

LAW FRESHERS' SURVIVAL KIT

General Considerations

This guide is intended to assist you through your Law degree, giving you advice on study skills and your relationship with tutors. Different students will have different ways of studying, and prescriptions can be constraining. That said, what follows represents techniques which previous generations of students (often by painful trial and error) have, in our experience, found effective. Some of what we say may appear rather obvious, but what is obvious to some students is not necessarily obvious to all.

Most of you are aspiring professionals, who at the end of your degree courses will go into careers requiring high levels of commitment, efficiency and personal organisation. It is fitting that these same professional standards should apply during your time at Oxford, and it is by these standards that you will be judged.

Reading Lists

One of the most intimidating aspects of learning at Oxford, initially, is the reading lists. Your subject tutors will give you guidance as to the order of priority among the reading items, whether they are cases, statutes, articles, or chapters from textbooks (a common form of this guidance is the use of an asterisk to indicate items of the greatest significance).

Your reading should always be active. It is perfectly possible to spend long hours in the library without making any intellectual progress. This happens when you read passively; in other words, without a set of questions in mind. To generate a set of questions (if they have not already been provided by the tutor): think about the assignment you have been set; think about how the case you are reading relates to others that you have read; think about definitional and conceptual issues; think about other issues you have covered in related areas. Don't allow yourselves any interruptions as you study and don't use your phone. Two good hours of studying are worth much more than four distracted hours! The impression in the beginning will be that progress is slow, but time is necessary for any new knowledge to be properly integrated. The goal is to understand, not to memorise. The more you read, the more things will start coming together.

Reading and Taking Notes

Effective notetaking depends to a considerable extent on how you read. Following the advice here may seem time-consuming at first, but rest assured that experience has shown it to be the most effective and economical method.

The least productive form of notetaking is simply copying and pasting into your notes a selection from the electronic materials, or otherwise faithfully replicating the contents of the materials you have read. Instead, you should try to summarise information as much as you can and copy the text verbatim only where absolutely necessary.

Contrary to popular belief, downloading or printing cases from databases is not the same as reading them. You should try to limit any printing to articles and, rarely, if ever, print cases - you must get into the habit of reading them and taking effective notes. If you do print out articles, then at least make notes in the margin, or condense the article to one side of A4; otherwise when you come back to read it again, it will be like reading it for the first time. It is helpful (and entirely possible) to summarise the central argument of most articles to a single page. Distilling information is a crucial skill you need to acquire to do well in your studies.

Make sure that your notes, reading lists, and essays are kept in clearly organised files. It is important that you realise that different types of text require different types of reading:

Textbooks

Ideally, you should read the relevant chapter(s) from textbooks first, and reasonably quickly, to get an overview of the week's work, without taking any notes. This will give you an idea of the relative significance of the cases and statutory materials on the list. If you have time, read the textbook again, after you have read the other items on the list, and take brief notes (confined to analysis and structure, rather than details of cases etc., which you should already have learnt from your reading of them). If you do not keep your notes brief, you are likely to end up copying them out - this is a pointless exercise if you have bought the book or it is easily accessible in the library or online.

You should note that different textbooks may take different approaches to a particular issue. This is to be expected. In many of the areas of law we discuss in tutorials and in your essays, the legal issues are complicated and contested.

Articles

There are hundreds of articles on every topic. If a tutor has placed one on the reading list, it is because they think it is important and you should, therefore, read it. Articles can, sometimes, tend to labour their point and you should seek to cultivate the skill of skim-reading. Look out for the framework of the argument, and don't allow yourself to be swamped by detail. However, it is not enough just to know what the author of the article claims, what is their position. You need to note down the main reasons they provide for holding this position.

Cases

Case reports are the lifeblood of the law and, consequently, the mainstay of most areas. Even if an area is largely based on statutes (e.g. Land Law), cases will be relevant to the interpretation of the relevant sections of the statutes. You will need to acquire the skill of reading case reports reasonably quickly and taking effective notes. To begin with, however, this will be a relatively slow process and you simply have to persevere. It will get easier as you go along. It is worth remembering that often only some parts of the case will be relevant for your reading; the litigants may have raised many issues and your task will be to select the ones you need to read carefully given the focus of a particular tutorial.

