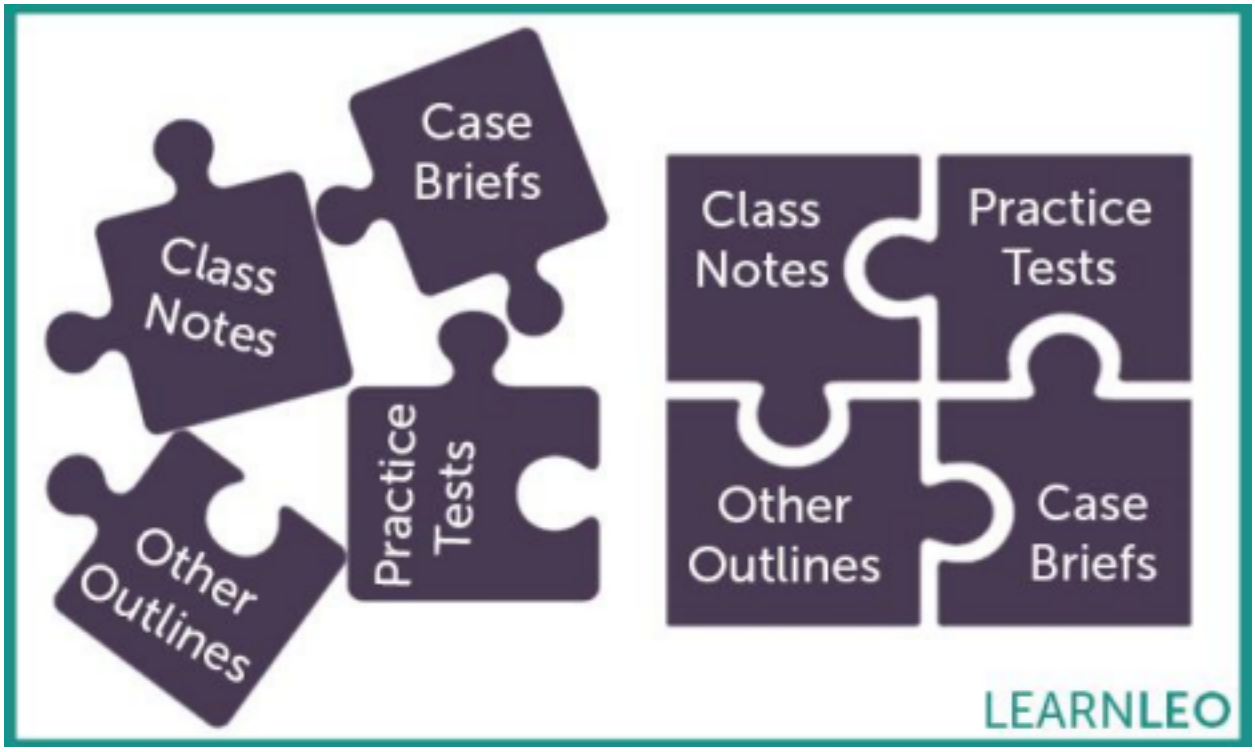
# OUTLINING: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER




## Why Outline?

The purpose of outlining is to synthesize all of your course materials into one comprehensive, personalized study guide that is organized around key concepts. Not only is reviewing your course materials from start to finish – distilling key concepts and summarizing case holdings and class notes in your own words – one of the most effective ways to study, it will also help you to identify any knowledge gaps while there is still time to get your questions answered. If during your review you find that something is not clear, reach out to your TA or professor.

## Tips Before You Get Started

1. The outline should be organized around issues and rules, not around specific cases. Like with all major projects, consider breaking

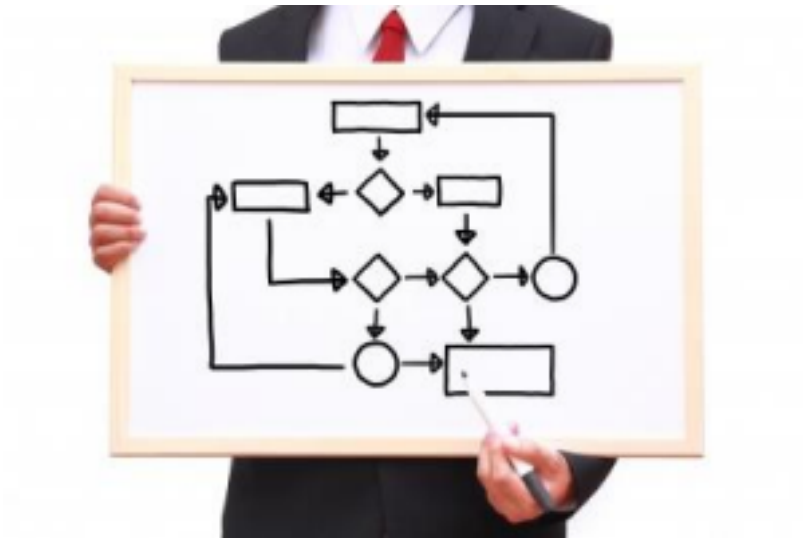
outlining down into smaller steps:
    a. Gather the course materials for the outline
    b. Organize the framework of your outline
    c. Block out time
    d. Use your course materials to add substantive details to the framework
2. Start with the class where you feel the most comfortable – this will set the tone for the rest of your outlines.

