

How to prepare for the Bar exam?

Hey folks, I am Jeff. I passed the 2020 Feb California Bar exam, so I want to write down some of my experience of the Bar preparation, hopefully, it will help you folks to prepare for the Bar. I will briefly introduce the materials of the Bar preparation and how you should use them. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me, I will try to respond as much as possible.

Email: sujinfeng@foxmail.com

What should I learn to prepare for the Bar exam?

The Bar exam is not difficult, it is just too much. This is how people describe the Bar exam, and it is right. As you may know, most of the subjects tested in the Bar are taught in law school. However, it does not mean that if you did well in law school, you will definitely pass the Bar. The problems tested in the Bar are somehow different from law school. It rarely happens that a Bar exam question asks you what the Supreme Court Justices' opinions are on a single question, nor the reasoning behind those opinions. The only thing tested in the Bar is the rule generated from that case. In a law school exam, the issue-spotter essays give you a hypo and you are supposed to compare that hypo to several cases you learned in the class and apply the rule through IRAC or CREAC to that hypo. In the Bar exam, you only need to remember the rule, write that rule down, and apply it to your facts. The hypos in the Bar are more straightforward, you remember the rule, you get it. There is another problem on the Bar prep, even if you have learned that subject in your law school, it is not guaranteed that your professor covered the same scope of the Bar. Furthermore, some subjects like torts, your professor may even teach a different approach from the Bar. So the Bar preparation is not only a review. I would say it is 70% review of what you learned from law school and 30% of what you learned from the Bar prep itself.

In my opinion, the Bar prep consists of three parts. The first part is studying the outline. This part will give you the most important information you need for that subject, this is where you get the rules of your essays and some of the multiple choices. The second part is practicing multiple choices, by doing these practicing questions, you will get the detailed rules tested in the Bar but not listed in the outline. This is important because no outline will be detailed enough for all you need to answer all the multiple-choice. It also makes sense that if an outline is detailed to the level of covering anything that could be tested in the Bar, it is not an "outline." By doing practicing multiple choices, you are drawing the spot around the outline you have learned. Doing this part will make your knowledge a tree with both the trunk and leaves. The third part is practicing essays and performance tests. By doing this, you will learn how much detail is expected in the Bar and what the answer should be. For an essay, you only have 30 mins if you are doing the UBE or 1 hour if you are doing the California Bar. Even if there are no words limit in the Bar, how to use your time intelligently so that you can hit as many points as possible makes a difference. This can only be done by practicing the essays and compare your answers to the sample answers. For the performance test, it is different from your legal writing class in that you only have 90 mins to finish your memo instead of several weeks or months.

What materials do I need for the Bar exam?

Before preparing the Bar, the most asked question is what Bar prep class should I take. The Bar prep professors of both of my law schools have the same answer: any of them. You may hear from your classmates in law school talking about their preference among Barbri, Kaplan, and Themis. This does not make too much sense, because most of the students only take one of them. They cannot meaningfully compare them. So, I agree with my professors, take any of them, finish it, there won't be too much difference.

However, the question here is what the Bar prep companies do for you. There are several benefits you can get from enrolling in one of the Bar prep classes. First, their outlines. The Bar prep companies spend a lot of time and money on the outlines. They are like the top students in your class,

they tell you the scope of the test, they write all the rules down for you. They help you by giving you the most important information on that subject and eventually saving your time. It does not mean you can't make your own outline to prepare for the Bar, but it will definitely save you a lot of time which is most important to your Bar prep. Second, the studying schedule. Using your time smartly is another important thing to pass the Bar. It is difficult to pass a Bar if you are well prepared in 5 subjects but not well prepared in the rest of the subjects. Similarly, it is difficult for you to pass if you are well prepared in multiple choices but not well prepared in your essays. The Bar prep company will simply give you your schedule, you don't need to spend time to research how to schedule it, just do what they say. Third, the practicing questions. This part may be the biggest difference among all the Bar prep companies. The company will hire some experts to draft their own practicing questions. Enough practicing questions are the key to your success. In addition, most of the companies will give you feedback on essays and performance tests. So, the Bar prep company will give all you need for your Bar preparation, if you enrolled any of these classes, it will be enough for you to prepare and pass the Bar.