This is not the occasion for a guide to the legal system of England and Wales but, in very simple terms, the courts are organised on three levels: the High Court, from which there is an appeal to the Court of Appeal, from which, in turn, there is an appeal to the Supreme Court (formerly

called the House of Lords). By way of exception the Supreme Court can hear appeals also directly from the High Court). Not every case is appealed to the Supreme Court but, where it is, needless to say, the decision of the Supreme Court is authoritative and of the greatest significance.

You may find the following general points helpful as you become acquainted with reading cases.

1. On the reading list for each subject, you will be given the names of the cases you are required to read, followed by a series of letters and numbers, e.g. [1992] 1 All ER 306. This indicates that the report of the case can be found in the series of law reports called the All England Law Reports (All ER) for the year 1992, volume 1 at p. 306. There are numerous series of law reports and you will very quickly become familiar with the abbreviations by which they are known. Of course, most (if not all) of the cases you need will also be available online. When you arrive in Oxford you will have an induction session with the Law Librarians, during which you will learn how to use important legal databases, such as Westlaw or Nexis UK. It is essential that you attend this induction session.

Among the most common case reports, and their abbreviations, are:

All ER	All England Law Reports	QB/KB	Queen’s/King’s Bench
AC	Appeal Cases	Ch	Chancery Division
WLR	Weekly Law Reports	Cr App Rep	Criminal Appeal Reports

2. It is important to note the level of the court which has issued each judgment (eg HC for High Court, CA for Court of Appeal, HL for House of Lords, and SC for Supreme Court) and to record that in your notes. This will help to alert you to the most important cases.
3. The ‘headnote’ of the case is, collectively, the summary of the facts and the ‘Held’ (outlined further at 4 & 5 below). In cases which are of limited significance, i.e. which focus on one fairly simple point of law, you can probably confine your reading to the headnote. However, the majority of cases on the list will be important enough that you should go on to read the judgments.
4. The summary of the facts - this has done much of the work for you. Although it is a summary, you should nevertheless attempt to shorten it further when noting them down. Do not note the facts until you have, at least, read the Held (see 5 below) and, ideally, not until you have also read the judgments. You should note down only the facts which are important from the perspective of the point of law decided by the case. In some cases the court’s reasoning and the arguments which have been used by judges will be more important than the point of law decided by them against the particular facts.

5. The Held. This is a summary of the decision and the reasons given by the judges for it. The latter will often only be superficially recorded in the Held and you will need to read the judgments to understand them fully.

In many cases, the judges are unanimous in their decision. Often, judges will simply give one sentence in which they record their agreement with another judge. However, in some cases the judges may differ. The case will be decided by the 'majority' and the 'minority' are recorded as having dissented. In such cases it is usually just as important to read the minority opinions as it is to read the majority's. The differences between the majority and minority may well form part of the issues we discuss in tutorials.

The Held is usually followed by a series of page/paragraph references. These tell you where, in the judgments, you will find the passages which have been summarised in the Held. These will sometimes help you to get to the relevant parts of the judgments more easily than skim reading the whole thing.

The Held will usually be followed by the names of a few cases, accompanied by the words 'followed', 'applied', 'distinguished', 'overruled' (rare) etc. This refers to cases, some of which you will also have read, that might have been thought to indicate which way the decision in the particular case should have gone.

6. The judgment(s) (a legal judgment misses out the middle 'e' which you will find in the ordinary noun 'judgement'). Thankfully, judges are increasingly using headings to divide up their judgments and this makes it much easier to find the passages which are most relevant. Unfortunately, older judgments are less helpful in this regard (with the honourable exception of Lord Denning).

Most judgments will start off with a fairly detailed description of the facts and a summary of the case to date. You can usually skip this because you already have them in summarised form from the headnote. Occasionally, the later parts of the judgment may seem to presume a fact(s) which did not appear in the headnote and you may have to come back to the judge's own assessment of the facts to clear this up.

7. The most important part of the judgment is where the judge deals with the principles of law which are applicable to cases and applies them to the facts. They may consider a statute and how it applies to the facts of the case, or where the matter is governed by judge-made rules ('common law'), they will consider what the state of the law is on the basis of previous decisions of the courts (the doctrine of precedent).

