

# BU 231

## Business Law Notes

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These are my compiled notes for **BU 231 - Business Law, Spring 2024** with Keith Masterman. These notes represent mostly material from lecture slides and lectures themselves. Content from the textbook and some internet sources were used to compliment certain content.

To the above, the usefulness of each note may vary - I have tried my best to highlight important bits with bold or italic font, but ultimately please use your own discretion. Another important thing to note is that **no case-specific information** is included here unless the case is super important.

I absolve myself from being liable for any negligent misrepresentation or omissions that may occur from using these notes. If something is wrong, or if you feel something is missing, please tell me and I will update it whenever I get around to it.

These notes were written up in Typst.

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# 1. The Law of Torts

## 1.1. What is a Tort?

### 1.1.1. Definitions

A **tort** is a wrongful act done to the property or person of another, which is recognized by law to be as such. Its main use is to **determine and allocate compensation for harm that has occurred**.

The **tortfeasor** is the person who commits a tort. Usually, they are being sued and are the Defendant.

Torts usually appear in civil cases where the burden of proof isn't absolute - instead, the evidence of proof is a **balance of probabilities** - usually > 50% chances.

Torts are usually a result from the Courts - so the perpetual question is, "**Did the Courts get it right?**" The legislation can sometimes disagree with the courts - they can then make their own torts lol

### 1.1.2. Intentional VS Unintentional Torts

Torts come in 2 flavours, **intentional torts** and **unintentional torts**. Intentional torts require that the action that *causes* the tort be done intentionally, and harm to have occurred. However, the tortfeasor doesn't necessarily wish for the tort to occur.

### 1.1.3. How Torts are Made and Change

Torts are recognized by law - this means that the Courts have judged on this before and decided that "**society's values have shifted such that this tort should be sueable**". If a tort doesn't exist, the Courts must be convinced enough to get them to add it as a new tort!

As society's values change, torts can be added and removed at will to best fit!

## 1.2. Liability, Defenses, and Damages

### 1.2.1. Liability and Fault

**Liability** is just as it sounds like. Who is liable for compensation related to a tort?

#### 1.2.1.1. Strict Liability

Liability is based on causation, regardless of blame or motive. If you were ultimately the person who caused damage to occur, then you're liable.

#### 1.2.1.2. Fault

Is unjustifiable injurious conduct that intentionally or carelessly disregards the interests of others. If you have fault, you are liable! This was created to help deter such faulty behaviour from happening; however it is sometimes defective in undercompensating if fault cannot be shown, and sometimes overcompensation too. Also takes more time to litigate and so on.

#### 1.2.1.3. Vicarious Liability

States that employers (any supervisor) are generally liable for torts their employees committed while employed. The employee is not freed from liability - both victim and employer can sue. This applies to any **reasonably foreseeable torts** committed by employees.

#### 1.2.1.4. History of Liability in Torts

Strict Liability used to be how all torts operate - regardless of blame or intention, if you did the damage, you were liable. No matter what. eventually, we moved on and started using fault for some torts, although others still operate with strict liability, notably public/private nuisance.

#### 1.2.2. Defenses for the Tortfeasor

The tortfeasor has a few defenses against torts (negligence or intentional or otherwise). The judge however can only pick ONE defense. This changes the decision so judge decides how harsh to be!

##### 1.2.2.1. Contributory Negligence

This defense says that Plaintiff in part contributed to their own injuries and thus Defendant isn't *fully* at fault. The plaintiff cannot recover damages fully - up to a % of rewards, decided when the judge/jury **apportions liability**. If they are unable to apportion it, it defaults to 50/50 though!

##### 1.2.2.2. Voluntary Assumption of Risk

The defense says Plaintiff knew **both physical and legal** risks (they'll get hurt + waived right to sue) and **voluntarily** assumed the risk. Then Plaintiff is barred from recovery (zero compensation!)

##### 1.2.2.3. Ex turpi causa (from a dishonorable cause)

If the Plaintiff's injuries occurred while performing an illegal activity, they are awarded zero. However, this defense is controversial and **rarely** used since judges are not supposed to judge morals

##### 1.2.2.4. Consent

If the Plaintiff **informed consents** to a tortious action, no wrong is done and no recovery is possible

##### 1.2.2.5. Self Defense

This defense is usually seen in intentional torts (like assault and battery). This happens when the Plaintiff took **only reasonable steps** to prevent harm to themselves, and only when it's the **last resort** and they have no other options to get out.

#### 1.2.3. Types of Damages

Damages refer to the compensation that is awarded to the Plaintiff to offset their injuries from the tort.

##### 1.2.3.1. Special (Pecuniary) Damages

These are **quantifiable** damages that can be claimed - extra expenses otherwise not incurred, loss of wages, any bills, funeral costs - as long as it's reliably quantifiable, it would fall under this.

##### 1.2.3.2. General Damages

These are **non-quantifiable**, like damages for pain & suffering, loss of future earning capacity, etc.

##### 1.2.3.3. Punitive (Rare) Damages

These technically do not correlate to any injury suffered by the Plaintiff; instead the Courts are **punishing** the Defendant for egregious behaviour to make sure it doesn't happen again. This happens more in the US, with larger punitive damages as well.

### 1.3. Intentional Torts

As mentioned earlier, these torts require the tortious action to be **intended** (though the tort itself can be unintended). In addition, harm **must** be caused.

There are **elements** to each tort that defines it. All elements of the tort **must be present** for the claim to succeed; the onus is on the plaintiff to prove the elements exist.

#### 1.3.1. Assault

This is intending to cause a trespass to the person. This is usually found together with battery.

1. **Intentionally**
2. Uttering a **threat**
3. Likely to cause a **reasonable apprehension** of imminent physical harm
4. Against a **person or an identifiable group**

#### 1.3.2. Battery

Actually committing violence threatened in the assault tort.

1. **Intentionally**
2. Applying **unlawful force**
3. **Without Consent**

Interesting examples include Nonconsensual Doctoring - if a doctor operates on you without your consent, each instance they touch you counts as a battery! Another example is in sport - if there is deemed to be "too much contact" it could be a battery.

