

SUCCEEDING IN LAW SCHOOL

Second Edition

Herbert N. Ramy

PROFESSOR OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT,
SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ramy, Herbert N.

Succeeding in law school / Herbert N. Ramy. -- 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-59460-740-0 (alk. paper)

1. Law--Study and teaching--United States. 2. Law students--United States--Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Title.

KF283.R36 2010
340.071'173--dc22

2010012050

Carolina Academic Press
700 Kent Street
Durham, NC 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919) 493-5668
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America

*This book is dedicated to my wife
Stephanie Chissler—my best friend and my favorite teacher.*

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank several people who helped to make this book a reality. Professor Elizabeth Stillman of Suffolk University Law School took the time to read every chapter of the book for content and clarity, and I incorporated much of her advice into the book's final version. Professor Kathleen Elliott Vinson and the deans of Suffolk University Law School treated this project like any other scholarly endeavor, giving me both the time and resources necessary to complete the second edition of *Succeeding in Law School*. Finally, my wife Stephanie supported and encouraged me as she always does.

Introduction

Succeeding in law school is no easy task. Classes are taught using the Socratic method, which means that students must prepare extensively every day because they may be called on to take part in a question and answer dialogue with their professors. In addition, the reading required for a single day rivals what most students are accustomed to completing for a week's worth of classes. Most importantly, law school examinations and papers emphasize analytical thinking, and most students are not used to explaining their thought process in this fashion. So how does one succeed in law school?

To perform well, students must **actively engage** the challenges presented by law school. Using a simple example, this means more than reading the assigned cases and knowing how they were resolved. Instead, you must read the assigned cases, carefully review the court's reasoning to assess *why* they were resolved in a particular fashion, and then project that result out into the future to determine whether similar cases will be resolved in the same way. In essence, you are learning to predict the future.

Law school professors reward your ability to think independently, critically, and actively. While memorization is certainly a part of performing well on law school examinations, thorough legal analysis is the difference between simply passing your courses and ending up on the Dean's List. Your professors want you to take the basic rules that you have learned, and actively apply them to factual situations you have never seen before. While the factual scenarios, or fact patterns as they are often called, will have some similarities to the cases you have read, there will also be important differences.

As you might imagine, all of this requires a great deal of hard work. Unfortunately, you can work hard in law school and not succeed unless you receive some guidance, which is why I have written the second edition of *Succeeding in Law School*. Through this book, you will learn how to best approach your classes on a daily basis. I will walk you through reading your first case, and we will dissect it together in a way that best prepares you for class. This means anticipating how your professor will use the ideas contained in the

reading to promote further discussion. You will learn about the best ways to take notes in class, as well as some of the common traps that students can fall into. Then, I will show you how to use the knowledge gained through the reading and classroom dialogue as the jumping off point for developing a thorough and nuanced understanding of any legal idea.

This edition of the book has several new chapters that are geared toward success both in law school and in the job market. A new chapter on legal analysis addresses one of the most common problems professors see on law school exams—the absence of the counterargument. As for the job market, new material on interviewing techniques, creating a writing sample, and writing a résumé are designed to help students market themselves to prospective employers.

Despite the changes, *Succeeding in Law School* is still intended to give students the feedback they crave while allowing professors to assess student progress throughout the semester. Whether students are seeking advice in the summer months or looking for help once the school year has begun, this book will help them make the most of their abilities.