This section may concern just one point of law or several. The skill you need to acquire is the ability to read this part of the judgment (which can be fairly long) quickly, and to note succinctly the reasons for the decision of the judge/court. Because the judges are bound by their previous decisions (the doctrine of precedent) you will find that a large part of the judgment is taken up with summaries of previous relevant cases. Many of these you will have read yourself, so there is no need to note down again what those cases were about or how they were decided. Limit your note to the way such previous cases are interpreted by the judges in the latest case.

Once the judge has reviewed the previous cases, they will usually try to distil the relevant principles and apply them to the case at hand. This is, probably, the most important part of the judgment and you should note it carefully.

Even if judges agree with one another, they may still want to have their say. You will learn quite quickly to spot a judgment which adds a different angle to a decision.

Be aware that you will find good and bad judgments – some are well reasoned, some are poorly reasoned; some are well written, some are poorly written. If you find a judgment that is particularly appealing and convincing to you, think about why. That may be helpful for your own writing.

Try to make your notes of cases as succinct as possible - even with longer cases where all of the judges give slightly different judgments, you should try to keep your note to two/three pages. Most cases can be noted adequately in one/one and a half pages of A4. Preparing one's own summaries of cases is crucial part of the learning process. This is where you will learn the substantive law, the patterns of argumentation and the factors to which judges tend to pay attention. To begin with, you will miss the point of some of the cases, and find them hard to follow. One way to avoid this is to check what your textbook says about the case, before you embark on reading it.

Your notes of cases should be presented in a uniform way which makes them easy to read and allows you to go back to the case if you need to. You may find it helpful to follow this pattern:

- 1) Case name and year/reference. Level of court.
- 2) Facts
- 3) Held (including a note of whether the decision was unanimous or split, e.g. 'Held (3-2)' to record the number of judges who voted each way.
- 4) Judgments (put a note in the margin of the page or paragraph number - this will be a great help if you have to go back to the judgment, because you think you have missed a point).
- 5) Comment - you may find it useful to add comments made about the case in the textbook, in articles, in case notes, or in the tutorial.

Case notes

These are, effectively, short articles (two/three pages) which comment on a particular case, rather than a particular topic. Some tutors use them more often than others. They will usually appear in parentheses after the reference to the case. You may find them very useful to read before you read the case, because they will tell you what is important about the case in more detail than a textbook. Notes from casenotes should be added at the end of your own note of the case.

As with textbooks, don't assume there is a single interpretation of a case. Of course, reading a case note is helpful, but there is no substitute for reading the cases yourself.

Statutes

Statutes can be a little dull to read, because they are simply rules. They only come to life, as it were, when they are applied to cases and the judges have to interpret them.

For example, the basic definition of theft in The Theft Act 1968 section 1(1) is:

'A person is guilty of theft if he dishonestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it'.

This short definition has spawned hundreds of cases on the meaning of 'dishonestly', 'appropriates', 'property', 'belonging to another' and 'intention permanently to deprive'.

Nevertheless, you should not ignore references to statutes on the reading list. You must always start with the basic rule laid down in the statute, as must the courts. Printing statutes is probably a good idea since you would have to note them *verbatim* anyway. In some papers, tutors will recommend that you buy a collection of relevant statutes.

Use of libraries

Students are inclined to complain that they have been unable to get hold of books. Sometimes this is for valid reasons (books do, annoyingly, go missing and there may be a certain amount of pressure of use), but sometimes it reflects laziness or poor organisation. Remember that in Oxford you are extraordinarily privileged as compared with students in other universities, who only have one source of books; you have, at least, three. Moreover, many of the materials, including books, are available on online databases you will be provided access to.

Your first point of call is the College Law Library. Many of you will prefer to work in the University library (the Bodleian Law Library – 'the Bod'), but those who decide to stay in the College Library must be prepared to share it with your colleagues.

DO NOT: (i) stockpile books at your desk - you can only read one report at a time and it is very annoying if a book is not on the shelf, yet is not actually being read by somebody else; (ii) leave your files, books etc at the desks in the library if you are not planning to return for a long time - you cannot make a proprietary claim to these seats; (iii) talk in the library - lawyers have a particularly bad reputation in this regard; (iv) deface the books in any shape or form.