Common defenses to this tort are that it was **consented to**, explicitly or implicitly.

#### 1.3.3. Intentional Infliction of Mental Distress

A relatively new tort that recognizes acts that lead to physical/psychopathological harm. This tort **requires intent to cause harm**, but actual harm caused does not need to be the harm intended.

1. Defendant's Conduct was **flagrant and outrageous**
2. Defendant calculated their actions will **harm the Plaintiff** (aka, they intended to harm)
3. Defendant's Conduct caused Plaintiff to **suffer visible and provable illness**.

#### 1.3.4. False Imprisonment

Restraining/Confining someone against their will unlawfully, and **need not be physical** (psychological OK too! (like threats I guess)) It is not false imprisonment if the police lay charges, so when in doubt just **call the police** instead of doing a citizen's arrest or something.

1. **Intentional**
2. **Total Confinement** of a person against their will
3. **Without Lawful Justification**

There is a relatively new defense to this - **Shopkeeper's Privilege**. If you are **very reasonably** sure that someone is committing a crime (for instance, a shoplifter in ye shoppe), you could use this as a defense in court, even if the person ended up being innocent! However to be clear, you still did the tort.

### 1.3.5. Malicious Prosecution

As described - reporting a person to the police when there is no good reason to believe that person committed a crime.

1. A Proceeding **initiated by the tortfeasor** so that:
  1. They withheld exculpatory information from the police
  2. They undermined the independence of the police investigation
  3. They communicated with police so that it misled them not to conduct an indep. investigation
  4. They undermined the indep. of the decision-making process to lay charges and prosecute
2. The Proceeding terminated **in favour of the plaintiff** (no charges laid)
3. Undertaken **without reasonable and probable cause** to commence/continue the investigation
4. **Motivated by malice** or some other reason other than carrying the law into effect.

### 1.3.6. Defamation

Making **untrue** statements that cause injury to the reputation of another. Can either be **slander** (spoken) or **libel** (written). Notably, **they assume that harm is done**.

1. **Defamatory material** that lowers the plaintiff's reputation in the eye of a *reasonable* person
2. Material must **refer to the plaintiff**
3. The material must be communicated or published to **at least 1 other person**

There are cases where defamation is not possible:

- In court and legislation, defamation is not possible as the speaker has **absolute privilege**
- When the speaker has a responsibility to provide a statement, and it was without malice and within relationship or job scope, the speaker has **qualified privilege**.

### 1.3.7. Trespass

The act of entering another's land without their consent. It is important that **harm needs to be done**.

1. **Intentionally**
2. **Entering Property**
3. **Without Consent**

In law, your land stretches up towards the heavens and down towards the earth's center. Back then, this means that people could (and did!) sue for airplanes trespassing into their land lol.

### 1.3.8. Public Nuisance

This tort is **strict liability**. It is interference with the use of public lands, often quasi-criminal. For example, occupation of public spaces etc. The only defense is to show damages were **trifle**.

### 1.3.9. Private Nuisance

This tort is **strict liability**. Interference with an occupier's use and enjoyment of their land. It includes both physical nuisance but also **amenities nuisance**, interfering with the use of amenities on the property. Like with Public Nuisance, the only defense is to show damages were **trifle**.

### **1.3.10. Intrusion on Seclusion**

An important extra tort to know in Ontario at least; it involves **breaking the rights of privacy** and **causing harm**.

### **1.3.11. Negligent Investigation**

An example of a new tort - a mix of classic negligence with a focus on Crown/police investigations

### **1.3.12. Dog Owner's Liability Act**

An example of a strict liability tort - in legislation, dog owners are strictly liable for dog bites/damage!

### **1.3.13. Wrongful Birth**

This tort exists - you can sue your doctor if they failed to advise against your birth, given extreme circumstances and lifelong suffering and the like.

## 1.4. Unintentional Torts (Negligence)

Negligence is the biggest type of Unintentional Tort out there - so much so that it *could* cover all.

### 1.4.1. Definitions

**Negligence** is the *careless causing of harm* to the person or property of another. It has 4 elements:

1. The defendant owed the plaintiff a **duty of care**
2. The duty of care was breached as the defendant **fell below the standard of care**
3. **Harm/Damages Occurred**
4. The defendant's actions **caused** the harm/damages.

### 1.4.2. History

In the past, around the Industrial Era, there was of course horrible mistreatment of workers, sending workers to die in the mines in droves. Workers tried to sue for Duty of Care, however back then Duty of Care was outlined in the contract - and since no contract was signed, they can't sue! Employees used to not have a duty of care to workers aside from what the contract says. Thanks capitalism.

But this all changed in the fateful **Donoghue v. Stevenson (1932)** case. Donoghue had bought a ginger beer from Stevenson, which apparently contained a decomposed snail. She got ill and sued. After lots of failure in the lower courts (since there's no direct intent to tort), this eventually got to the highest courts, who said "Nah wait sec hold on a moment". They expanded and established General Principles of Duty of Care significantly, and the principle of "Neighbours in Law"

### 1.4.3. Duty of Care

A **duty of care** is any relationship to which one could foreseeably cause harm to another. As outlined by Donoghue v. Stevenson, "**you must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to injure your neighbour**" - you should think of them!

A **neighbour in law** is anyone who is closely and directly affected by one's actions; such that one should reasonably have thought they'd be effected when performing the negligent act.

The general test (also called the "Anns Test") has 2 steps:

1. Is there a sufficiently **close relationship** between the parties such that the damages caused by carelessness from one of the parties is **reasonably foreseeable**?
2. Are there any policy concerns or considerations that should limit the **scope**, the **class of persons** to which it is owed, or the **damages** that a breach of it should give rise to?

