing for the Exam

- Build Your Confidence:** You can pass this exam, if you take it seriously. You want to work extremely hard, and pass the exam the first time. Never take the bar exam as a “trial run.” Sitting for the exam with the intent to take it again will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Prepare Financially:** The bar exam is expensive. The application and the costs of a preparation course may exceed \$4,000. You cannot work while preparing for the bar exam. Visit Southwestern’s Financial Aid office if you need help.
- Clear the Decks:** Get your life in order. The two months that you are studying is not the time to be fixing your car, running errands, taking vacations, or starting new relationships. Tell your family and friends how important this exam is. You must explain that you will be unavailable for the two months before the bar exam.
- It’s a Full-Time Job:** From the time you graduate until you take the bar exam (approximately two months), you need to study 8 or more hours a day, 6 days a week. You cannot work while studying for the bar exam.
- Create a Schedule:** Passing the bar exam requires that you learn and memorize a large number of rules, take many practice exams, and attend Bar Review classes. You need a plan for how you will get it all done. Schedule what you will do every day of each week. Stick to your schedule.
- Take a Bar Exam Preparation Course:** Preparation courses are not optional; you need to take one to pass the bar exam. There are many good courses out there, with many different teaching styles. Pick one.
- Do Exactly What Your Bar Exam Preparation Course Tells You:** You are paying a lot of money to have someone help you pass the bar exam. Those companies have an interest in seeing you pass. Do exactly what they tell you: follow their study plans. Attending lectures is not optional: 100% attendance is required.

- Learn Actively, Not Passively:** You will not pass the bar exam if you spend all your time creating or memorizing outlines, flashcards, and notes. You should take literally 1000s of MBE practice questions, and write out many practice essay and performance test questions. Do not put off taking practice exams.
- Take Timed Practice Exams:** Take at least some practice exams timed. You need a sense of what MBE questions, essays, and performance tests are like when under time pressure.

B. Some Practicalities

- Reserve a Hotel Room:** Do not commute to the bar exam. Be certain to book a hotel room near the examination site (close enough to walk to from the hotel). Rooms fill up, so book early. As soon as you find out where you're taking your bar exam, make a reservation. This is not the time to penny-pinch. Avoid sharing rooms with others; you need a quiet place to unwind.
- Take Care of Yourself:** Preparing for the bar exam is like running a marathon, not a sprint. You must prepare emotionally for the exam. You need to sleep. You need to eat. You need to exercise. Be sure to schedule time to do these things to avoid burning out.
- Tie-Up Loose Ends:** Think ahead. If you have children, be certain that you have arranged child-care. If you are taking the exam using a laptop, ensure that your laptop is working properly. Ahead of time pack the supplies you will take with you (pens, pencils, high-lighters, aspirin, watch, etc.)
- Visit the Exam Site Before Exam Day:** You do not want to be worrying about where you need to go the day of the exam. Visit where you are taking the exam long before exam day.

C. The Day of the Exam

- Wear Comfortable Clothes:** The exam is not a fashion show. Wear your most comfortable clothes, and wear them in layers. The air conditioning may be blasting, or not working well. Be prepared.
- Eat Breakfast and Lunch:** Be sure to eat breakfast and lunch the day of the exam. You do not want to eat something heavy, but this is a long day. You cannot go the full day without eating. Plan ahead.

- ❑ **Arrive Early:** Much of the key to passing the bar exam is managing stress. Be sure you arrive early. There may be 1000s of student taking the exam. You will not be permitted to take the exam if you arrive late.
- ❑ **Leave Study Materials at the Hotel:** You cannot cram for the bar exam. Doing so is a waste of time. Do not bother trying to learn anything new before the exam.
- ❑ **Do Not Discuss the Exam:** Never discuss the bar exam with others. You will be tempted; but don't do it. There is no benefit to discussing the exam. All talking about the exam does is increase stress.
- ❑ **Don't Freak Out:** You cannot do well on the bar exam if you panic. You must be thinking rationally. If you have taken a preparation course, and studied hard, you are ready to take this exam. You will do fine. Remaining calm is one of the keys to passing.