Helix BAR REVIEW by AccessLex

RETAKER GUIDE

Moving Forward: A Guide for Bar Exam Retakers

Receiving news that you didn't pass the bar exam can be disappointing and difficult. There is no way to minimize that reality. However, it is important to remember that this setback does not define your legal career, nor does it determine your future success. Many accomplished attorneys have faced the same challenge and have gone on to build fulfilling and prestigious careers. You can do the same.

The first step forward is to assess what may have contributed to your result and to develop a strategic plan for your next attempt. The bar exam, while significant, is ultimately a standardized test. Like all such exams, it has inherent limitations and does not measure your potential as a lawyer. Your capabilities and dedication extend far beyond a single test score.

It's natural to feel discouraged, frustrated, or even in denial. Give yourself time to process these emotions. However, once you reach acceptance, refocus on your preparation. With a clear plan and renewed determination, you can pass the exam and move forward in your legal career. This guide will support you in this process.

Decisions *and Action Steps*

First, consider whether you want to retake the exam during the next administration. It can be helpful to make your own list of pros and cons. Here are some examples:

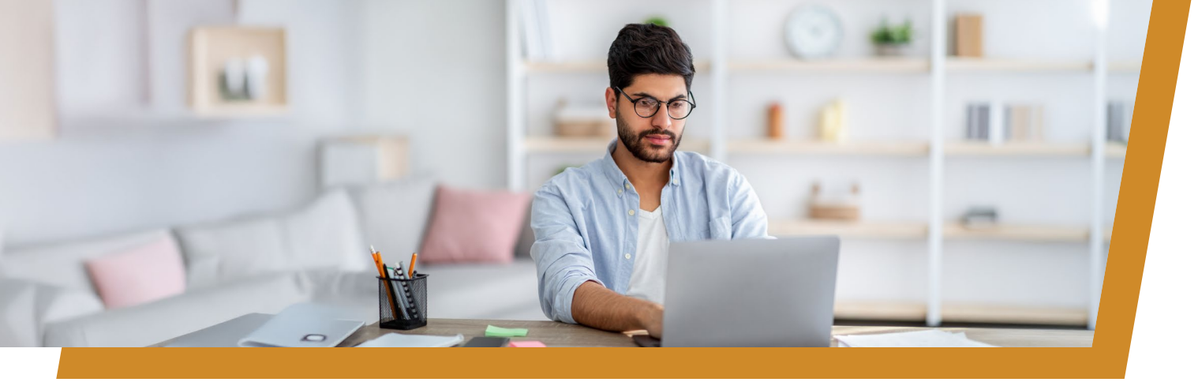
> **Pro:** You have only taken a short break from studying, so you will likely remember a lot of what you covered the last time around and it won't be too hard to jump back into a bar prep regimen.
>
> **Con:** Taking the bar exam costs more money – many people need to save up for the expense – especially if you just devoted several months to studying for the bar exam instead of earning money.

If you don't have the time to dedicate to studying right now or the resources to make it happen, you don't necessarily have to take the exam again immediately. However, each jurisdiction has its own rules regarding the viability of MPRE scores and other licensure requirements, so make sure you know how much time you have.

If you plan to take the bar during the next administration of the exam, register ASAP. You don't want to miss that deadline. The process will be the same as last time, but since they have your information already, it's a bit streamlined. You probably received information from the bar examiners on how to reapply to sit for the bar in the letter that said you did not pass. If not, look at your **jurisdiction's bar examiners' website** for instructions.

Next, if your jurisdiction permits, secure copies of your written work. This information should also be in the letter that the bar examiners sent you. However, if it is not there, determine whether you are able to access your written responses – ask the bar support team at your law school, look at the bar examiners' website, or give your jurisdiction's bar examiners a call.

Finally, think about what materials you will use to prepare. You may be eligible for a free retaker course from the bar preparation provider you studied with previously. However you may wish to go with another provider. You may also want supplemental resources – like extra multiple-choice questions or tutoring services. Take stock of what materials you have – for both memorization and practice. What worked well for you? What didn't help very much? Then, think about what else you need to fill in the gaps.



Reflecting On Your Previous Attempt

To make an effective plan for moving forward, it is important to first look back at your previous study period and ask yourself some reflection questions. Figuring out what went well and what you want to improve upon can inform your study plan. (**Note:** Even if you do not plan to sit for the next administration of the exam, you should go through this process now, while the experience of the last exam is still top of mind.)

As you work through these suggested reflection questions, be honest with yourself. The reflective process is for you – no one else is judging you. Only honesty will result in improvement. And, remember – you have done hard things. You can do hard things.

