

Hi Everyone,

Congratulations to everyone that passed! I passed on my second attempt - it still doesn't feel real! I want to thank all of you on this page - the community here is so supportive and uplifting and I'm grateful to have found all of you.

I'm not writing the following as advice but just as a source of motivation for repeaters or foreign attorneys that are looking for other ways to study for the exam outside a commercial prep program. I remember going through the FB pages, Brian's Make This Your Last Time Page and Reddit trying to figure out the magic recipe...well it turns out there isn't one haha. But this is my experience and I hope it helps other foreign attorneys (Hi Canadian Friends!) or repeaters that are looking for other ways to study for the exam outside a commercial prep program. In my opinion, this exam can be passed without a commercial prep program if you can devote a few months to full time study, you are disciplined and tailoring your prep to your strengths and weaknesses (mine happened to be writing).

Before I go into my approach, I think there are a few things that are incredibly important to assess when you go into your prep.

1. Assess your strengths and weaknesses

For me, my writing has always been my strength but standardized testing and multiple choice questions were always my downfall. Thus, I made sure to structure my prep in a way to reflect that.

My Strength (writing): For writing that meant I was more concerned about HOW or the STRUCTURE to write a passing essay than the content itself. I trusted myself enough to know I was going to be able to put something together even if I wasn't sure what the answer was. For me, I have found that formatting is a completely under valued skill of this exam. Everyone always focuses on BLL, and of course that is important but you can get yourself to a passing essay even if the BLL is slightly off by formatting your essay in a way to make it very easy and clear for a grader to read - make separate paragraphs under IRAC, bold, underline and italicize if you can. You want to make it easy for them to give you points.

My Weakness (MBE): For me, I have consistently struggled with multiple choice standardized testing. I took the LSAT twice, the grades of my courses that focused on M/C over writing were always consistently and significantly lower. I have bad test anxiety and lack self confidence. For the exam, I knew I was going to need some hefty practice. At the time, Adaptibar was the clear and obvious choice. I don't regret that one bit.

2. Why are you doing this?

No seriously - I think it's important you have this conversation with yourself, even just for 10 minutes. I promise you if the answer isn't for you or is for external validation, your prep is going to be a lot harder and much more of a struggle than if you are doing this for yourself. It's not to say other factors don't exist, but I think when you show up to your prep focused on a positive outcome for YOU rather than something else it makes your prep much more bearable and it allows you to be in a much more positive mindset.

I underestimated the notion of a positive mindset - I actually think it's responsible for being 3.5 points off on my first attempt. I started prep hopeful but deep down I had 0 self-confidence that a foreign Canadian attorney with no US legal background was going to come close to passing this exam - especially one that struggles with severe test anxiety.

For me, there was an important and fine line between being disciplined and telling myself “I could study for a couple more hours” and being kind to myself and saying “today just isn’t my day, I’m better to take a half day and be refreshed tomorrow”. I think this is a completely individual assessment but for me it was important throughout my prep. I wish I would have been more positive and kind to myself in my first prep - because I think I would have been a lot more confident and performed better the first time.

3. What are you afraid of happening on the exam? (Outside of tech difficulties)

For me, as a foreign attorney with no background, I was terrified I was going to be confronted with an essay where I wasn’t even going to be able to decipher the essay topic let alone issue spot (in hindsight it’s a lot clearer than you think it is) but I digress....For me, that meant, I was going to tailor some of my approach to putting this fear to rest the best I could. That meant I would cook (Brian Hahn’s approach) a lot of essays to get familiar with all the types of essays that frequently appeared for each topic. For my approach, I purchased the Approsheets which eased my fear of the type of essays that were likely to appear for each topic - it made it much less daunting. Then I would make write ups (similar to what I did in law school) for each essay subtopic I assessed was mostly to appear on the next exam.

MY APPROACH & SCHEDULE

After doing a bunch of research on these FB groups and Reddit I made my plan.

I subscribed to Brian’s weekly email pep talks - they were good reminders and I would highly encourage anyone to do the same.

Schedule: Brian had shared mock study schedules and I found them incredibly helpful as a base to tailor them to my own needs, it gave me the type of structure I needed.

- The first couple weeks I devoted to watching videos that outlined the basic and fundamentals of each of the core subjects (they were long) but for me I felt they were necessary before diving into outlines and practice. I also used some of Studicata videos for concepts that I didn’t quite understand and I thought they were really helpful.

Long Outlines: I was fortunate to have someone in the group provide me with visually appealing outlines, they aren’t mine or else I would share them. However, I would say that the outlines in the Mary Basick book were pretty similar and would have been what I used for review. I used them on my first day to review the entire subject before diving into practice MBEs and essays.

Short Outlines: For Essays and MBEs, I used SmartBar Prep materials which I found really helpful. They are organized in a manner that tells you what material is frequently tested and for essays the last time it was tested. It allowed me to tailor my practice accordingly.

Adaptibar Videos: In my second prep, I used the Adaptibar videos to help increase my overall MBE score - absolute game changer. I went from a 58.7% (1253 questions) to 66.9% (1374 questions). The videos are great at pointing out where and how you tend to lose easy points on the MBE - and teaches you the concepts in a way that is beneficial for the MBE portion. I wouldn’t start using these videos until you have a decent grasp on the concepts otherwise it’s pretty useless.