### 1.4.4. Falling Below a Standard of Care

In general, falling below a standard of care means that you did not do what a **reasonable ordinary person** would have done in the scenario; thus the negligence! There are some exceptions:

- Professionals have additional standards they are held to, and must act like a **reasonable and competent person in their profession**, if the negligent act requires specialized skill/ knowledge.
- Professionals must also **avoid conflicts of interest** as part of their standard of care.
- Specialists in a field are held to a higher standard than generalists - surgeons VS the family doctor.



- Children are held to the standard of a reasonable child of the **same age**; unless they are engaged in an adult activity (like driving), then it's a reasonable adult.

#### 1.4.5. Injury and Causing Said Injury

Harm or Loss must occur for negligence to occur, but did the defendant *cause* it to happen?

##### 1.4.5.1. The “But For Test”

This test simply states, “**but for** the conduct of the tortfeasor, would the harm/injury have happened?” If yes, then this is the cause of the loss or harm! Essentially, outcomes that would have been inevitable cannot be sued for - the acts of the defendant must have caused it.

Note that the defendant does not need to be the *sole* cause of harm - it is sufficient to show the defendant's conduct, in part, was **a cause** for the harm.

##### 1.4.5.2. Res Ipsa Loquitur (the thing speaks for itself)

This is a doctrine that allows judges to make a “Quantum Leap of Logic” to automatically deduce liability regardless of evidence, since the sheer fact that this accident occurs implies negligence. Usually seen in manufacturing. Formally, it has these parts:

1. The injury would not have occurred (or is really unlikely) if no one was negligent
2. The defendant (usually the manufacturer) was likely the negligent party
3. The plaintiff did not **voluntarily** contribute to the accident occurring
4. There is no other evidence that explains how the accident occurred

##### 1.4.5.3. Malfeasance and Nonfeasance

**Nonfeasance** refers to failing to provide a positive act (for example, not saving a dying person). In Ontario, it is **not punishable**, unless explicitly stated to be in statute.

**Malfeasance** says that if a positive act was provided, but done negligently, the actor is liable for any **additional damages caused** (like saving a drowning person but dragging their face across the rocks and giving them head trauma). The positive act fell below a certain standard, and thus there is liability.

Interestingly, Google distinguishes **malfeasance** and **misfeasance** - misfeasance states that the damages caused was **unintentional**; while malfeasance states that it was **intentional**.

## 1.5. Other Unintentional Torts

### 1.5.1. Product Liability

In short, the plaintiff must prove that the product **fell short of reasonable standards**, thus harmful.

#### 1.5.1.1. Subcategories to Product Liability

- **Negligent Design:** When the product itself was designed badly (i.e. exploding Ford Pinto)
- **Negligent Manufacture:** A glaring mishap in the manufacturing process (like a snail in ya soda)
- **Failure to Warn:** Failing to warn consumers about faulty products (not sending recalls, not putting safety warnings, etc.)

#### 1.5.1.2. Ongoing Duty to Warn

For some products, manufacturers have an **ongoing** duty to warn users of the risks of using its products, and send notice to them if something comes up (if that advice is heeded is not their responsibility - that's voluntary assumption of risk).

This applies to dangerous products (cigarettes, explosives, corrosives), products found to be defective, and new scientific or technological advancements. Especially applies for **unexpected risks**.

### 1.5.2. Occupier's Liability

This outlines that people who occupy/own (tenant/owner) a property **owe a duty of care** to anyone who enters those premises. An occupier is any person who has control over the property. Essentially, people entering your property should not die or get injured due to the condition of the property.

A separate duty of care is also owed to *trespassers* - they are still owed a **duty of general humanity** and thus you **cannot set traps** - you cannot **create harm**. Otherwise, the standard of care is minimal.

If signage is placed, it depends on the ambiguity of the wording and if a notion of consent exists. Also, if the sign is visible (and for that matter, if the plaintiff can read).

### 1.5.3. Failure to Supervise

An interesting new tort: says that people have a duty to supervise children, and if the child causes or incurs damages, the supervisor can be liable. This includes babysitters, teachers etc.

## 1.6. Business-Related Torts

### 1.6.1. Passing-Off

This is essentially forgery, when you attempt to “pass off” one of your products as those of another party, unfairly taking advantage of their brand power and misleading consumers.

### 1.6.2. Product Defamation

Defamation but for someone’s property. Not much to say here.

### 1.6.3. Inducing Breach of Contract

Occurs when the tortfeasor knows of a contract signed between 2 parties, and takes **active** steps to break said contract. For example, stealing employees from one of your competitors. Not cool.

### 1.6.4. Unlawful Interference with Economic Relations

Here, unlawful is the true meaning of the word - doing something genuinely criminal or quasi-criminal, with intention to injure/interfere with someone’s ability to do business or earn a living. (Ex. Bribery)

1. There is an existing business relationship the defendant **knew about**
2. The defendant **intended** to act to interfere with it
3. Acts taken to interfere are **illegal**
4. This interference caused a **loss**

### 1.6.5. Negligent Misrepresentation

A tort that was conceived in *Hedley Byrne & Co. Ltd v. Heller and Partners*, [1964], A.C. 465.

Though the Plaintiff lost the case the courts still decided to start recognizing this and became formal in 1971.

**Representation** is any statement - written, verbal, or action. **Misrepresentation** is thus any untrue statement. Negligent Misrepresentation covers cases where it was untrue due to carelessness.

Especially important for professionals - you’re responsible to **not do this!**

1. A statement is made that is **false**
2. The statement Maker owes the statement Hearer a duty of care (subject to policy considerations to limit liability - are you an actual client, etc? Important due to internet info spread - liable to all?)
3. The statement fell **below the standard of care**
4. The Hearer **reasonably acts** on the Statement and suffers a **loss** as a result of the action taken.

### 1.6.6. Fraudulent Representation

Established in the same case above, it comes misrepresentation that is **intentionally untrue**, so lying.

1. A statement is made that is **false**
2. The statement Maker knows the statement is false (They’re lying!!!)
3. The Hearer **reasonably acts** on the Statement and suffers a **loss** as a result of the action taken.

