



How to Read Effectively as a Law Student

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A majority of law students love reading and can do so for stretches of time. However, it's not reading that's the issue, it's what you read.

Most law students can read a novel for a whole day and never get tired. I have my fair share of novels I have completed within a day. We also spend time "reading" on social media, and can do so for hours.

However, while reading novels and social media are quite interesting, reading academic or legal materials is an entirely different piece of cake. It would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than to find someone (myself inclusive) reading a legal textbook for fun.

Fortunately or unfortunately, if success in exams and your legal career is something you desire, then you have to be able to read legal material, and enjoy yourself while doing so.

While this might seem like an uphill task, it is possible with the right techniques which I'll outline below.

Before you Start Reading

Abraham Lincoln once said, "If I have 7 hours to cut down a tree, I'll spend 6 hours sharpening my axe." What this essentially means is that preparing to do a task is as important, if not more important than doing the task itself.

It's by putting structures in place before you read that you'll be able to ensure you read effectively.

So, that's what we'll be dealing with first.

Scheduling your Reading

The first thing to consider when trying to read effectively as a law student is when you should read. Different people have different times when they'll be more alert. For some people, they're better off reading first thing in the morning.

For some other people (aka vampires), they're not active until the sun has set and everywhere is dark. If you fall in this category, then you could try reading from 10pm to 1 am.

So, it's best for you to find the ideal time when you can start reading and choose what's best for you.

After you've chosen the ideal time for you to start reading, you should give yourself reading targets. For instance, if you are doing 10 courses, you can decide to read two courses per day.

At this point, it is very easy to fall into the trap of allocating specific times for reading, like "read from 3 pm to 6 pm."

The thing is, according to Parkinson's Law, [work expands to fill the time allocated to it](#). So, if you decide that you want to read for three hours per day, you could end up reading 3 pages, while chatting on social media the whole time, and when three hours are elapsed, you'll think you've achieved your goal for the day.

Well, you actually did achieve your goal for the day "to read for three hours. But you've achieved little to nothing.

Instead, what you should do is to be intentional about what you want to achieve within a given time frame. For instance, you can say that for each course you're treating on a specific day, you'll read one topic from your curriculum per day.

This way, when you start reading at your allocated time, say 10 pm, you won't stop until you have achieved your goal – reading one topic for the day.

Dealing with Procrastination

Reading legal materials for five hours is one thing, opening the first page of your book is another.

Procrastination is an issue that affects most people, and especially law students. We all have our fair share of experiences involving not reading until the powers that be release the exam time table.

Procrastination occurs when we don't consider something to be important enough for our immediate attention. When was the last time you procrastinated on whether or not you should go to the exam hall for your exams?

Your guess is as good as mine.

A good way to fight procrastination is to either have a reward for doing your task, or have a punishment for not doing the task.

Also, [studies have shown that humans are even more motivated to avoid losses](#) than by acting to gain. This is why you would not procrastinate on going to the exam hall for exams because you know that if you do, you're guaranteed to fail.

So, how do we incorporate this into reading as a law student? If you're really struggling with procrastination, you should get an accountability partner. This should be someone that would remind you at specific times to read.

If you want to go hardcore, you can incorporate punishment by giving out a certain sum of money each time you fail to read at an appropriate time.

You can give this to your accountability partner, a charity or a friend that you know would not listen to your squeals for mercy when you fail to follow through on your commitment to read.

Alternatively, you can link up losses and reward by giving money to your accountability partner at the beginning of the week. Then, if at the end of the week, you can prove that you actually studied, you get your money back.

If you don't, you lose your hard earned cash.

Action Steps: So, do the following:

- Schedule the time when it would be best for you to read.
- Get an accountability partner.

Actually Reading Effectively as a Law Student

Now that we've taken care of the preparation stage, it's time to deal with how to actually read effectively.

Your Environment

When it comes to reading, your environment plays a huge part in your success.

People have different preferred environments to read in. You can decide to read in a place that is deadly silent. Some other people can read while jamming Naira Marley.

You should find what works best for you.

If you're in an environment where there are constant external distractions, you should consider listening to familiar music to drown out the external distractions.

Listening to music you're familiar with would give you the ability to zone out of the playing music and concentrate on what you're reading.

Alternatively, you can listen to classical music without a lot of beats. You can download some [here](#).

Listening to music while reading also helps eliminate the boredom that comes with reading for a while.

Secondly, you should eliminate distractions while reading. One of the constant sources of distraction is our mobile devices.