# Gather Course Materials for Your Outline

1. Case Briefs
2. Class, TA, and study group notes
3. Syllabus
4. Class handouts
5. Textbook
6. Commercial supplements (hornbooks, E&E, etc.) and 2L/3L outlines – however, use these **only to supplement** your own outline and **not as a substitute** for creating an outline

# Organize the Outline Framework

1. Frame the initial structure of your outline (main headings and subheadings setting out issues).
    a. Use your syllabus to build your outline's framework.
    b. It's helpful to structure your outline around the syllabus because the syllabus shows you how your professor has organized the material and relevant body of law.
2. If you don't have a syllabus, consider using the textbook's table of contents/main headings or an outline from a previous year.
3. **Format the outline based on your learning style.**
    a. Outlines with Roman numerals and bold headings might work for some (for example the standard Microsoft Word formatting).
    b. Some might prefer a flow chart.



c. Some prefer using different colors (rules in green, case names in red, significant policy arguments in blue). **Be sure you can print in color!
d. Some prefer flashcards.
e. A table of contents with page numbers can also be helpful.
f. Ultimately, you want the outline to be organized, easy to read, and tailored to **your learning style**.

# Block Out Time

1. Time Management (our favorite phrase!) is really key. There is enough time to prepare for classes, prepare an outline, take breaks, and still enjoy Thanksgiving, etc. . . you just need to be organized.
    a. Look at the rest of the semester and note important deadlines (such as LPW/class assignments, job application deadlines, and external moot court deadlines).
    b. Weekly: block out time for classes, exercise, TA sessions, volunteer work, student orgs, or other weekly commitments. This shows you your available blocks of time.
    c. Start outlining now and plan to finish so that you have enough time to review the outline multiple times and take practice tests. Best practice: aim to complete your outlines BEFORE the reading period starts.
    d. You'll need to dedicate significant blocks of time for outlining.
    e. Work on your outline in blocks of 3-4 hours.
    f. Try to schedule your outlining sessions for days and hours when you think you'll be the most productive at this task (you'll find it requires

greater concentration than reading/class prep).

g. If you are easily distracted, figure out what is distracting you (noise vs. silence, the internet, TV, family discussions, etc.) and then schedule to avoid those distractions. Try study groups if for nothing other than accountability and the ability to ask quick questions related to the subject matter.
h. ***If you find that after 2-3 hours you are simply cutting and pasting and not condensing/synthesizing material, stop and take a break.***

# Add Substantive Law to the Framework

1. After identifying broad issues in the framework, use your course materials to insert all pertinent rules (majority and minority jurisdictions, if applicable), rule elements, exceptions, policy arguments, class hypotheticals, and case examples.
    a. You're essentially fleshing out the syllabus with relevant notes, with the goal of understanding the relationships between the various concepts covered in the class. If your professor spends a lot of time on a concept, policy, or fact, summarize what you find important in your own words.
    b. For classes like contracts and civil procedure, note relevant UCC or FRCP provisions, in addition to cases.
2. **How to Incorporate Cases into Your Outline**
    a. Case references should be brief 1-2 sentence summaries. Should demonstrate that you know both the rule AND how courts have applied the rule or found exceptions under various fact patterns.
    b. LESS IS MORE: You do NOT want to cut and paste case briefs. You DO want to summarize case holdings and analyses in your own words.
    c. It is ok not to include facts if you understand the holding/rule of a case. But if you do include facts, summarize them in your own words or use shorthand.
3. **Suggested Outline Length**
    a. Ideally 30-35 pages – though it varies by person and class. Bottom line: it should be short enough that you can read it through from beginning to end multiple times in a single day.
    b. Consider creating a shorter attack outline (this can be the table of contents for your longer outline).

As always, if you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us in Student Services!