Materials recommended for the Bar exam

Some students may not want to enroll in the Bar prep classes for whatever reason, or some students want extra materials for their Bar prep. If this is your case, I can recommend you some materials. The multiple-choice practice questions are good for both UBE and California Bar, however, the outlines, essays, and performance tests materials are only for the California Bar. If you need outlines, essays, and performance tests material for UBE, ask your Bar prep professors in your law school. They are the most helpful resource for your Bar prep.

As I said above, you need outlines, multiple-choice practicing questions, essay practicing questions, and performance test practicing questions.

Outline: Essay Exam Writing for the California Bar Exam 2nd Edition (ISBN-13: 978-1543813500 ISBN-10: 154381350X). This book will

give you all the outlines of all the subjects in the California Bar. The outlines are well organized and in a proper length to study.

Multiple choice: Strategies & Tactics for the MBE (Bar Review) 7th Edition (ISBN-13: 978-1543805727 ISBN-10: 1543805728). The biggest advantage of this book is most of the questions are released by NCBE, so this is like the “official” flavor of your Bar exam. The explanations of the questions are well written too. If you have extra time, the sixth edition is also a good supplement, there are a few questions that are the same as the seventh edition, but there are many questions different from the seventh edition. (6th edition: ISBN-13: 978-1454873129 ISBN-10: 9781454873129).

Essay: Essay Exam Writing for the California Bar Exam 2nd Edition (ISBN-13: 978-1543813500 ISBN-10: 154381350X). This book as I introduced above does not only includes the outlines, there are six practicing essay questions of each subject. The questions are all chosen from the California Bar past exams. The sample answers are well written and organized.

Performance Test: California Performance Test Workbook: Preparation for the Bar Exam (Bar Review) 2nd Edition (ISBN-13: 978-1543813517 ISBN-10: 1543813518). This book is of the same style as the essay book. It gives you the approach of answering the performance test and several practicing questions along with sample answers.

How much time do I need to spend on the Bar prep?

If you take any of the Bar prep classes, the answer is simple: finish everything on your schedule. The most common reason for students fail the Bar is they did not finish their schedule. However, there must be a lot of things distracting you from your Bar prep, an interview, a kid to take care of, or packing your stuff. Arranging every potential distracting thing before you start your Bar prep. It is difficult to keep your track even without distracting things. Most of the classes require about a two-month full-time study. Budget that time beforehand and stick to your schedule.

If you want to do your own Bar prep, I will suggest you 2500 multiple choices, 100 essays, and 5 performance tests after you finish all the outlines. If your time is limited, for the 100 essay questions, you can draft 3

full essays and 3 bullet points outlines for each subject. As I said, if you want to prepare it by yourself, it is more difficult to schedule your time. But these are necessary numbers of practicing questions to get a pass.

What should I expect during the preparation?

The Bar prep is a hard time for everybody. If you are super emotional, you probably need to find someone that you can cry with during your preparation. Taking a short break like half a day in a week is also helpful. However, it is not something you cannot conquer, it is just something you need to go through as a lawyer. If you can prepare full time (10 hours a day), a total of two and a half months will be enough. If you cannot prepare full time, you need to calculate your time accordingly. Remember, enough practicing questions are the key to your success. It is difficult to pass the Bar exam if you only finish the outlines without enough practicing questions. However, you may experience depression when you do the practicing questions, I experienced that too. My correct rate of the multiple-choice was only about 60% in the beginning, but in the end it was about 80%. This is exactly what you learned from the Bar prep, the 20% difference. Do not hesitate, just keep going, you will see your increase in the correct rates. For the essay part, the final goal is to not miss the important rules from the sample answers. However, because the sample answers are written by the experts and under no time pressure, it is difficult to write as well as they do, just try to hit as many points as possible.

How to conquer the extra difficulties for secondary language speakers?

After you read the paragraphs above, you may find my English is somehow broken. English is my secondary language and I only use that frequently after I came to study in the US. I took the bar after one and a half years after I arrived in the US. As you may expect, my speed in essays is slower than most native speakers. However, it doesn't mean I cannot succeed in my Bar exam. If this is also your case, start to practice typing in English now. When you prepare for your Bar Exam, practice more essay and performance test questions. There is an old saying: with time and patience the leaf of the mulberry becomes satin.