

LETTER TO A ONE L FRIEND

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A LITTLE GUIDE TO SEEING THE BIG PICTURE
AND SUCCEEDING IN LAW SCHOOL

Isaac Mamaysky



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To Lisa, Eve, and Levi

“When one has finished building one’s house, one suddenly realizes that in the process one has learned something that one really needed to know in the worst way—before one began.”

-Friedrich Nietzsche

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PREFACE

I wrote this book with one goal: to teach you how to earn high grades in law school. I tried to make it a quick, easy read that you can finish in a few hours and then reference as needed during 1L year and beyond.

As you may have already discovered, many books on this topic are much longer and broader in scope. Often written by brilliant, well-intentioned professors who have long forgotten what it's like to be students, they include chapters on who should attend law school, the lawyer's impact on society, and conflicting theories of legal reasoning. While these are certainly interesting and valuable topics, I wanted *Letter to a 1L Friend* to be different, and much shorter.

In my final year of law school, an attorney friend advised me to read *The Curmudgeon's Guide to Practicing Law*. The book is punchy, humorous, full of anecdotes, and exactly what every new associate needs to know but nobody tells them. I read the whole thing in a couple hours and referenced it throughout my first few years of practice. I kept thinking, *this is the kind of book new law students need*. And then I wrote *Letter to a 1L Friend*.

After reading this short guide, my goal is for you to arrive on the first day of school ready to hit the ground running. You'll know

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exactly what to expect and exactly what to do to rise to the very top of your class. I wish you the best of luck.

Isaac Mamaysky
Rye, NY

FOREWORD

“Assumpsit” was the first word that I read in law school.

I was a new law student and had just started my reading assignment for contracts, one of the required first year classes. The assignment involved reading several ancient legal cases in a textbook creatively titled “Contracts.” In fact, the textbook itself looked like it could have been as old as the cases. It reproduced each case, one after another, with little in the way of context or guidance. It was the first case in that Contracts casebook that began with a one-word sentence: “Assumpsit.”

I dutifully looked up the word in my legal dictionary, typed the definition into my notes, and continued reading, often stopping to look up unfamiliar words and reread confusing passages. The reading assignment took much longer than expected, but by the end of the night, I felt reasonably sure that I understood what happened in all the cases. “That wasn’t too bad,” I thought to myself.

The next day in class, however, I quickly learned that our professor was less interested in the details of each case and more interested in the legal principle, or what each case meant about the law. As the semester went on, I would also learn that he expected us to understand how the cases fit together.

Two cases that seemed particularly mysterious, at least to us first-year law students, illustrate this point well. One involved a dispute about ownership of a goat, the other a cow. The facts were

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almost identical. The lawyers made similar arguments. And the cases took place in the same timeframe and jurisdiction. Yet, in one case the plaintiff won and in the other case the defendant won. We struggled with those cases, trying to figure out why. Could it be that there were different laws for goats and cows?

Eventually we understood that the key difference was simply who had physical possession of the animal at the beginning of the lawsuit. From there followed the simple principle that courts do not like to interfere in personal matters. That principle became actionable knowledge that we could apply to exam questions.

All law students encounter challenges, and you will inevitably struggle through difficult material. But certain rules, such as focusing on the principle of each case, will ensure you study most effectively. Once law school starts, you won't have time to focus on *how* to study; keeping up with the substance of each class will be challenging enough on its own. That's why you should formulate your strategy *before* law school starts. This book will show you how.

Isaac has great insight about what it takes to succeed in law school. Not only did he graduate with top grades and multiple academic honors, but Isaac has always taken an interest in helping students excel. In law school, he mentored 1Ls and taught them the proven strategy you're about to read. He ultimately wrote a letter of all his advice to a close friend who was just getting started. I am glad that Isaac turned his letter into a book because it enables every aspiring law student to benefit from his mentorship. I have no doubt that this advice will serve you well, whether or not you understand your first reading assignment.

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