Fraudulent misrepresentation often has higher damages than negligent ones - the court could rescind the contract and/or award extra damages - **or** for negligent; but **and** for fraudulent. Thus fraudulent misrepresentation is the better recourse if possible.

## 1.7. Liabilities Part 2

### 1.7.1. Fiduciary Duty

A **fiduciary duty** is an overarching “super duty” that if X breaches, X is liable. A hybrid between tort and contract that applies in certain scenarios. Please don’t try to find fiduciary duty everywhere - this only applies to certain scenarios with imbalanced power.

A **fiduciary** stands in a **special relationship of trust to another**. They are the dominant party to a subservient party, who relies on them. Fiduciaries also apply to some professionals who act in a “trust” relationship with their clients.

A previous court case *Frame v. Smith*, [1987] SCR 99 at 136 defines a **fiduciary** as follows:

1. Has the scope to **exercise some discretion or power**
2. Able to **unilaterally exercise power** to affect beneficiary legally or practically
3. The beneficiary is **particularly vulnerable to / at the mercy of** the fiduciary

Some in-class examples include, the director of a company to the company; a husband holding assets for a wife; an old woman relying on only 1 banker ever; pension investors to pensioners apparently (even if they never even met!) Relationships can change from contractual to fiduciary - if 1 party becomes heavily reliant or vulnerable in a way that only the other party can protect them

As a fiduciary, your duties include (**in addition to the normal duty of care**):

1. Place the beneficiary’s interests **above all** (except for the law)
2. **No conflicts of interest allowed**

### 1.7.2. Professional Liability

The modern-day definition of a professional is **anyone with specialized knowledge that the general public relies on**. As mentioned earlier, professionals have a higher standard of care, equivalent to any other reasonable professional in the field, and scales depending on their specialization. They also need to avoid conflicts of interest and so on.

But who do they owe a Duty of Care to? As the General Public relies on these professionals, there could be **unlimited liability** as anyone who even happens on your work (like a published financial report from an analyst on the internet) could claim a Duty of Care and ask for damages. (3rd Party Liability)

This obviously isn’t good, since you would owe a Duty to Care to an absurd number of people. This is why Duty of Care for professionals often are dealt on a **case by case basis** and have lots of **policy** to limit liability - for the latter, recall the Anns test, which lets us limit liability due to policy reasons.

In summary, here are some common ways to limit professional liability:

- Utilize Policy Reasons to limit Duty of Care: you could argue that the plaintiff is not your client
- **Retainer agreement**: A contract stating you will do exactly what is contracted of them to do and nothing more; anything else that occurs is not your problem and thus you are not liable for it.

## 1.8. Fun Facts

### 1.8.1. How long can you wait to sue someone after a tort?

In general, 6 years after a tort occurred; unless you are a child at the time, then 6 years after adulthood.

### 1.8.2. Tort of Harassment?

There is a tort of harassment in the US, but not in Canada, mainly due to the problem of intention - was the harassment intended I guess.

### 1.8.3. Defamation and Anti-SLAPP Laws

Defamation leads to interesting free speech issues, especially when it comes to media coverage. News agencies might just find themselves being sued for exposing things, and then be silenced since the Plaintiff has lots of money to throw. This is called **strategic lawsuits against public participation** (SLAPP) and they intimidate and silence criticism by dragging critics through legal hell.

Anti-SLAPP laws try to remedy this. If the defendant makes a motion to dismiss the case since “this is a matter of public interest and this trial is frivolous”. The plaintiff then needs to show they ain’t bluffing - show the case has merit, with actual evidence that will cause irreparable damage to them. If they can’t do this the suit is dismissed instantly!

In summary, Anti-SLAPP laws help news organizations protect themselves from being bullied with defamation lawsuits.

### 1.8.4. The Thin-Skulled Plaintiff

This is a principle or law that says that tortfeasors “take their victim as they find them” - if the Plaintiff suffers injuries or damages that are unexpectedly severe due to some precondition or vulnerability, they are still liable even if the damages are higher than if the victim were an “average person”.

### 1.8.5. The Courts do not want you to sue people

They are trying to minimize the number of cases they have by limiting liability (so you can’t sue everyone). In doing so, they are sometimes unfair and favour those who can pay for lawyers. They’re trying their best.

## 2. The Law of Contracts

### 2.1. Introduction to Contract Law

#### 2.1.1. What is a Contract?

A contract is a **set of promises** that the law can enforce. In general, it is any agreement.

#### 2.1.2. The Suspicions of a John Swan, the Prof's Prof

When Prof. Masterman was learning about Contract Law, his prof. told him that

*"Everything that I teach you is utter crap" - John Swan, the Prof's Prof*

This seems to be due to their observations about how the courts sometimes handle similar court cases, giving contradictory verdicts without any certainty. Their hypothesis is that the courts are actually **manipulating the rules** to choose who they want to win. So no one really knows the rules!

In particular, the courts basically decide who gets the insurance payouts so they move accordingly. This is important to keep in mind in contract law.

#### 2.1.3. A Rant on the failure of the Law of Precedent

The Courts follow the **Law of Precedent** - Lower Courts follow rules established by Upper Courts in their previous rulings. This is why decisions in cases matter - they set a precedent to be followed! This is ultimately because the courts are trying to **eliminate the courts** - in the end, every possible case would have had a precedent!

However, this is a bit of a failure as lawyers keep piling on  $\infty$  numbers of exceptions as  $t \rightarrow \infty$ , so there is never a precedent! Keep this in mind with contract law - past contract rulings might basically have no effect.

#### 2.1.4. Equity VS Common Law

Another thing to remember is how **equity** plays into the law - what is deemed fair. This could be yet another exception! For example things like equitable remedies I guess.

#### 2.1.5. Contract Law Stairway

1. What is a Contract, formally?
2. What are the defences to a contract (how can you get out of one?)
3. How is a contract interpreted, especially where there are points of ambiguity?
4. How are damages awarded?

## 2.2. Elements to a Contract

There are 7 big elements to a contract. The courts **must see** 3 of the 7 - Offer, Acceptance, and Consideration; the other 4 the courts **assume to have been met** unless 1 party asks to dispute that.