You will be given a tour of the Bod. There is no book which you will need during your three years as an undergraduate which the Bod does not hold - the excuse that the College Library did not have a particular book will, therefore, get you about as far as you might imagine. The Bod is a reference only library. Since the Bod also contains the lecture theatres for Law, you will find that you need to use it between lectures, even if your normal work-base is the College Library.

Finally, if you want the real 'Oxford experience' you might consider working in the Codrington library in All Souls College. Its one drawback is that it is so warm and quiet that you are more likely to fall asleep than to work. If you wish to use it, you will have to fill in an application

form - they can be collected from All Souls – and obtain a reference from one of your tutors, which we are happy to provide.

Essays & Problems

Your knowledge and understanding of the Law will be tested in two ways - by the writing of essays and the solving of problems. Some papers do not require any formal problem solving at all, others make it optional (e.g. Constitutional Law), while for others it is compulsory (e.g. Criminal Law, Roman Law). The two disciplines are quite different. Essays require you to analyse critically a particular area of the law and, often, consider what the law ought to be as well as what it is. Problems require you to apply the law *as it is* to a hypothetical set of facts.

Essays

Essay Planning

Planning is essential and you should ensure that you leave enough time to do it properly. You will normally know your essay topic before you start the reading for a given week, which means that you should read the material with the essay in mind. Some students are paralysed at the point when they come to write the essay, often precisely because they have not been thinking about the demands of the question while doing their reading. It is a good idea to keep a sheet of paper separate from the main body of your notes on which you should record thoughts and ideas relevant to the essay title as they occur to you in the course of your reading. This will assist you in shaping an essay.

Essay Writing

Essays in law subscribe to the same basic pattern as for any other type of essay. Your guiding principle here should be clarity. Much of what is said below relates to making your case explicit and providing signposts to your argument. Aristotle helps us here: 'A speech has two parts. You must state your case and prove it. You cannot either state your case and omit to prove it, or prove it, without having first stated it; since any proof must be a proof of something, and the only use of a preliminary statement is the proof that follows it.'

It is important that your essay includes an **introduction**. Introductions have a number of functions, but what is most important is that they contain a clear statement what you will argue or what position you will defend in the essay. For this purpose, you will often have to identify the issues which the question raises. Where opinion is divided - and it usually is - the introduction also provides an opportunity to evaluate claims of both sides, albeit in a preliminary fashion. This evaluation should help you to signpost your own approach; in other words, to establish an analytical strategy and explain how your own argument will develop in the essay. The type of strategy you adopt will depend on the kind of question you are asked. Before you decide on the strategy, break the question down into a series of sub-questions. These sub-questions can then be addressed in subsequent individual paragraphs of the essay, giving you a clear and coherent structure.

Your essay should be clearly organised into paragraphs. Each paragraph should contain a claim related to the main question; if it does not, it should be eliminated. Be brutal with your own writing; even though you would have put a lot of work into it, if a paragraph or two does not fit, then cut it.

The claim of the paragraph (its proposition) should be announced in the first sentence of the paragraph (the 'topic sentence'). The sentences which follow should prove the proposition by means of evidence. It is also legitimate to use the topic sentence to introduce a question or explain the context, but only provided that (i) it is related to the main question; (ii) the paragraph addresses that question, and sticks to it, and (iii) your answer to the question is clear by the end of the paragraph. You should not drift from the subject matter announced in the topic sentence. It should be possible for the reader to make sense of your essay by reading the first and last sentences of each paragraph. Test for yourself.

Some students have difficulty linking their paragraphs. Much depends on whether you have successfully identified an analytical strategy at the outset. If you have done this well, you will already have given the reader the necessary signposts to the argument, so that you will know where each unit stands in relation to the whole. But there are other devices for linking material. One is by means of a brief summary of the argument so far, pulling the strands together, and indicating the thus far unanswered questions. Another is by providing a numbered sequence of points, e.g. 'There are three reasons for this...' then list them in summary form...then devote a paragraph to each. Numbered sequences can also be used to organise materials within paragraphs.

Another common source of difficulty lies in the use of evidence, which, in legal terms, means cases and statutes and not the opinions of writers. The latter can certainly be called upon in support of your argument but even the opinions of writers must be based on evidence. When writing an essay do not fall into the trap of identifying which area of the law the question relates to and turning it into 'everything I know about...'- in which you provide (no doubt accurate) summaries of the cases you have just read but no real argument. The evidence should be made to fit the argument you have constructed *before* you put pen to paper.

