

How to Pass the Bar Exam

Dear Friends,

It has come to my attention that a number of people in our community will soon be preparing for the bar exam.

I would like to share the study methods I developed after some trial and error. In my personal opinion, this is the most effective and efficient way to study for the bar exam (i.e. maximizing your exam score per minute spent studying).

I took the California bar exam, but the approach below may be useful for bar prep in other states as well. Of course, you should modify any of the advice below to match what feels right to you.

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at jamalkhan1@gmail.com.

Kind regards,

Jamal Khan
JD, Harvard Law School
www.jamalkhan.org

Exam Format

The California bar exam consists of two components: the Multi-State Bar Exam (MBE) and the essays.

The essays, in turn, are split into two components: one performance test and five state-specific essays.

Links to Excellent Online Advice

- <https://www.top-law-schools.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=41&t=257138> (read the third post)
- <https://www.top-law-schools.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=41&t=248756> (read the first post)
- <https://www.top-law-schools.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=41&t=271217&sid=417b94281ebb4bb28583132650f90654> (read the second post)
- <http://www.top-law-schools.com/forums/viewforum.php?f=41&sid=7eb9c083d54cb7ffad02453a9800f8c9> (for general browsing)

Materials You Will Need

- Access to audio lectures covering the seven main areas of law that will be tested on the MBE: Civil Procedure, Criminal Law and Procedure, Torts, Property, Contracts, Evidence, and Constitutional Law.
- A premium subscription to BarEssays.com
- The book *Strategies & Tactics for the MBE Volume I*, available at <https://www.amazon.com/Strategies-Tactics-MBE-Book-ebook/dp/B01G0Y38W6>
- Optional (I didn't use this): The book *Strategies & Tactics for the MBE Volume II*, available at https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00B4WIRBM/ref=series_rw_dp_sw

MBE

Listen to the audio lectures and take notes by hand rather than by typing. I cannot stress this enough. Handwriting your notes will cement the material more firmly in your mind and will pay dividends for your recall later on.

After you finish listening to all the lectures and taking notes, move on to the book *Strategies & Tactics for the MBE Volume I*. Each chapter begins with an overview of that area of law. Take your time to read this overview slowly and carefully. Then move on to the multiple choice questions. When you check your answers, make sure to thoroughly read the explanations for all the choices, not just the right answer. Lots of learning takes place when you read the answer explanations.

Count the total number of multiple choice questions in the book and divide it by the number of days you've devoted to multiple choice questions. That will be the number of multiple choice questions you'll need to complete per day. In my case, I tried to complete at least 50 multiple choice questions per day.

Essays

My approach was a modified version of the online advice in the links above.

As the above links to online advice recommended, get a premium subscription to BarEssays.com:

BarEssays.com | Essay Search

baessays.com/members/search.aspx

ESSAY SEARCH [SEARCH FAQ](#) [ISSUES TESTED CHART](#)

Subject

- ☐ Civil Procedure
- ☐ Community Property
- ☐ Constitutional Law
- ☒ Contracts
- ☐ Corporations
- ☐ Criminal Law/Procedure
- ☐ Evidence
- ☐ Performance Exams
- ☐ Professional Responsibility
- ☐ Real Property
- ☐ Remedies
- ☐ Torts
- ☐ Trusts
- ☐ Wills

Score ☒ 57.5 and below

- ☐ 60 to 62.5
- ☐ 65 and above

Year 2020

Month ☐ February ☐ July ☒ Both

Format ☐ Typed ☐ Handwritten ☒ Both

SEARCH

Year	Month	Format	Score	Subjects
2020	February	Typed	57.5	Contracts
2020	February	Typed	57.5	Contracts
2020	February	Typed	55.0	Contracts

Download every question for every year for every topic, along with the model answer. Don't bother with the CalBar answers because they contain mistakes. Same goes for the user-submitted essays (except with the most recent questions where the model answer is not available).

Here's what it looked like when I saved each question and model answer onto my computer for a given topic like Civil Procedure:

The screenshot shows a Windows File Explorer window with the address bar set to 'baressays > essays > civ pro'. The left sidebar shows 'Quick access' and 'This PC' locations. The main pane displays a list of 26 items, which are PDF files named with years and topics, such as '2006answer', '2006question', '2009 with torts answer', etc. The table below represents the data shown in this window.