### 2.2.1. Offer

An **offer** is a tentative promise made by one party (the **offeror**) in exchange for conditions/requests from the other party (the **offeree**). Once accepted, the terms are **binding** on both parties.

- All terms must be **definite and certain**. Specific prices, specific times etc. No uncertainty!
- The offer must be **communicated** to the intended recipient - verbally, through writing, digital mediums (with back and forth) or even through actions and conduct. **An offer cannot be accepted until the offeree knows of it!**

#### 2.2.1.1. Standard Form Contracts

**Standard Form Contracts (Contracts of Adhesion)** are “take it or leave it” offers, where there is no room for negotiation and you are essentially forced into taking the offer. The most prominent example is that of the parking lot ticket. Although they are fast and easy (and needed for a lot of businesses to run in linear time), they leave the offeree with highly unequal bargaining power and they cannot negotiate terms at all. The question is - how would a consumer get out of the contract?

#### 2.2.1.2. Contra Proferentum (Against the Offeror)

The rule of Contra Proferentum can be used to get out of Adhesion Contracts. It states that **any ambiguity in a contract is leveraged against the drafter**. Ambiguities are not binding!

The specific test for ambiguity is to check that the clause is broad enough to encompass negligence (ex. you can't sue us for negligence) and broad enough to encompass another cause of action (ex. also contract breach).

If both of the above are true, the statement is **ambiguous!** This is why formal contracts are so long - they take the time to list out every specific cause of action.

#### 2.2.1.3. Inadequate Notice of Terms

Another way out of Adhesion Contracts is through **Inadequate Notice of Terms**. If you can prove that you were not given enough time to read all clauses and were forced to accept, then you were not given adequate notice and thus the contract is not binding. The definition of “reasonably sufficient notice” may differ on a per-case basis.

#### 2.2.1.4. Lapse, Revocation and Counteroffers

**Lapse** refers to how contracts don't last forever. Contracts lapse after a *reasonable* amount of time, or in a timeframe otherwise specified in the contract. Note: you are allowed to set any time you want as the timeframe for acceptance! (If you don't let the Court choose for you, that is)

**Revocation** allows offerors to cancel offers at any time **before acceptance**. This has 2 exceptions: **option contracts**, a separate contract where the right to revoke was bought; and **contracts under seal**, contracts with a red dot/X at the end of names (this also extends the litigation period since they are specialty contracts lol). *You cannot enforce irrevocability in the contract.*

Offers usually aren't a one-and-done deal - negotiations can occur! When one side makes an offer, and the other side makes a **counter-offer** (any modification of the offer), the original offer is considered rejected and is immediately voided. Instead, the counter-offer is a **new offer** that can be accepted or rejected, and the process repeats.

#### 2.2.1.5. Offer and Consumers

Here are some notable cases involving sales of goods and services as seen in the textbook:

- Invitations to do business (aka, *most* advertisements) are **not contracts**. They simply are ways to entice customers to start a contract of sale. It is the customer who, after being enticed, makes the offer; and the seller who holds the power to accept or reject.
- Having goods or services provided without request or knowledge doesn't form a contract, since no offer was made and thus accepted. Notably applies to unsolicited goods and services, with additional legislation to prevent "default assumed offer acceptance" if it was unsolicited but there was an untaken opportunity to reject it.

#### 2.2.2. Acceptance

Formally, **acceptance** is the final unqualified (unconditional?) consent to the terms of the offer by the offeree, which is then **communicated** to the offeror by word or by specific conduct. Regardless, the acceptance must be a *positive* action (silence or no action cannot be an acceptance (unless agreed that it can be)).

Certain types of contracts are **unilateral contracts** - these are contracts that are accepted by performing act(s) required by the terms of an offer. In this case, acceptance happens *only through performance* of the acts specified.

##### 2.2.2.1. The Postal Acceptance Rule

Special rules apply to contracts negotiated through mail, due to antics related to mail delay. Notably, acceptance is binding when **it is put in the mailbox**, and revocation is only binding when **the other party receives it**.

This can lead to a funny scenario where the offeree accepts an offer that the offerer was trying to revoke - but the revocation was still in transit when the acceptance was put into the mailbox. The revocation is too late and the contract is binding! lol

This is also why you **DATE** all your letters - you need to have your evidence for this sort of thing!



### 2.2.3. Consideration

Consideration is essentially the **price** - what is exchanged for which the promise of the other is bought. Consideration is usually money, but it doesn't have to be - it can be performance (a promise to act), or goods and services. **Both parties must give something** as part of the contract!

#### 2.2.3.1. Gratuitous Promises

If one party doesn't give up anything, it **does not count as Consideration**. Both promise something! This is why charities usually provide some sort of promise back (even a annual dinner is enough)

#### 2.2.3.2. Past Consideration

**Past Consideration is not Consideration** - Consideration that occurred before the contract was signed **does not count**. In addition, continuing consideration (defined as performing an existing legal duty) doesn't count either - it needs to be **new consideration**.

#### 2.2.3.3. Adequacy of Consideration

The courts do not care if the contract is a fair trade - you are allowed to give a mere peppercorn, and it would be sufficient as consideration. However, both parties must ensure that the consideration is **something they have a legal right to** - for instance, in one case ruling, the right to complain cannot be given up so a "contract" involving that did not count.

#### 2.2.3.4. Exceptions to the Requirement of Consideration

##### 2.2.3.4.1. Debtor/Creditor Rule & Mercantile Law Amendment Act

This was a whole debacle of events involving the *Foakes v. Beer* case, where a debtor could only pay partially, which the creditor originally accepted. They then sued for breach of the original debt contract. The courts ruled in favour of the creditor - since the debtor has not given up **new consideration** (they're getting a freebie with debt relief), thus no new contract was formed & remaining still owed.

Immediately after that though, legislatures across Canada immediately moved to pass the Mercantile Law Amendment Act - when a creditor **accepts** part performance (positive action of some \$) to settle a debt, and the debtor pays that partial amount in full, then the entire debt is extinguished. Despite lack of consideration, it's a binding agreement!

