

## Some key hints for law students

1. **The permanent members of staff who lecture you are also the people who set and mark your examinations.** *So, listen to their hints, observe what they focus on and leave out; and try to get on their wavelengths.*
2. **If you want to get a better mark, read the cases.** *There is no idea (in an ordinary law course) which you need to mention to get a good mark which has not been mentioned in the cases by the judges giving leading judgments, or by the barristers in argument (their arguments are summarised in the law reports before the main judgment), or by judges in lower courts whose judgments have been overturned, or by judges giving dissenting judgments.*
3. **Stop taking reams and reams of notes: read and think more instead.** *Notes which are on the page but not in your brain are useless to you, until you get them into your brain. Even though deciding which font to use or which highlighting method to employ does take a lot of time, and even though you are creating loads and loads of notes, ask yourself honestly if you can do the following things: (i) can you discriminate between the important ideas in old those notes necessary to answer a problem question and the unimportant ideas? (ii) can you find the idea you want quickly, or is it just like wading through another textbook? (iii) have you actually just paraphrased your textbook, or have you written anything original? (iv) can you actually remember very much that's in those notes without looking it up first? (v) do you feel exhausted and drained after a long session of typing/ writing your notes, instead of feeling like you are enjoying your studies?*
4. **Have fun.** *I really, really enjoyed my time at university; but at the same time I worked as hard as anyone. There is no reason why working for 40 hours a week should not leave you with most of your evenings and your weekends free (or whatever other time you prefer); and no reason why studying in itself should not be fun, if you identify which of the hints in here will work for you.*
5. **Be prepared for seminars.** *To be a successful law student you need to know your stuff before seminars so that when you go into each seminar you are able to answer questions off the top of your head (instead of needing to rummage through your file of notes) and to discuss your own opinions. Seminars are not intended to be teaching sessions: instead the purpose of a seminar is to discuss the material which has already been lectured to you and which you have already read about. You have already had all the teaching; seminars are about you learning, on the basis of the work which you have already done.*
6. **Talk in seminars.** *The idea behind seminars is that you discuss the material which has already been lectured to you and other material which you have since read: and through that discussion your intellect will improve. It is all too easy to know what you mean in the deep recesses of your mind, but it is a completely different skill to be able to put those ethereal ideas into words out loud. Being able to speak out loud about the law (to give voice to your ideas) will put your mind on a completely different plane. Significantly, being able to talk about the law will also develop your essential skills in being able to write about the law. One of the most difficult parts of being a law student is being able to put your ideas into words, and particularly in examinations to be able to write in words all of the things which are somewhere in the dark recesses of your mind. More generally, a law school is a community of scholars: discussing ideas is a key part of being in a community of scholars, and so that is another reason why you should talk in seminars.*
7. **Be honest with yourself.** *If you are honest with yourself, then you will learn about your intellect, what works for you, how you work, and so on. You will develop proper self-knowledge. If you kid yourself that four hours at the computer (an hour on Facebook, two hours typing notes up while listening to music and thinking about something else, 30 minutes in total making coffee and talking to your flatmate, and 30 minutes in total staring out the window) was actually four hours of intense work, then you will not make much progress. It would be*

*better to acknowledge that you like talking to your flatmate and looking out of the window, and to be honest about the times when you actually work well: because it is only if you learn how you actually work well that you will actually be able to increase your productivity when you need or to remedy any under-performance in your work. It is better to work effectively for two hours and actually know something, than to pretend that you have worked for eight hours but not actually know very much at all. What's more, if you're not honest with yourself (about what works, about what you enjoy, about how well you're doing), then you will have trouble staying friends with yourself.*