8-Steps to a Perfect Bar Exam Essay

1. Analyze the call of the question before you read the fact pattern.

Why? This will help you understand exactly what the bar exam graders expect to see in your answer. I discuss this very important aspect of bar exam essay writing in this video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXzrAu0QWcw.
2. *Skim* the fact pattern to get a sense of the hypothetical and to begin spotting issues relevant to the call of the question.

Why? It is important to do a “quick pass” through the fact pattern in order to orient yourself each time you begin a new essay.

3. Re-read and re-analyze the call of the question to ensure you have a complete sense of what needs to be in your answer.

Why? Having skimmed the fact pattern, you will begin to see added nuance to the call of the question.
4. **Read** through the fact pattern at normal speed and begin creating your issue outline.

Why? The bar exam is a pressure-cooker environment. It is important to have an outline to follow so you do not forget to put something in your essay.

5. **Structure** your outline with major issues (e.g., Was Dave negligent?) followed by sub-issues (e.g., Dave’s duty, breach of duty, causation, harm).

Why? Your completed outline will guide you as you write your essay response, from major topics to subtopics.
6. Use headings in your written response.

Why? They will help a tired, overworked bar grader to see that you hit all the major issues and sub-issues in your essay response. Put your headings in **bold** to make them stand out from the rest of your essay.

7. Use IRAC.

Why? IRAC is the standard for legal analysis, and will be easiest to follow for the bar exam grader. State the issue or sub-issue and underline it as a heading in the essay. Then, write a concise, accurate rule statement. Insert a brief, but sufficient analysis, and then a quick conclusion.
For a good example of IRAC in action, check out the answer to Question 1 on the February 2013 California bar exam. (Also, be sure to note how the examinee used “See rule above” to avoid wasting time when analyzing whether multiple parties were guilty of conspiracy.)

8. Write and review as many practice essays as necessary until you become very good at the first seven steps.

Why? The act of writing practice essays helps you learn the law and the format of a correct essay response. Your first attempts at writing bar exam essays will likely be disappointing and may lead to intense frustration. Don’t
worry, everyone goes through this. Keep at it and soon enough you will be able to write solid essay responses.

Also, at some point, be sure to practice writing essays in a loud location, since there will be ambient noise at the bar exam testing site (e.g., hundreds of people pounding on computer keyboards). You should also set aside one or two days to do a “dress rehearsal” for bar exam essay day, during which you write the full complement of essays under timed conditions so you can get used to the time- and mental-pressure of bar exam essay day. I call this “Anticipation of Conditions;” you can read more about it here: http://www.barexammind.com/anticipation-of-conditions/.
Bonus tips:

--Read as many sample essays and answers as you can find from your jurisdiction. Check your state’s bar website for samples of *actual* questions, if your bar prep program does not provide some for you.

--Have a fellow bar studier or tutor give you one or more detailed evaluations of your practice essays. Feedback from a third-party can be very helpful.

--If you are taking the California bar exam, check out BarEssays.com [get a $15 discount code here] and BarIssues.com [click for $10 off].
Thanks for reading! I hope you found these tips useful.

For more help with your bar exam essays, be sure to read my book *How to Write Bar Exam Essays: Strategies and Tactics to Help You Pass the Bar Exam*. 
Free Audio Book

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