Your essay should be concise; individual tutors may give you their own guidelines but, normally, about three to four typed pages should be adequate (remember you will only have 45 minutes to produce an essay in the examination).

If your tutor has marked an essay, always read their comments, and try to act on advice given. If you cannot read the comments, ask for them to be deciphered.

Problems

Problems are quite different to essays. Whereas with essays knowledge of the law is the basis for making an argument about its correctness or future development, problem questions require you to apply the legal rules you know to the facts of the problem.

Problem questions usually consist of a fairly complex set of hypothetical facts in relation to which you are asked either to advise certain of the parties or discuss what offences may have

been committed or liability incurred. The facts are usually quite improbable in that they will raise several legal issues whereas, in reality, cases usually boil down to one or two issues at most.

The skill in answering problem questions is to spot the legal issues to which the facts give rise and then indicate how a court is likely to resolve them on the basis of the existing law. Needless to say, problem questions cannot be answered without a clear understanding of the relevant areas of law. If you add to this the fact that problem questions can cut across several different topics on a particular paper, whereas essays tend to be fairly one dimensional, you can begin to see why problems are viewed by many tutors as the best way of assessing whether a student has a real understanding for the law. There is no way of acquiring the skill other than through practice. Some tutors will give problem classes, some will stick to essays, even in papers for which problems are compulsory. You should obtain copies of past examination papers for each subject you take and look closely at the type of problems you are likely to come up against.

When answering problems, you have to adopt a well-structured approach: use headings and numbered paragraphs to divide up your answer into the separate issues and sub-issues which are raised by the facts. How you do this will vary with the type of paper but your tutor should, in most cases, give you guidance.

Style

When writing essays or answering problems, it is helpful to underline the names of cases, when cited. You do not need to cite the case in full; a reasonably identifiable abbreviation will do, e.g. *R v Home Secretary ex parte Bentley* can be cited as *ex p. Bentley* or *Entick v Carrington* as *Entick*.

Some abbreviations are entirely acceptable: J. for Mr. Justice, LJ for Lord Justice. Others can be used if you indicate what they are on the first occasion they are used: e.g. Sale of Goods Act (SGA). You will pick up common abbreviations very quickly.

You do not need to cite the reference for cases or the year, though if chronology is important (because one case has overruled/distinguished another) you should ensure that you get cases in the right order.

Tutorials

Law students at Oxford are taught in Tutorials and in Lectures. Tutorials are classes in very small groups (usually two or three students), which take place in colleges. Lectures are organised by the Law Faculty and are addressed to the entire year of law students from all colleges. It is important to understand the function of an Oxford tutorial.

The tutorial is intended to be a mutual exploration of a topic, and is almost always premised on the prior submission of written work. It should be obvious, but we have learned from experience that it is not – please ensure that you respect your tutor's time, and submit the

written work on time. The process of writing an essay or a problem answer will help you prepare effectively for a tutorial.

Tutorials are not a one-way transaction; you are not there to be spoon-fed. If you are not already aware of the fact, it should be apparent from the minimal contact time which tutorials provide, that you are here, very largely, to teach yourself. You have left school behind; dependency is out and independence is in.

You should expect your tutor to provide some feedback on the content and structuring of your essay, but you should not let the initiative lie always with them. You should always go into the tutorial with an agenda of problems you feel need discussing. If you feel a little intimidated by the set up - and some of you may do at first - then write down the issues you want to discuss before you go in. You should pay careful attention to the issues the tutor raises with you and the range of alternative approaches they suggest. By all means take handwritten notes during the tutorial, but not at the expense of your own intellectual engagement. Do resist the urge to hide behind a laptop screen, google furiously or type detailed notes during a tutorial. This is usually distracting for the tutor and your tutorial partner, and not conducive to a thoughtful dialogue. It is also likely that many tutors will not, for the reasons just indicated, allow you to use laptops during their tutorials. If you have not taken notes during the tutorial, write down what you have learned immediately the tutorial is over. Make sure that your notes are clear - it is a very good habit to write up in full those few scribbles you have made in the tutorial; very quickly they will become meaningless and tutors get extremely irritated when in revision they find themselves going over material which they laboured in tutorials.