##### 2.2.3.4.2. Sealed Contracts

Seen earlier under revocation, sealed contracts do not require any consideration to be binding.

##### 2.2.3.4.3. Equitable Estoppel

1. Some form of legal relationship between the 2 different parties **already exists**
2. One party (gratuitously?) promises to release them from some or all of their legal duties to them
3. The other party acts on that promise in a way that **alters their position** such that if the promiser re-negs on their promise it would provide extreme hardship.

In this case, the courts use "equitable" jurisdiction to prevent the promiser from **denying the promise was untruthful** - that party can't back out. Notably this **can only be used as a shield, not a sword** - the promisee uses this to prevent action by the promisor to enforce their original rights.

### 2.2.4. Intention to Create Legal Relations

Unless brought up specifically during court, this element is assumed to have been fulfilled in a contract.

If it is raised though, the courts employ the **reasonable bystander test** - did the outward conduct/ context of the 2 parties lack serious intent to create legal obligations (for example, jokes or alcohol)

As a consequence of the reasonable bystander test, the Courts also generally assume you don't want to create legal relations with **family** or in scenarios that **lack common sense** (obviously joking I guess)

### 2.2.5. Capacity

Capacity is the ability for a party to enter a contract. For instance: minors and people with reduced mental capacity. No capacity = no contract.

Minors are still bound to contracts for supplying **necessary or essential goods or services** - anything needed for their station of life, or anything they don't have an adequate supply of (for some definition of necessary or essential - for example, does a car count?)

In addition, they're also bound by **contracts of service that benefit them** - employment contracts and the like. *Seemingly*, beneficial is defined in the sense of opportunity cost - if there is a better work contract or something it could be argued that the existing work contract is no longer beneficial

For any other contract, the minor gets to choose whether they back out or enforce the contract, seemingly allowing them to **void contracts at whim**? As for when the minor reaches the age of majority, the following happens:

1. For contracts where they gain a permanent or continuous interest (like things paid in installments), they should back out **immediately** if they want to be released from those obligations; otherwise they lose the right to do so for that contract.
2. Any contracts for non-continuous interests require **ratification** (acknowledgement and promise to perform) after they reach majority. This is required for example when you buy something where the payment happens after the date of majority.

People who are have diminished mental capacity follow the same rules as a minor would.

#### 2.2.5.1. Aside: Void VS Voidable

**Void** contracts refer to a contract that never existed, failing to form due to lack of requirements.

**Voidable** contracts instead exist, but can be turned void at the option of one of the parties. If a contract is found void, the court tries its best to return the parties to their original positions. It can also decide only parts of a contract are void and **sever** (remove) those void parts of the contract.

#### 2.2.5.2. Other Groups with Capacity Concerns

1. Corporations - they are separate legal entities and have their own rules on capacity.
2. Labour Unions, Associations and other Organizations - unless they incorporate, its not a separate legal entity - use **representative action** (1 person represents group in court actions)
3. Aboriginal Peoples living on Reservations - thanks outdated Indian Act. They are "special unincorporated associations" and have representative capacity like a labour union
4. Bankrupts - under contractual disabilities (save for necessity) until discharged from bankruptcy.

### 2.2.6. Illegal Contracts

Contracts that violate an Act, Statute or Public policy are **unenforceable** - the courts cannot provide assistance to remedy. There are some cases where the contract is deemed void under a statute - then the court could still intervene to restore positions but the contract still basically didn't exist.

For example, contracts going against the *Criminal Code* (robberies, assassination? idk), the *Income Tax Act* (sneaky payments to avoid them), the *Competitions Act* (no anti-competitive behaviour) and the *Law Society Act* (regulating the legal profession in Ontario) violate acts.

As for violating common law or public policy, this includes things like compensation (indemnity) for committing torts (bail out of consequences?), as well as contracts deemed immoral, a perversion of justice, or prejudicial to the interests of the Canadian public.

Oh also a thing about the Competitions Act - technically NDAs are unenforceable unless in the context of sale of business and employment (which is what you usually see them in anyways). The enforcing clauses must be unambiguous in location, activity, and time period for it to be reasonable and enforceable.

### 2.2.7. Certainty of Terms

The terms of a contract must be absolutely certain and unambiguous - if there is any vague or incomplete terms in the contract, it may be deemed **void** by the Courts, and thus no contract was ever formed.

Examples of vague terms include:

- **Fair Value** - instead of explaining how monetary value should be determined, they just use this or an equivalent term to waive it off. Not OK!
- **Incomplete Contracts** - Contracts missing essential terms like price, what's being purchased, handover dates, and other items.

## 2.3. Contract Impeachment

Now that we have discussed what a contract is, we can discuss how a contract can be set aside - a way out, a defense, an ability to renege.

### 2.3.1. Mistake

Mistakes happen, and despite our best efforts they can sometimes make it onto contracts (*I swear if people start using ChatGPT to draft contracts I am going to commit so many torts*)

#### 2.3.1.1. The General Principle to Finding Mistake

Although Mistake has its own subcategories, Prof. Masterman insists that if:

1. There was indeed a mistake in the Contract
2. The acceptor's interpretation of the mistake is reasonable to a reasonable bystander

then the contract is still binding and you will have to deal with that mistake. In other words, a contract can be voidable if the acceptor abuses the mistake to screw over the other party.

#### 2.3.1.2. Rectification of Mistakes

**Rectification** is the correction of written documents to fix mistakes. The courts will fix the terms that contain mistakes, subject to the following:

For **Mutual Mistakes**, where both parties made a mistake of some sort, the contract doesn't reflect the parties' shared common intention so can be rectified through renegotiation.

For **Unilateral Mistakes**, where only 1 party claims a mistake was made, the courts need that:

1. There was otherwise a complete oral agreement between the parties on all terms
2. No further negotiations occurred to amend the contract
3. The mistake in the contract *could have* been due to fraud (optional)
4. The defendant (should have) known of the mistake and the plaintiff did not when signing
5. Any subsequent attempt to enforce the inaccurate document would be equivalent to fraud

would they rectify the contract. As such, for unilateral mistakes, rectification is **very rare** and an **extreme remedy**.