The scene is all too familiar.

You finally temporarily slay the monster called procrastination and pick up the book you want to read.

This is just 4pm, and you hope to read for two hours. Then, you've barely read a paragraph when your phone vibrates, you get a message from that guy(or babe) you've been eyeing.

You give a reply and quickly put down your phone. After two minutes, your phone vibrates again, and you check the message. Things seem interesting and you also respond.

After this, you find yourself deciding to reply to all other pending messages on whatsapp. That takes about ten minutes. You instinctively swipe right and quickly view some whatsapp statuses.

You laugh at one joke, respond to a friend's picture and keep on going.

Suddenly, you remember that you're supposed to be reading. You quickly skim through two more paragraphs. Then you check the time. You're surprised it's 6.45 pm. You shrug, read for fifteen more minutes, then you call it a day.

In your mind, you think you've done three hours of reading. When you barely read a page. "At least", you tell yourself "I tried. I will read tomorrow. Besides, I have to eat."

Well we both know the same thing will happen tomorrow, until you hear that exam is tomorrow and you have to cram everything into your head overnight.

This is a problem everyone faces.

Social media is specifically designed to keep you hooked on your device for as long as possible. Mark Zuckerberg and his gang [specifically scheme on ways to distract you](#) with social media.

Fortunately, you can fight an app, with an app. There are numerous apps you can download to prevent other apps from distracting you. Just search for "App Blocker" on your App Store and download whichever catches your fancy.

I personally use [AppBlock](#) for my android device. They probably have a version for the iPhone, and if they don't there are countless other alternatives.

Action Steps:

1. Locate a silent place where you can do your reading. Alternatively, download the music I recommended, or listen to your own playlist of songs.
2. Download distraction-eliminating apps like App Block.

The Pomodoro Technique

Sitting on one spot and reading law for extended periods of time is likely to tire you out (unless you're an alien).

Instead of reading for five hours at a stretch, you should take breaks in between reading sessions. A good system to help you do this is by using the pomodoro technique.

This is a very simple timing technique [developed by Francisco Scirrito](#) in the eighties, and it has remained in the mainstream ever since.

With the pomodoro technique, you work for 25 minutes and take a short break for 5 minutes. After doing four work sets of 25 minutes, you take a longer break for 15 minutes.

The reason why this works so well is that when you're doing a difficult task, it's very easy for you to focus for 25 minutes.

Let's say you're getting tired of reading, and then you glance at the timer, you might see that you have about ten minutes more of reading to do. It's very easy for you to power through the remaining ten minutes till you get your break.

On the other hand, without a timer, you might get tired after reading for two hours. Then you check your clock and discover that you've only been reading for fifteen minutes.

That can be very demoralising, and you might just decide to check Twitter. After all, "chop life before life chop you."

It is not compulsory you stick to the 25 minutes work and 5 minutes rest process. The most important thing is that you take short breaks while reading so that you can get refreshed.

Most Pomodoro apps give you the ability to modify the timing process. So, instead of reading for 25 minutes and resting for 5 minutes, you can read for 50 minutes and rest for 7 minutes.

Then after four reading sets, you can take a 20-minute break.

A cursory search through your app store would turn up numerous apps. Personally, I use [this timer](#). It's very simple and doesn't distract you with all its complexities.

Action step: Download a pomodoro timer from your app store.

Ensure you use Active Reading Techniques

Finally, it is very tempting to fall into the temptation of just reading your notes and textbooks like a novel.

This is called passive reading, and unless you have a photographic memory, you'll hardly recall what you read.

Instead, you should try active reading. This means that you don't just consume your content, but engage with it. You

can do this by forming your own notes, or teaching someone what you read.

When you do that, you™re able to easily process and recall what you read.

While I was in school, I used to type my notes. However, that wasn™t all. Whenever I carried out research on cases or statutes given by the lecturer, I added it to the note. Also, if I found more information while reading the textbooks or external sources, I added it to the note.

In essence, while the lecturer™s note formed the backbone of what I read, I added enough to it here and there to engage with the content, and it helped me with recall.

In addition to active reading, you should use spaced repetition to [help you memorise legal cases and statutes](#). If you use spaced repetition when you read every day, recalling cases during exams would become a piece of cake.

Action Steps:

- Try active reading the next time you decide to read.
- Implement spaced repetition when you read.

Conclusion

So, that™s it. How to read effectively as a law student. Don™t hesitate to try this out and share your experience in the comments. I™ll be happy to hear from you.