Always listen patiently to what your tutorial partner(s) say, and be prepared to comment on their arguments. You can disagree and be critical, but always be respectful and fair in evaluating other positions. Don't always wait on your tutor's judgement. Never dismiss another person's point of view without arguing the case, and avoid posturing.

Lectures

Lectures are an important component of your course. For your Mods subject you will find a range of lecture series that will introduce you to the relevant material in an accessible but critical way. Many of the lecturers at Oxford can put also you in touch with up-to-date research or provide you with a broad interpretative framework, filling in the gaps between what can be isolated pools of knowledge provided by tutorials.

During the first two terms leading to Moderations, you will find lectures closely tailored to the demands of the papers for which you are working. Thereafter, it is a weakness of the Oxford system that lectures and tutorials do not often run in tandem; you have to be willing and able to attend lectures for some papers before or after you have studied them in tutorials, though this is no bad thing in many ways. The availability of recorded lectures online will to some extent address this weakness as in many, but not in all, cases you will be able to access the relevant lectures at the appropriate moment.

It is difficult to give advice on techniques for taking notes in lectures because the style of individual lecturers varies. However, much the same principles apply as for taking notes from

books and articles. Some lecturers will provide handouts but very often these will just be a list of references to the material contained in the lectures. Some lectures will use PowerPoint, in which case their lecture slides will be made available online, usually before the lecture.

Revision

This course is not simply about passing examinations with the highest possible grades, but this is an important objective and one which will exercise your mind the closer you get to examinations. For every paper, always look at past exam papers (available online) to get an idea of the type of questions asked. This will also assist you in identifying gaps in your knowledge, which you may then close in your further revision. It is often helpful to re-read some of the key texts on a given topic, because they may make more sense retrospectively than they did on the occasion of your first reading. Once this has been done, you should work by means of detailed essay plans and practising problems, tackling questions of a different kind from those you did for tutorial assignments. Be warned that the worst thing you can do in any examination is to fail to answer the question; you will never get more than a lower second class mark, and you run the strong chance of a third or worse. This is why you must gain experience in turning your mind to new questions.

Oxford Marking Scheme

The Oxford marking is based a numerical system, which is as follows:

Grade	Class
70 +	First
60-69	Upper Second (2.1)
50-59	Lower Second (2.2.)
40-49	Third (3 rd)
30-39	Pass in Finals/Fail in Moderations
0-29	Fail

End of Term Reports

At the end of each term, you will you will receive a report from your tutors commenting on and assessing your work in a given subject (paper). These reports will usually be read out to you by your college tutor during a special meeting at the end of each term (Tutor's Collections). Sometimes, this special meeting will take place in front of the Master of St Peter's College (Master's Collections).

Collections (college examinations)

Every term beginning with your second term, your St Peter's tutors will also set you college examinations (also known as 'collections') on the previous term's completed tutorials. Marked collections will be returned to you with comments, from which you should get an indication of the level of your performance and suggestions for improvement. You will be expected to achieve at least a 60 in each collection. Students performing at the highest levels at collections (marks above 70), will be nominated for college prizes.

What is your tutor looking for?

Below is a series of issues to which your tutors will pay attention. They are listed in the form of questions. You should be asking yourself these questions as you assess your performance in tutorials:

Intellectual curiosity: Have I engaged thoughtfully with the material? Have I identified questions that you would like guidance on? Have I asked questions in tutorials?

Argumentative ability: Have I shown an interest in conceptual issues? Have I exhibited conceptual clarity? Have I structured my essays clearly? Have I developed an argument and substantiated it?

Fluency: What is the standard of my written English? How wide is my vocabulary? Are my statements precise and understandable?

Responsiveness: Have I made an effort to implement the advice my tutor has given me on my previously submitted work? Am I making an effort in tutorials? Do I engage with the work of my tutorial partner?

Originality: Have I made a real effort to engage with the contents of what I have read? Have I thought critically about the arguments of the judges and writers?

Professionalism: Have I been punctual to meetings and tutorials? Have I submitted written work on time? Have I prioritised tutorials and tutorial assignments over other activities? Have I responded promptly to tutors' requests for information? Have I respected tutors' time?

Efficiency: What steps have I made adequately to balance my academic duties and other commitments? Have my assignments been completed on time? Have I been reserving enough time to complete the reading and the written work prescribed?

