

## The Real Bad Habits of Law Students

There are lots of lists out there about the bad habits that law students adopt while in law school. Those blogs get posted, and immediately there is someone out there tweeting “I did that bad habit and I got an A!” It’s really fun when you get that tweet about your advice for statistics students, because correlation/causation is still a thing.

Today, I offer my observation as to what law student habits I wish I could change. I think about this in terms of not only observing students in the classroom, but my own behavior as a law student. But mostly, I think of law school as a process that can change you, and not always for the better.

1. “Reading” cases doesn’t really mean you know what the case is about. Sometimes reading a case once isn’t enough. And yes, there is advice against “rereading cases” because it can be a time-management issue. Cases should be actively read (at least once). There’s a story to be gleaned from the case. A rule of law perhaps, perhaps policy, perhaps historical perspective. But that case links to a larger universe of cases. It is a piece, and your professor thought it an important enough piece to assign. That means that reading requires a bit more care in how you read.  
I understand that can be difficult, especially if you have a professor who assigns a hundred pages of reading at a time. But you’re here in law school to learn. That’s the point of this endeavor, isn’t it?
2. Someone else’s outline doesn’t give you the answers. Having someone’s outline doesn’t mean you know the material in the outline. Yes, it might help you answer some of your professor’s questions in class, but that doesn’t mean you’ve got a grasp of the subject. Reading someone’s outline is like reading a “how to” book about swinging a golf club. You’ll never hit a ball like Tiger Woods reading a “how to golf” book. Yes, you still might get an “A,” if that is all that matters to you. But it might be quite accidental. Once again, if your goal is to learn, you’ve basically just shortchanged yourself.
3. Mistakenly sacrificing things in life in order to study often means you are sacrificing things that can make studying (and life) easier. I remember spending some late evenings cramming, sometimes to the point of exhaustion, falling asleep at my desk. What I didn’t understand is that I was creating my own little stress chamber. By depriving myself of sleep, sunlight, food, time with friends, and peace of mind, I was creating conditions that would make it more difficult to study. “I’ll never understand this!” I would say as my heart was racing from my fifth double espresso of the night. I was right: I wasn’t priming myself to allow information to enter my head. I was doing what others were doing, and what I thought was expected of me. But I wasn’t learning.

4. Habits you start in law school stay with you after law school if you aren't careful. Procrastination is the one that comes most often to mind. Putting off until the last minute can often be the recipe for disaster, as some who have had printer issues can attest to. But procrastination isn't the only one. Avoidance is another. Often, students avoid some opportunities for fear of failure or rejection. Many times, that which we carry into law school in terms of emotional baggage gets carried out with us, because we have not taken time to care for our own mental health. That is a terrible way to start a stressful career.
5. You can lose yourself in law school. Often, students seek to fit in to what their perception is of the law school community. That can be an anxiety-laden, cut-throat, and competitive world. The intense pressure can change us. We can become things that we loathe. We can turn from being compassionate, generous, and human into petty, selfish, and amoral tools. That transition comes at the cost of your soul. As you become lawyers, it is all too easy to sacrifice your morals for the sake of the firm's profits.
6. [Mistakes](#) (even on exams) are as important for learning as studying. I'm not saying we should all go out and make a bunch of deliberate mistakes. I'm suggesting that mistakes we make teach us valuable lessons, if we let them. As I've written before, making mistakes makes "you human. They make you grow. They make you learn. And, they make you humble."  
Query: An "A" student and a "C" student on an exam: Which one mastered the subject matter? Trick question, as I didn't tell you how long ago the exam was. Both have the opportunity to improve and learn. When law professors say "you are not your grades," this is what we mean. A grade is a measure of how you did one day. Learning from mistakes can actually make you a better lawyer. And an "A" exam is never perfect.
7. If you don't have a strong center, law school can crush you against the rocks. I didn't realize in law school how much law school can change you. All of the anxiety, stress, pressure, peer pressure, competition, one-upmanship, expectations, and grades are a constant stream of pressure that can play hell with your ego, if you let it. It is hard to stay centered with the tornado of all of that unease is around you. But you'll be better off if you have yourself centered.

You might notice that the list starts out with seemingly small things, and builds. My point is that everything can turn out to be a big thing over time. So it is good to be deliberate in how you learn, how you study, and how you live in law school.

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