“What If I’m Taking a Different Exam?”

Sometimes, you might end up taking a different exam than the one you originally sat for, either because the jurisdiction changed the exam it is administering, or because you decide to take the exam in a different jurisdiction. The key reflection and review tasks you find here will largely stay the same. Even if you’re taking a different exam – you will need to demonstrate your ability to issue spot, state thorough rules, and engage in legal analysis. Thus, even if your new exam has different question styles – focus on your ability to do those tasks. Additionally, make sure you know what else the new exam is testing. For example, if you’re taking the NextGen UBE, you need to be able to formulate your responses with your client’s goals, objectives, and constraints in mind.

General Reset Reflection

- What are you proud of accomplishing in law school? In life?
- Why do you want to become a practicing attorney? What are you going to do with your law license?

Strengths

- What are your strengths? How did you use them in bar prep?
- What went well during bar prep?
- What subjects do you feel confident about?

Challenges

- What roadblocks or challenges did you experience during your bar study?
- What bar prep tasks required more focused effort?

Bar Preparation Course

- Did you use a bar preparation course?
- Did you follow the plan for the course?
- How much of the course did you complete? Were you just checking the box, or did you engage in active study and practice?

Study Routine

- What did your daily routine look like? How often did you review and revise your schedule?

Practice Questions

- How many questions did you complete during your last bar study?
- How many written assignments did you fully write (not just outline or read) the model answer for?
- How many multiple-choice questions did you complete?
- How did you approach reviewing completed practices questions (all types)?
- What did you do with the information you learned from question review?

Memorization Tools

- What types of tools did you use to help memorize (journal, charts, flashcards, outlines)?

The Final Weeks

- What did your final two to three weeks before the exam look like? How did you structure your study? Did the amount of time you spent on practice questions increase or decrease?
- How did you feel on exam day? What was your experience?

Reviewing Your Previous Work

Jurisdictions vary in what information they release to previous bar applicants. Having information about your subject-specific performance can be very useful. Your strongest and weakest subjects may or may not align with what you expected them to be.

If you are not privy to your subject breakdown from the actual exam, go back to whatever notes you have or what you remember from your previous studies. Having a sense of your stronger and weaker doctrinal areas can help prioritize your studying.

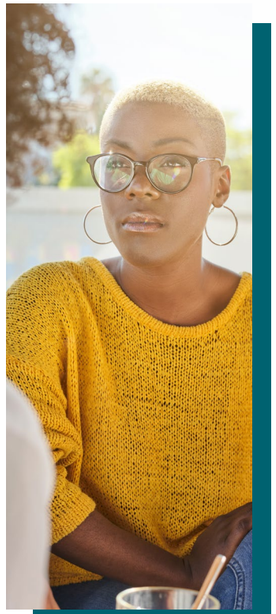
Similarly, jurisdictions differ in terms of the information they release regarding written scores. You may just get the scores. Or, you may be able to review copies of your written assignment answers. If you have that opportunity, you should take it.

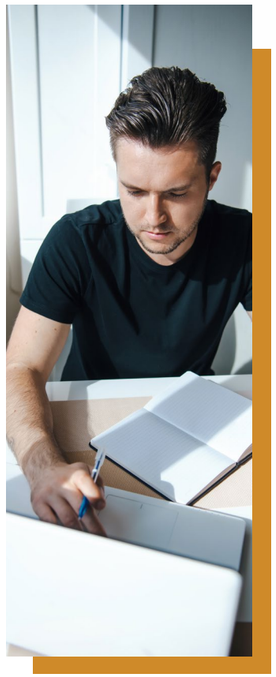
You won't likely see any feedback on the answers. You will just get back what you submitted. This is still extremely valuable, as it allows you to compare those answers to the sample answers your jurisdiction puts out. Then, you can engage in the process of self-assessment.

Your self-assessment reflection should address each component of IRAC, your overall structure and clarity, and your testing experience. Here are ten questions to ask yourself:

1. Did you organize the answer similarly to the organization of the sample answer?
2. Did you identify all the major issues?
3. Did you spot all the same rules and state them accurately?
4. Did you match the facts with the correct issues?
5. Did you properly explain why the facts were important?
6. Did you cite facts from the fact pattern and tie them directly to a particular part of the rule?
7. Did you conclude on the issues and sub-issues, fully answering the precise question asked?
8. Was your response easy to read and understand?
9. For a PT, did you demonstrate your analogical reasoning skills, comparing the precedential case facts to your facts?
10. Were you able to complete the assignment in the time you were allotted on exam day?