Teamwork: Have I contributed constructively to tutorial discussion and any joint assignments? Have I studied jointly with other students in my group? Have I discussed the material with them outside the tutorials?

Initiative: How I sought all the materials on the reading list, including those only available in hard copies or only held by the Law Faculty Library? Have I made enough effort to understand the material before I asked the tutor to explain it to me in the tutorial?

Balance between academic and other commitments

The first call on your time must be your academic work, but it would be unfortunate if that was all you did in your time at Oxford. You are encouraged to engage in other activities (sport, drama, music, College and University Societies). The flexibility of your timetable is one of the chief advantages of a Law course. But you must learn to organise your timetable so that your work does not suffer. Some hints on time management are offered below. You should generally avoid major time commitments in your final year, when you will have exams.

Time management

In many ways this is the biggest challenge of your time at Oxford. For much of your previous academic career you have been bound by timetables imposed by external agencies. Now you will be set goals but no precise timetables for achieving them, just deadlines. This means that you will have to be proficient at organising your working time and disciplined at adhering to a self-devised timetable. This experience will prepare you for your future careers because most of them will inevitably impose demanding schedules, although at Oxford you will have a somewhat greater degree of freedom to manage your time.

- 1) The most important point is to make sure that you work steadily. Do not leave your work until the last minute, but allocate a set number of hours each day to study. Define precisely what you aim to achieve on particular day (which items you will read, what writing you will complete).
- 2) One source of problems is the standard tutorial cycle. Students do one set of assignments weekly and another concurrent set of assignments fortnightly. This means that in some weeks you will have to complete only one essay and in others two. It is tempting to take things easier in the 'lighter' weeks, but this is foolish as it piles up work for the following week. Create a timetable for each week which allocates time for both assignments.
- 3) Some students know in advance that because of major extracurricular commitments they will be extremely pressed in particular terms or weeks of term. If this is the case, then they should discuss the matter in advance with the tutor. In these cases, a sensible course of action might be to get some reading done before the term starts.
- 4) Another common fallacy is that while in your first year you have to work for Mods (Law Moderations – exams which you will take after the second term of your first year), you can take things easy in the second year, and turn things on only in the third year. This is the single biggest cause of underachievement at Oxford. The standards expected of candidates in Finals (Final Examinations taken at the end of your final year) are significantly higher than those in Mods. Students who switch off in the second year are unlikely to realise their full potential.
- 5) Your vacations are not a holiday - achieve an appropriate balance between the necessary academic work and other activities - paid work, work experience, travel etc.
- 6) Keep your financial affairs in good order, because disentangling them will take up a lot of your time; settle your bills promptly; ensure that you have the funds to meet your obligations; and apply for grants and loans at the start of the year.

Welfare

If you have a personal problem that affects your ability to work effectively, it is advisable to mention it to your tutors so that they are aware of the circumstances that might affect your academic performance. To receive welfare support, please approach the College Welfare Officers, the College Dean for Welfare, the College Nurse or Doctor, as well as student peer supporters. Sometimes you may find it helpful to talk things over with JCR Welfare Officers, who are also students and might be able to help or will direct you to the right person.

Enjoying the Course

Oxford is an incredibly vibrant and stimulating intellectual and cultural environment. How far you benefit from this will be the real test of the next three years, because the fulfilment of your intellectual and cultural potential depends on the choices you make. Be prepared to talk about legal topics with your peers. Law is a dynamic and high-profile subject upon which many non-lawyers also have opinions. You may wish to seek out some of the special lectures, particularly those given by visiting academics, which will broaden your horizons. You should also take the opportunity to put your legal skills into practice - the University offers some wonderful mooted competitions.

Finally...

Please remember that the demands on your tutors are multiple. They are not merely undergraduate teachers, important though that is to their role. They have administrative duties in both the College and the University. They supervise and examine research students, teach and have responsibility for graduate students in both College and the Law Faculty, and, most importantly, they are active legal scholars and members of an international research community. This is not to discourage you from approaching them, but to encourage you to observe the guidelines outlined above. Oxford gives its students a unique level of access to its academics, and you should therefore conduct your relations with them in a thoroughly professional and mature manner. Your tutors will be willing to make time for you, but please exercise judgement on when an issue requires their attention, and when it can be easily resolved through other channels.