Name	Status	Date modified	Type	Size
2006answer	✓	2/28/2014 12:16 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	22 KB
2006question	✓	2/28/2014 12:16 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	12 KB
2009 with torts answer	✓	2/28/2014 12:22 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	19 KB
2009 with torts question	✓	2/28/2014 12:22 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	14 KB
2009answer	✓	2/28/2014 12:18 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	55 KB
2009question	✓	2/28/2014 12:17 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	48 KB
2011answer	✓	2/28/2014 12:24 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	50 KB
2011question	✓	2/28/2014 12:23 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	47 KB
2012answer	✓	2/28/2014 12:25 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	80 KB
2012question	✓	2/28/2014 12:25 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	12 KB
2013answer	✓	2/28/2014 12:27 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	50 KB
2013question	✓	2/28/2014 12:26 PM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	16 KB
2014answer1	✓	2/6/2017 3:03 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	134 KB
2014question1	✓	2/6/2017 3:02 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	17 KB
2015answer1	✓	2/6/2017 3:04 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	99 KB
2015answer2	✓	2/6/2017 3:04 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	103 KB
2015question1	✓	2/6/2017 3:03 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	15 KB
2015question2	✓	2/6/2017 3:04 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	14 KB
2016answer	✓	5/5/2021 11:47 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	120 KB
2016question	✓	5/5/2021 11:47 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	55 KB
2017answer	✓	5/5/2021 11:48 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	110 KB
2017question	✓	5/5/2021 11:47 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	17 KB
2019 with evidence answer	✓	5/5/2021 11:49 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	544 KB
2019 with evidence question	✓	5/5/2021 11:49 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	17 KB
2019answer	✓	5/5/2021 11:50 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	467 KB
2019question	✓	5/5/2021 11:49 AM	Adobe Acrobat Docu...	23 KB

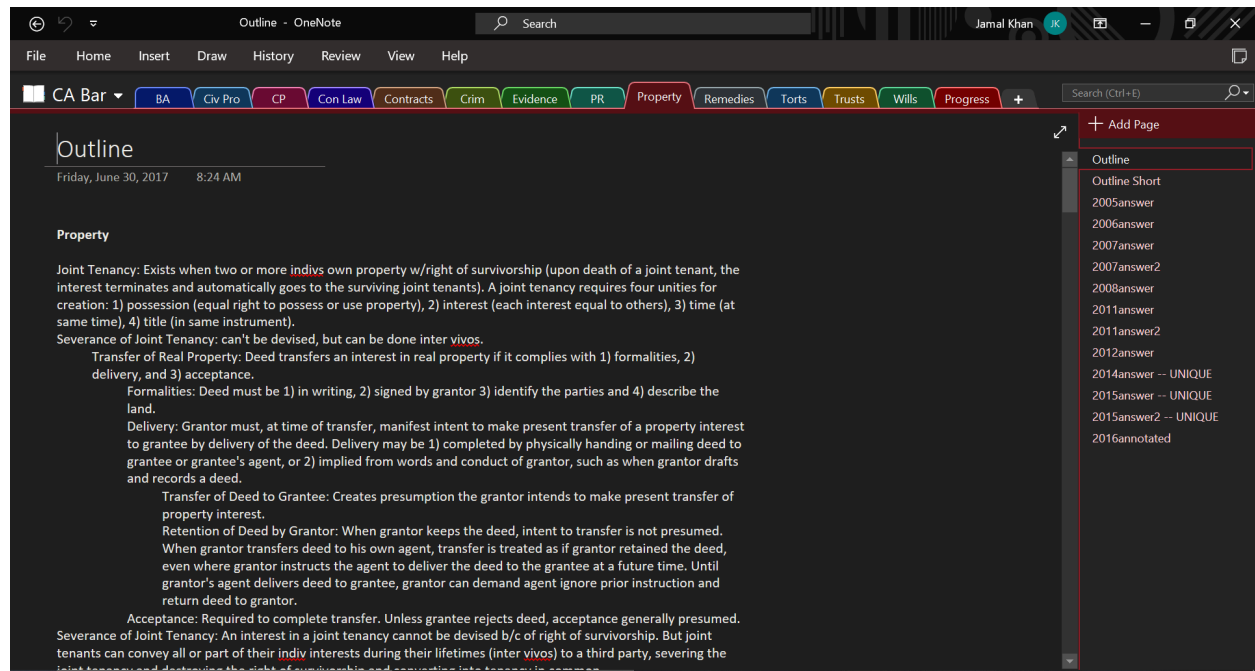
Next, I used Microsoft OneNote to organize the material. You can also use Word, but OneNote (or something like it) is easier because of the tabs:

The screenshot shows a Microsoft OneNote window titled '2005answer - OneNote'. The top ribbon includes 'File', 'Home', 'Insert', 'Draw', 'History', 'Review', 'View', and 'Help'. Below the ribbon is a tab bar with various legal topics: 'CA Bar', 'BA', 'Civ Pro', 'CP', 'Con Law', 'Contracts', 'Crim', 'Evidence', 'PR', 'Property', 'Remedies', 'Torts', 'Trusts', 'Wills', and 'Progress'. The 'Civ Pro' tab is selected. The main content area shows a legal outline for '2005answer' dated 'Friday, June 30, 2017' at '10:54 AM'. The outline includes sections like 'Does statute violate: Commerce, Equal Protection, Due Process, Privileges and Immunity', 'Standing', 'Ripeness', 'Mootness', 'Eleventh Amendment', 'Commerce Clause', 'Supremacy Clause', 'Discriminate Against Out-of-State Commerce', 'Important Noneconomic State Interest', 'No Reasonable Nondiscriminatory Alternatives', 'Exception - Market Participant', 'Unduly Burden Interstate Commerce', 'Equal Protection Clause', 'Fourteenth Amendment - Equal Protection', 'State Action', 'Classification - Selling Gasoline with 10% Ethanol vs w/o 10% Ethanol', 'Level of Scrutiny - Rational Basis (b/c of above)', 'Due Process Clause', 'Procedural Due Process', 'Substantive Due Process', and 'No Fundamental Right'. On the right side, there is a 'Table of Contents' pane showing a list of pages, including '2004answer', '2004answer2', '2005answer' (which is highlighted), '2006answer', '2007 with crim answer', '2007answer', '2008answer', '2009answer', '2010answer', '2011answer', '2012answer', '2013answer', '2014answer', '2015answer', and '2016annotated'.

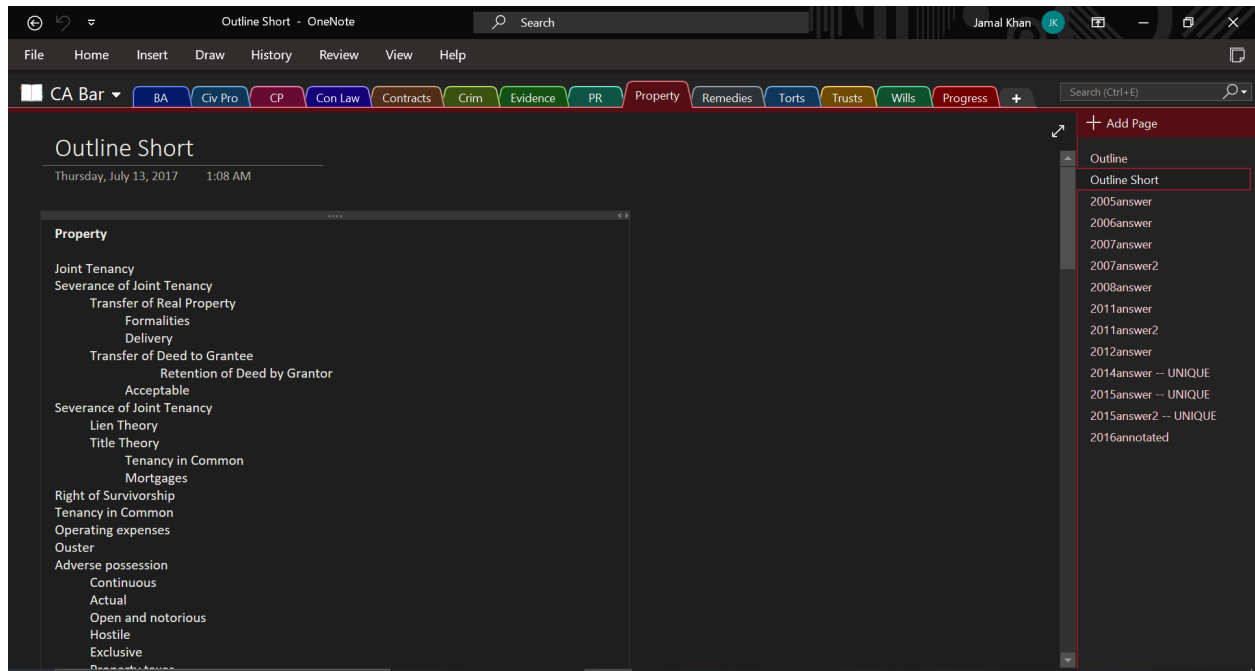
At the top, you can see the tabs for each topic (Civil Procedure, Contracts, etc.) Within each tab, I created a separate page for each answer, ordered by year (you can see the list of pages on the right hand side).