#### 2.3.1.3. Mistake in Terms and Meaning

##### 2.3.1.3.1. Inadvertent Word Usage / Typographical Errors

Typos happen! If a reasonable bystander would recognize that a mistake occurred, then the contract would be **voidable** by the discretion of the party who made the mistake. The courts could also choose to **rectify** the contract.

##### 2.3.1.3.2. Errors in Recording Terms to Writing

Usually occurs when oral agreement was improperly converted to writing. Usually, these parties don't want to void the full contract - thus the courts offer **rectification** as a remedy as outlined by the section on rectification above.

### 2.3.1.3.3. Misunderstanding the Semantic Meaning of Words

The 2 parties may interpret the same words differently. In this case:

- If there are unequally reasonable interpretations, the court will decide which meaning is the most reasonable in light of the fact matrix, and the contract is **binding** under those semantics.
- If the 2 interpretations are equally reasonable, then the courts rule there is **mutual mistake** and the contract is **void** for mistake as to the meaning of terms. This is “essentially” an instant defendant win though if you think about it hard enough

### 2.3.1.4. Mistake in the Subject Matter

#### 2.3.1.4.1. Wrongly Assuming the Existence of Something

Oops, you tried to sell something that doesn't exist, or got destroyed; or you're getting insurance for something that's in the middle of being on fire! In these cases the contract is deemed **void** - obviously there's no way to reasonably enforce that contract.

#### 2.3.1.4.2. Misvalued Assets and Promises

What if a party made a mistake in the valuation of an asset (and was about to get ripped off)? The Courts will intervene if the mistake in value was present from the outset - a **fundamental egregious mistake** at the onset of the contract (subject to interpretation). The courts will not intervene due to market price flux. The contract gets **voided**.

#### 2.3.1.4.3. False Identities in the Contract

If one party tricks the other into thinking they're someone they're not, the contract is **voided**.

However if the *identity assumed must be an existing one* - if the identity was fake or non-existent, its only **voidable** but you can only really get compensation from that “party” listed on the contract so good luck with recovery lol. Murky law.

Also, if mistake in identity occurs but the 2 parties have met in person, the contract is only voidable.

### 2.3.1.5. Mistake in Document Nature (Non Est Factum)

In Latin, it translates to “not my doing” - essentially “**This is not the contract I agreed to**”. This was a very historical defense devised for the illiterate, who could be *tricked* by the literate party into signing - you're relying on another's word that the document is correct. Today it is often used for the persons with blindness or who are illiterate.

Note - this defense **does not work if you were careless in not reading** - this was the case at some point but the courts reverted that decision. This defense is limited in the sense that you couldn't have been careless yet still signed a document while being mistaken about its nature.

## 2.3.2. Misrepresentation

### 2.3.2.1. Wait, isn't this Tort Law?

Well, yes, but **innocent** misrepresentations aren't tortious (although the professional still has a duty to correct). In contract law, any **material misrepresentations** may allow one part to gain the right to rescind the contract. Misrepresentations are not terms of the contract - false impressions!

### 2.3.2.2. Formal Definition of Misrepresentation in Contract Law

**Misrepresentation** a statement or representation that is made during the negotiation of the contract, **before the contract's formation**, that turns out to be false.

There are 3 types of misrepresentation:

- **Fraudulent:** The party making the misrepresentation intentionally did so, essentially lying
- **Negligent:** The party had a duty to ensure the statement was accurate, yet failed to take the steps needed to do so and fell below the standard of care (for instance, a professional)
- **Innocent:** Any misrepresentation that does not get categorized into the above. It is important to note that parties **must still correct these** when in a position to do so - else it may become fraudulent or negligent!

Recall the Elements of the Tort(s) Misrepresentation - the same general outline follows here:

1. A statement is made, and that statement is false
2. The statement is such that it is negligent/fraudulent/innocent
3. Relying on said statement **caused the injured party to enter the contract**
4. Relying on said statement caused harm to the innocent party.

### 2.3.2.3. Consequences of Misrepresentation

As mentioned earlier, the contract becomes voidable at the option of the victim. Fraudulent misrepresentation allows for rescinding the contract and/or awarding extra damages; while for negligent misrepresentation only 1 of the 2 options are available. Note that the party should rescind promptly lest they lose their right to rescind after an unreasonable amount of time has passed.

### 2.3.2.4. Representations must be Statements of Fact

A statement can't be a misrepresentation if it is a statement of opinion - this is why saying "In my opinion" is important. However, there is an exception if you are an **expert** (or are perceived to be one?) - expert opinions are considered statements of fact.

### 2.3.2.5. Omissions as Misrepresentation

Omissions are misrepresentations only if there is a **duty of utmost good faith** owed (like a fiduciary duty or implied contractual duty of good faith); or if there is some latent defect (a defect that existed at the time of purchase, not obvious to a *prudent* buyer, yet serious and important).

Some contracts **require disclosure** - failing to do so renders that contract voidable. For instance, the insured must disclose to insurance companies info related to their risk; directors to their corporation (as a fiduciary duty); partners in a partnership; and professionals to their clients.

There is also the rule of **Caveat Emptor**, or **Buyer Beware**. The purchaser is responsible for clearing misrepresentations. This is however countered by the *Sale of Goods Act*, which makes contracts voidable for buyers if the vendor fails to disclose a problem with the ownership, quality, or characteristics of goods. However, the *Sale of Goods Act* does not apply to contracts involving services or land, so yeah I guess.

### 2.3.3. Undue Influence

**Undue Influence** is the *domination* of one party over the mind of the other to a degree that deprives the latter party of the will and ability to make an independent decision. In other words, they have such overwhelming power over them that it's impossible to go against them. If this is the case, the contract is **voidable** to the victim of the influence at their discretion.

