**So You Want to go to Law School**

**Part 3**

February 20, 2020

The LSAT – Okay, let’s be honest – I got nothing. No, really, I don’t. I can’t tell you the secret to getting a great score or even how to improve your score if you’ve already taken the test. I can offer suggestions and hints and conjectures, but when it comes to LSAT day, it’s all on you and who you are.

Yes, who you are. We are all different and have different abilities. Each of us looks at things differently, influenced by what we have learned and our individual pasts. The obvious best way is to have learned all the stuff on the test over your life to date. But, assuming you didn’t, let’s get start.

Many students ask me when should they start studying for the LSAT? Well, the truth is probably in 6th or 7th grade, but I never say that. English and logic skills are best developed over time – not over weeks or months before the test. So you’re doomed, right? No. Assessment formats, like multiple choice, make it easier for good test takers to “game” the system, using test taking tricks and strategies to make better guesses. What I can do is to make some suggestions that have worked for me over the years and things I have learned from giving test for longer than I’d like to remember.

Some research hints that what makes some people good at taking a multiple choice test is likely a mix of lots of things:

**1**. Low test-taking anxiety which allows them to perform better in the moment;

**2**. Well-informed schemas that provide greater context and allow them to make more educated assumptions (guesses);

**3**. Going with their first hunch;

a. I’ve kept track over the years, and at least on my tests, when a student changes an answer, over 60% of the time it is from right to wrong. Another 10-20% of the time the change is wrong to wrong. Usually it is less than 30% that change an answer from wrong to right. I often see tests where changing from wrong to correct is significantly less – less than 10%.

b. AND, changing answers kills time. You are stewing over the answer, thinking and rethinking. You don’t have that kind of time on the LSAT. Time is your enemy on an LSAT.

**4**. Not allowing themselves to get stuck on one question causing them to rush through the rest of the test.

a. This is simple. If you spend too much time on one or two questions, you will not finish the section. That’s an automatic “you’re not going to do well”. If you don’t quickly know the answer, just mark “c” or whatever your go-to answer is when you haven’t got a clue. Sure. You may only have a 25% chance to get it right. But if you spend a lot of time on a question and happen to get it right, well wonderful. But those five or ten questions you didn’t answer because they called time are all going to be wrong. And guess what? You just might have gotten some or most of them right.

Yes, I know I skipped over the one you didn’t understand – number 2 and the “well-informed schemas” thingy. It simply means you have to have a plan on how to read and answer the question. It may not be as hard as you think. Before you read on, how do you take a multiple choice test? Do you even know? Think about it for a minute.

Here is one method and what I tried to use when I still took tests.

**1**. Read the question

**2**. Decide what you think the answer is.

a. Look at all the answers. If there is a perfect match jumping out at you, go with it and move on.

**3**. If there is not the perfect answer, start eliminating wrong answers. Often [usually?] this reduces the possible answers down to two. Then it’s simply a matter of guessing from what is left.

**a**. Note: this only works if you do not cross out the right answer. Only discard answers you are sure are wrong.

**b**. This maximizes the odds over the course of the test of your guessing right.

**4**. The remaining few questions that the above didn’t work, you just work backwards from the answers, such in a math questions where you might test all the answers, TIME PERMITTING. Again, don’t spend too much time on any question.

**5**. Do all this quickly.

**NOW, HERE IS WHAT I SUGGEST AND WHY.**

The head of the LSAC test division once said the key to a good score is simple – a sense of peace and calm when taking the test. He said that *way* too many test-takers are too stressed before the test starts because being a lawyer or getting into a particular law school has been their goal for as long as they can remember. Of course, you are *not* putting any stress on yourself if you set down to take a test thinking all your hopes and dreams from when you were five years-old depend on answering a bunch of impossible questions in an impossibly short period of time. Piece of cake. Yeah . . . no. Unfortunately, he didn’t really offer any good methods to reduce stress.

Here is my suggestion.

**1**. Take a practice test but don’t time yourself. Practice tests are available just about everywhere: in libraries, at used book stores, some on line; and from friends that took an LSAT course and have the old books in the basement of their mother’s house.

a. Grade your test. See what you got wrong. Figure out why.

**2**. Take a second practice test but don’t time yourself.

a. Grade your test. See what you got wrong. Figure out why.

**3**. Take a third practice test but don’t time yourself.

a. Grade your test. See what you got wrong. Figure out why.

4. Now it’s time to get real. Take a practice test **under time.**

a. Grade your test. See what you got wrong. Figure out why.

b. Did you finish? Why not?

5. Keep repeating 4, above, until you almost always finish in time, hopefully with even a few minutes to spare.

And what did all of the practice testing do? You should find you are getting faster and comfortable with the allotted time. This is a biggie. This will help you relax when you are waiting for the test to begin. Instinctively, you know how long you will have for each section. You will know how fast you have to answer the questions. And, hopefully by checking your answers and studying why you missed the questions, you will stop making the same mistakes you made on the practice tests.

And one more plus: you were actually learning things while you were taking the tests. From my own experience of years and years of drawing up tests at UH and at many other Universities and taking more test that I can count, I realize that there are only so many ways of asking the same type of questions, going over the same material. While you may not know the material perfectly, as you take the practice exams you will start to notice patterns in the way LSAC asks questions, in wrong answers, in right answers. When the same person or organization prepares tests, they unknowingly place their own personal stamp on the test, the questions, and the answers. There will be patterns.

Sadly, in the long term, the practice tests will not make you brilliant or even help you in law school. Test-taking strategies are very short-term oriented. Yes, it might help you on another standardized test, especially one prepared by the same company. But it will not be information you can draw on when trying to figure out whether an enfeoffment in fee simple absolute was properly done based on a long, convoluted fact situation on your property course final. But, who cares. That problem will only arise once you’re in law school or practicing law. Right now we just want to get there.

**Just a quick postscript**: I always thought it odd that one of the major items that the law school admissions people consider is the LSAT score – a multiple choice test. Yet, in law school you will take few if any multiple choice tests – I took exactly one in law school. Recent grads tell me they took 10 to 25% multiple choice tests. So they are looking for people that can take a timed, multiple choice test to see if you can excel at taking essay tests in law school. Long essay tests that require analyzing a fact situation, applying the relevant facts to the correct law, and then draw the correct conclusion. And they test *YOU* on your logic.