

Preparing to Prepare for the Bar Exam

Time is of the essence! This term (or phrase) of art certainly holds true for the bar exam preparation period. In the 10 weeks prior to the bar exam, your bar studies will require the bulk of your time and attention. Most California Law graduates spend at least 50 hours per week studying in May and June and 60 hours per week studying in July. While this study commitment is manageable, it does require you to plan your time carefully.

What can you do now to ensure that you have the time you need to study for the bar exam?

- Put in your notice of leave or resignation at work. Let your supervisor know that you will not be working over your bar preparation period, and take steps to ensure that you can afford all of your living expenses without income from a job.
- Start to prepare friends and family for the reality that you will be working hard from graduation through the bar exam.
- Avert potential crises over the summer. Take your car in to get serviced now (don't wait until it breaks down while driving to your bar review course!). Freeze some extra meals, so you have something healthy in a pinch over the summer. Take your pets to the vet, and take yourself for a general physical exam.

Preparing your significant others for the bar exam

Your significant others – loved ones, family, and friends -- are the most important component of your life. They can help you prepare for the bar exam. In fact, when they understand what you're going through to prepare for the bar, they will want to help you.

How can you effectively prepare your significant others for the bar such that they can support you in this endeavor?

- Explain why passing the bar is important to you.
 - You must pass to practice law.
 - You have invested a large amount of time and money in law school, a bar prep course, and the exam itself.
- Explain that you'll need to work hard all summer to pass.
 - Prepare a bar study schedule and share it with your significant others so they know what you're doing.
 - Note that most California Law graduates study for at least 50 to 60 hours per week for the bar exam, each averaging 600 to 800 total hours of study over the summer.
- Explain why maintaining this person's relationship is important to you.
 - Explain that your bar study effort may limit the amount of time you have to spend with your significant others over the summer.
 - *Be clear in advance that you will make this up to them in August after the exam is over.*
 - *Identify something concrete that you will do for your significant others to thank them for their support and patience.*

What can they do to help?

- They can offer support, encouragement and sympathy.
- They can assist you in keeping your distractions at bay. They can help you keep the TV off or clean up the dinner dishes. They may even do your laundry!
- They can screen your phone calls, and prevent individuals who drain your energy from distracting you in the midst of a study block.
- This is not the time to be shy. *Let folks know what you need, and be clear about how you will repay their kindness after the bar exam.*

Perform a Bar Preparation Financial Assessment

Why is this important? Research on bar exam success demonstrates that bar applicants who work more than ten hours per week on something other than bar exam preparation are at a significantly higher risk than those who do not of falling short of their goal of passing the bar exam. Thus, if at all possible, you want to avoid working while you prepare for the bar exam. In other words, bar preparation is a full-time job – typically requiring fifty to sixty hours of work per week. Can you survive the summer without income from a paying job? Do you have sufficient financial resources to cover your living expenses while you study for the bar full time?

How can you determine whether you are financially secure for the bar preparation period? Conduct a financial audit. Examine your actual expenses for an entire month. Record each expenditure. How much do you spend on housing? Utilities? Food (from groceries and restaurants)? Other necessities (like toilet paper and laundry)? Social Activities? Gas? Parking? Clothes? Medical needs? Regular maintenance (doctor's appointments, car repairs, vet expenses)? Pets? Family? Your phone? Calculate your total monthly expenditures. Then, add a sum to take into account unexpected emergency expenses that may be necessary from time to time. Determine how much money you have in the bank. Divide that sum by the number of months between now and next August. Do you have ample monetary resources to cover your monthly expenses (plus potential emergencies) through the bar exam? If yes, smile! If no, let's find a solution to this situation now.

If you are cutting it close financially, what can you do now to avoid a financial crisis during the bar preparation period?

1. Visit the Financial Aid for information about where to go for financial advice and about bar study loans.
2. Examine your budget to determine where you can save money now so that you have sufficient funds for the summer.
3. Talk to family members about whether they will support you financially while you study for the bar. Be explicit about how you will re-pay these individuals once you are employed and practicing law.
4. Consider securing a bar loan to enable you to devote your attention to studying for the bar without worrying about having the resources necessary to pay for food and housing.
5. In other words, take steps to avoid having to work in a paying job while you study for the bar exam.

Perform a Bar Accommodations Assessment

Even if you have never had a specifically-identified testing accommodation for an individualized need in law school (or elsewhere), you may need one on the bar exam. The bar exam is different.

Each state has a set of rules governing what you can bring to the bar exam and how you may act once the exam begins. In California, Rule 4.80 et seq. of the Rules Regulating Admission to Practice Law in California (Rules) govern who will be allowed accommodations for purposes of the bar exam. These rules will likely prompt all students who have received testing accommodations in law school to seek similar accommodations on the bar exam. These rules may also prompt students who have never needed an accommodation to seek one for the first time on the bar exam.

All bar exam accommodations requests require medical documentation and are due no later than the end of April. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THEN! FILE NOW!

Who should prepare a bar exam accommodations request?

- Anyone who sought and obtained testing accommodations in law school should consider an application for similar accommodations on the bar exam.
- Anyone who regularly brings food to exams and eats to sustain sufficient energy throughout exams should consider an application for accommodations (to bring food) on the bar exam. Note that bar applicants are not permitted to bring food into the testing site without an approved accommodation. This means that you must plan to be without food for a minimum of 3.5 hours.
- Anyone who has difficulty writing and uses a particular writing instrument to make that task easier should consider seeking a bar exam accommodation.
- Anyone who may have irritable bowel syndrome (and has to use the bathroom more often during testing or high-stress situations) should consider submitting an accommodations application. You may want a seat close to a bathroom and extra time on the exam to accommodate this condition.