For a given topic like Property, my procedure was the following:

I first created a page called Outline. I went through the model answers one by one and typed the black letter law into the page, not including the facts or the application of the law to the facts. Obviously, the more model answers I went through, the more redundant black letter law I came across that I didn't need to type into the outline because it was already there from a previous model answer. Here's what my outline looked like:

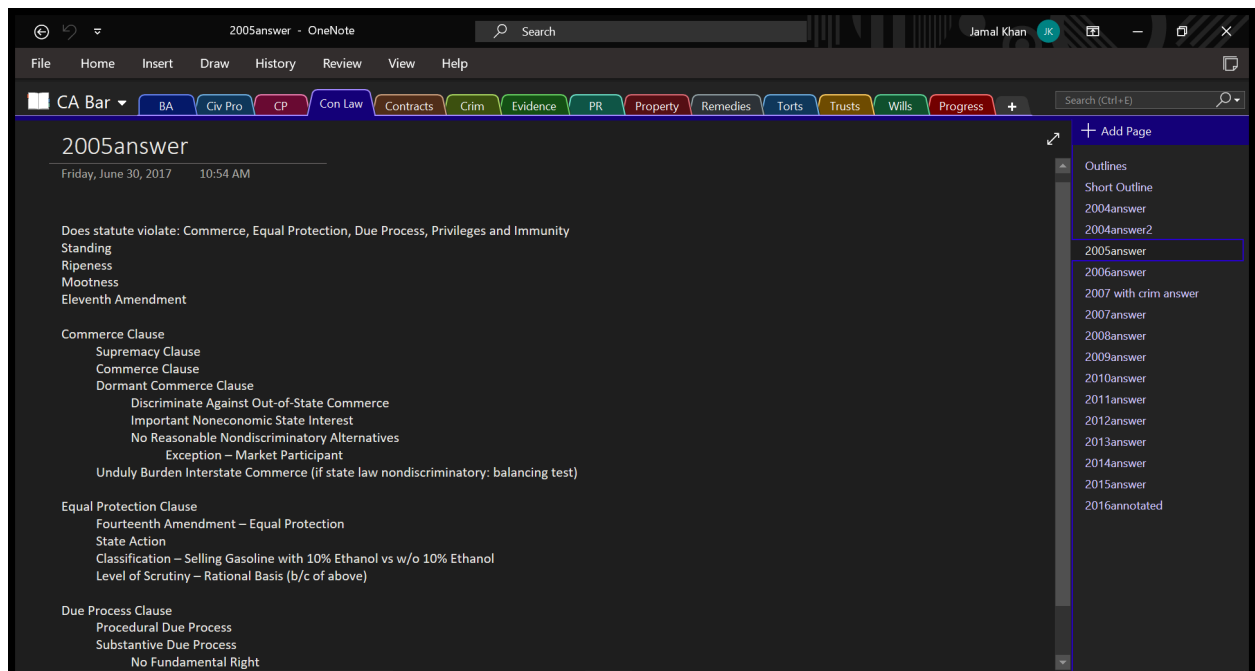


After I completed the overall outline, I created a second page with a short outline. Here's what that looked like:

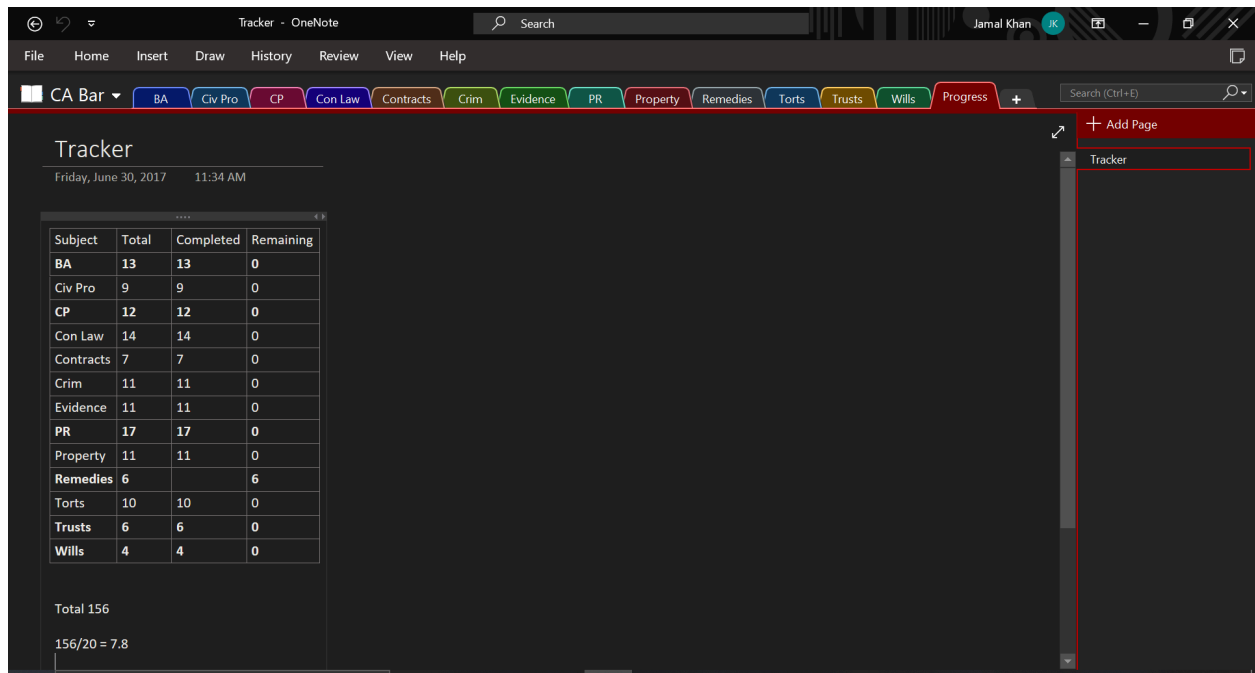


Completing the long and short outlines gave me a comprehensive overview of the black letter law that came up again and again for that topic.

For each subsequent page that focused on a specific question, I typed out the main areas of law from the model answer (not the entire model answer):



I also created a tracking page that contained the total number of questions for each topic, the number of questions I had completed, and the number of questions remaining:



The screenshot shows a OneNote application window with a dark theme. The title bar reads 'Tracker - OneNote'. The ribbon at the top includes 'File', 'Home', 'Insert', 'Draw', 'History', 'Review', 'View', and 'Help'. Below the ribbon is a navigation bar with tabs for 'CA Bar', 'BA', 'Civ Pro', 'CP', 'Con Law', 'Contracts', 'Crim', 'Evidence', 'PR', 'Property', 'Remedies', 'Torts', 'Trusts', 'Wills', and 'Progress'. The 'Tracker' page is open, displaying a table with the following data:

Subject	Total	Completed	Remaining
BA	13	13	0
Civ Pro	9	9	0
CP	12	12	0
Con Law	14	14	0
Contracts	7	7	0
Crim	11	11	0
Evidence	11	11	0
PR	17	17	0
Property	11	11	0
Remedies	6		6
Torts	10	10	0
Trusts	6	6	0
Wills	4	4	0

Below the table, the text 'Total 156' and the calculation '156/20 = 7.8' are visible. The right sidebar shows a list of pages with 'Tracker' selected.

You can add up the total number of questions and divide it by the number of days you've devoted to essays. For example, if there are 200 questions and you have 40 days to study for the essays, then you'll need to go through five questions per day to cover all of them. Start with the questions from previous years and work your way up to the more recent questions.

Next, I printed all the questions out. I didn't need to print out the model answers.

How did I go through each question? Here were my steps:

First, I simply read the question. I didn't think too hard about what the answer would be. I just read it and absorbed the facts.

Then I went to the OneNote page for that question and found the short outline of the answer that I had already typed. I handwrote the short outline of the model answer directly onto the physical page below the question.

I read through the question again, including the short outline I had now handwritten onto the same page.

Then I read the PDF of the full model answer slowly and carefully, occasionally jotting down notes with my pen onto the physical page containing the question. Reading aloud helps with

retention of the material. The more essays I did this with, the easier it became to spot issues. You'll be surprised at how good your recall becomes by doing this over and over again.

That's it! Then I moved on to the next essay question and repeated the steps.

Feel free to do your own variation on my approach.