RESOURCES THAT WORKED FOR ME

ESSAYS

1. **Mary Basick Book** - I used this book for the outlines occasionally but mostly for practicing essays. For me I would do the questions on my own eventually just cooking them (not fully complete) and then go to the answer and write out a passing answer. The approach of writing out passing answers is discussed in more detail by Jessica Klein and her book.
2. **Bar Essays** - This is KEY in my opinion especially if you don't have a commercial prep program. This is where I learned the format of passing grades and what was realistic. Sometimes you'll see model answers that are clearly a 75 and it can get incredibly discouraging in prep. Of course, prepare to catch every single issue but we all know that isn't necessarily very realistic. Take a look at what's missing from a 50/55 answer, what was needed to hit a 60/65 and what's the extra added to achieve a 70/75 - having that understanding will be incredibly helpful while practicing essays during your prep.

Also used this for PTs!

3. **Smart Bar Prep** - I found these materials incredibly helpful. It would put my mind at ease about the type of essay subtopics that are likely to appear vs those that aren't. Instead of using predictions, I used these materials to try and predict/prepare for subtopics that were more likely to appear, and not spending so much time on a sub topic that had just appeared (except for PR). That's just what worked for me.
 - **Magic Sheets:** I had access to them, and they were great as well. I just preferred the visual aspect along with the information of when issues were tested on the SmartBar prep materials. However, these are great short outlines for review if you have access to them.
4. **Approsheets** - I used Approsheets to put my mind at ease about the types of essay to prepare for and for structure (what issues I needed to hit). I would definitely recommend them

MBE

5. **Smart Bar Prep** - Really liked their short outlines to review before practice
6. **Adaptibar** - It comes down to practice - you need to practice a lot of different questions, and as many as you can. Adaptibar is really helpful and I can't imagine having gone without it. Keeping track of your progress and topics you need to spend a little bit more time on is also incredibly helpful
 - Adaptibar Videos: Absolutely wish I had used them my first prep, would highly recommend
7. **Excel Sheet** - For me, I knew quality over quantity was going to be more helpful for my prep. Doing 5K questions for me just wasn't feasible, especially with my attention span - so I made sure in my first prep to type of the subtopic and what type of question I got wrong and what the right answer was - I also did this for questions I got right but guessed on. I didn't feel I needed this as a repeater but I do think it helped me grasp concepts better the first time.

RESOURCES THAT I COULD HAVE GONE WITHOUT

Old Barbri Books - they were nice to have and eased my anxiety that I wasn't missing anything from my prep but definitely were not necessary. I barely used them. If anything, having

the PT book I probably found the most useful and would recommend getting your hands on in conjunction with Bar Essays.

Critical Pass Flashcards - I know everyone raved about them but they just didn't work for me. Nice to have but I would have been fine without them. I didn't use flashcards in law school, I don't know why I thought I had to have them for this. Personally, I prefer the other materials I mentioned above.

Emmanuel MBE Book - I would use this book as a cheaper alternative to the Adaptibar videos. For me, I need visuals and to be engaged - I actually benefit from videos. This book definitely has some stellar tips for MBEs and great for practicing MBEs but I didn't use it as much as the other materials above.

ADVICE I WISH I DIDN'T LET GET IN MY HEAD

Insert SpongeBob meme here for...

1. "You HHaaaaaVveeee to doooOooooo 5,000 MBE practice questions"

I let that one haunt me for awhile and while I commend those that have the ability and attention span in their prep to make that happen along with doing essays - it wasn't feasible for me. I let the idea get in my head that because I only did 1200 Qs I was destined to fail. And while it was the reason I was unsuccessful on my first attempt - I still scored 1378 on that portion. If I had believed in myself a little more and gotten those Adaptibar videos, I think I would have been just fine.

2. "You HHaaaaaVveeee to fully practice 20 essays for every subject"

That wasn't necessary for me - I trusted my gut, and cooking essays, and spending more time ensuring I could issue spot and apply the facts accordingly was much more beneficial for me. I only did a handful of fully timed essays. My adrenaline has always helped me in testing conditions despite my anxiety, and I trusted my ability to get down what I needed when it came to test day. I think this also comes down to my strength in essay writing.

3. "You HHaaaaaVveeee to get a tutor"

While I'm sure having that resource is helpful, it clearly wasn't necessary for me. Of course, it all comes down to individual needs along with your strengths and weaknesses but I think there are other resources where your money can be better spent.

4. "You HHaaaaaVveeee to do 10/20 PTs"

For me, as a foreign attorney, I had spent the last year prior to prep preparing memos, doing research, extracting the necessary info (PT-like work) in a time sensitive manner. It's not to say don't practice them or underestimate their ability to terrorize you lol. BUT again this comes back to strengths and weaknesses - I knew I needed to practice a few under the time constraints but for me I already felt I had learned the skills necessary for PTs.

However, I will say - nerves got the best of me in my first PT because I forgot to answer a question -_- (but still scored a 60 lol) Formatting is also HUGE on the PT, had I not missed that question - I would have passed on my first attempt as well.

TIPS

1. Get a bar prep friend outside your group

My first attempt - I went in solo. Had a couple conversations with people but not a consistent support buddy. I connected with a few amazing people for the second attempt - and I think it was a game changer, especially as a foreign attorney with no background. You need someone to vent to and commiserate with to remind you that you aren't alone.

2. Eliminate any toxic energy out of your life during prep

This was also a game changer between my first and second attempt. I was much more clear and focused my second time when the toxic energy was eliminated. Do not let people live rent free in your head, especially during prep!

3. Even if you have absolutely not a clue about what to write when you see a topic on Game Day, swing at it like it's going to be a home run

Fun fact on my first attempt, the essay I felt the absolute worst about and just started writing down every single concept I could think of that might relate to the topic ended up being my highest graded essay (What's up BA on October 2020).

Write down anything and everything. Give yourself 30 seconds to have a pity party in your head about having relied a little too heavily on predictions and then just start typing and use the facts the best you can to issue spot and trigger any possible concepts that might apply

GOODLUCK!