This is often seen in issues with wills, spouses, and other special relationships where one party holds special skill or knowledge and the other places trust and confides in them. It also often goes hand-in-hand with duress.

#### 2.3.3.1. Test for Undue Influence

It is up to the plaintiff (victim?) to show, on a balance of probabilities, that:

1. There was domination by the other party, seen in 1 of the below cases:
  1. There exists a special relationship (doctor-patient, lawyer-client)
  2. OR they were in a desperate circumstance at contract formation
  3. OR they were under a threat of prosecution at contract formation
  4. OR the contract was **unconscionable** - unequal bargaining power between the parties
2. The contract was unfair or disadvantageous to the weaker party

In some cases (like spouses), it is presumed that undue influence exists - then the dominant spouse would need to establish that no undue influence was applied!

#### 2.3.3.2. Minimizing Undue Influence

One way lawyers try to minimize undue influence when a contract is signed is through **independent legal advice**. The lawyer would send the weaker party to another independent lawyer and sign it separately to help reduce pressure and influence. But one must ask - given that special relationship still exists, does this *really* help?

### 2.3.4. Duress

Compared to Undue Influence, **Duress** is **actual or threatened violence or imprisonment** as a way to **coerce** a party to enter a contract. If this occurs, the contract is voidable at the victim's discretion.

While historically it outlined physical harm, nowadays the definition of duress is broadened - economic duress (forced payment backed by inappropriate pressure beyond normal competitive commercial pressure) and other types of violence also count for duress! This is part of why it is confused with undue influence so much, I guess.

## 2.4. The Requirement of Writing

### 2.4.1. Preface

For some contracts to be enforceable, they need to be **in writing**, as stated by statute. Prof. Masterman generally considers these as failures due to the court's propensity to manipulate rules and how the statutes benefit those who are aware of them. There are contradictory cases abound here.

### 2.4.2. What is "In Writing"?

In general, it just needs to be written down - no specific form is necessary, and it could be across multiple scattered documents (however, they cannot be connected through oral promises). Electronic writing and signatures are also sufficient. **Evidenced in writing**, not specifically in writing.

Essentially, they only need to include essential contract terms - names of the parties, subject matter of the contract, consideration (excepting guarantees), payment details, and signatures of signing parties.

The in-writing rule is known to be manipulated by Courts to get the ruling they need, as there is room for interpretation as what counts as "in writing still".

### 2.4.3. Contracts to be in Writing from the Statute of Frauds

1. The promise of a will's **executor** to pay for an estate's debts (after distribution) with their own \$
2. **Guarantees**: A promise to pay the debt of another person IF the debtor defaults.
3. **Indemnities**: In BC only, promises to pay **on behalf** of a third party as long as the other party in the contract performs. **Not conditional on the debtor defaulting**.
4. **Marriage**: Historically for marriage contracts like bridal dowry, now it is governed by Family Law. However it still needs to be in writing to be enforceable.
5. **>1 Year Actions**: Agreements where both parties perform only after a year or more from signing unless the contract has an indefinite time period.
6. **Land Interests**: Contracts that create an **interest in land** (ownership rights, including leases). A specific exception for these is the **Doctrine of Past Performance** - if both parties already partially performed parts of a land-interest contract, it is considered binding regardless.

### 2.4.4. Contracts to be in Writing from the Sales of Goods Act

This applies to all provinces but BC and Ontario. So it doesn't apply, but sales of goods usually over \$50 need writing, acceptance, part payment (credit to paying the purchase price), or earnest (token sum or article to seal the deal); otherwise they are unenforceable.

### 2.4.5. Contracts to be in Writing from the Consumer Protection Act

This applies to B2C contracts only. For Direct Agreements of over \$50 (like door to door sales) to be enforceable, it must be in writing that includes:

- |                                             |                                            |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1. Detailed Description of Goods/Services   | 2. Itemized Purchase Prices                |
| 3. Name, Address and Contact Info of Vendor | 4. Notice of Statutory Cancellation Rights |
| 5. A Copy must be given to the consumer     | 6. Cost of Borrowing, if applicable        |

Some contracts under designated industries might be subject to further rules and exceptions too.



## 2.5. Tidbits

### 2.5.1. The Basis of the Bankruptcy Act

The Bankruptcy Act is based on the Debtor/Creditor Rule and its subsequent ruling! If you commit a act of bankruptcy (defined as owing more than \$1000 to 2+ creditors with no way to pay them down), you have 2 recourses:

1. Your creditors issue a bankruptcy notice, and all\* of your debt is paid and all\* your assets are liquidated to pay whatever possible. You start over from ground zero with nothing.
2. File a proposal to distribute assets to your creditors in return for debt alleviation. If 2 of 3 **blocks** of creditors agree to this proposal (gerrymandering fully allowed) your debt is paid down and you don't enter bankruptcy. This is risky though since if you don't get 2/3 acceptance or can't live up to the proposal, you automatically enter bankruptcy.

### 2.5.2. You need not Perfect Capacity

The Capacity requirement needed for different contracts may differ. For example, a marriage contract has really low capacity compared to say **Power of Attorney** - allowing someone else to deal with your **financial care** (managing your finances) or **personal care** (managing your life and even when to pull the plug) when you inevitably lose capacity to do so yourself.

A general test for capacity is as follows:

1. Do they have a sense of time?
2. Do they have a sense of place? Where they live and so on?
3. Do they know who those live near them are?
4. Do they know of the size of their assets?
5. Do they know the nature of the document they are about to sign?

### 2.5.3. Loopholing Damages for Negligent Misrepresentation

Say hypothetically a misrepresentation is negligent but the courts feel it appropriate to void the contract AND award damages. This is not usually allowed since its a negligent misrepresentation, so only 1 can be chosen.

The trick is to claim the existence of an **auxiliary contract** - if the main contract was not entered without having the auxiliary contract, the auxiliary contract follows all 7 needed elements for a contract, and voiding the original contract isn't enough to cover damages, this argument may be allowed and now there's 2 contracts you can recover damages with!