Use these questions to engage in this process of self-assessment after each new practice session during the study period.





Planning for the Next Round

The first thing to do is to think realistically about how much time you will be able to devote to bar study. You may need to take some time off work or take a leave of absence. You may also need a financial plan.

Speak to your supervisors and loved ones and try to carve out as much time for study as you possibly can. If you are unable to find adequate time to study, think about whether it would make more sense to sit out the next exam, and instead take the following exam.

Talk to your law school to see if they offer any programming or support for alumni retaking the bar exam.

Research has shown that if we write out a plan, we are more likely to stick to it. So, once you have a good idea of your resources and limitations, consider your day-to-day schedule and write down when, and for how long, you can devote time to your studies.

Study Tasks

Everyone's study plan is unique. However, as you think about studying again, remember that you are not starting from zero. You have studied for this exam before. What you learned is still inside of you. It's not all lost. You are in a different place than you were in when you started to study last time.

You do not have to do absolutely everything all over again. You may not need to watch every video or read every word of the outline again. But you do need to critically – and honestly – reflect on what you did and what resources you have. What did you use to memorize from last time? Do you still have those materials? Are they solid?

You have a head start from where you began last time, but you can't just do everything exactly the same way again. Be honest with yourself about what worked and what didn't. Keep in mind your reflections about your study process. When did you study? How much did you study? What did you do when you studied? Then, monitor your learning as you progress through your bar prep this time around. If something isn't working for you, make an adjustment so you don't waste precious time you could be spending on tasks that benefit your learning process.

Practice, Practice, Practice

While study plans vary, one component is non-negotiable: practice. Be active in your learning. Practice every day. But, make sure you are not just blindly practicing. Reflect after each session. Regardless of whether you just completed a set of MCQs or a written assignment, ask yourself these questions (in addition to the reflection questions listed above):

1. What did I learn about the doctrine?
2. What did I learn about how the bar examiners test?
3. What did I learn about myself as a test-taker?
4. What specific action steps will I take to improve?

Practice is most beneficial when you come up with some overarching takeaways after each session. It's important to think about what you learned about the rules. Sometimes you might learn a new rule entirely. Other times, you might learn an exception or a nuance in how the rule is applied. You also want to think about how the bar examiners tested the issues. There are a finite number of ways they can manipulate facts to implicate each rule. If you intentionally think about how the rules are tested, you will begin to see patterns and get a better idea of how the facts will trigger certain rules on the exam.

Also think about yourself as a test-taker. Did you second-guess your answers and change your response from the right option to the wrong one? Did you add facts that weren't there? Did you read too quickly and miss facts? Identifying common test-taking challenges will help you develop strategies to overcome them. Finally, always think about concrete steps you can take to improve performance the next time you approach each component of the exam.

Example Takeaways	Potential Specific Action Steps
Forgot to cite the facts.	Cross off facts after using.
Didn't directly connect the facts to the law.	Use the word "because" to connect the rule and facts – "the rule is met/not met because relevant facts."
Struggled with timing.	Create an exam outline and allocate time to issues by weighting them.
Second-guessed and switched from correct to incorrect multiple-choice answer.	Go with your first instinct and only change your answer if you can articulate why in IRAC format (i.e. you missed an exception or misread the fact pattern).

Log these takeaways in a journal or spreadsheet. Note every rule that you learn or clarify through a practice question in your memorization materials and keep track of tips based on your common mistakes.

Caring for Your Whole Self

Remember that you are a human being, not a machine. Be kind and take care of yourself during this process.

Be sure to build in practices that are good for your physical, mental, and emotional health every day. Try to eat well and exercise. Give yourself a daily opportunity to wind down. Pay attention to your stress level and your physical exhaustion. You need to be well to be productive. If you incorporate wellness practices early on, you will be more likely to maintain them as the exam gets closer and your experience becomes more stressful.

Once you have figured out your schedule and your plan, it's time to dive in.

But don't cover your eyes and jump – think strategically about each study session. Start by assessing where you stand. Take some time to reflect on the subjects you feel most comfortable with, and the test components you performed best on.

Remember, you've got some experience under your belt. The name of the game when you're studying again is to build up those weaker areas without losing your strengths. And your plan should always be in service of this goal.

Most people think they should start with their weaker subjects so they have the most time with them. Spoiler alert: it's actually best to begin with a subject you feel more comfortable with. Getting started with studying again is difficult, both intellectually and emotionally. So, use your first couple of sessions to boost your confidence and get back into the flow of studying.

Reminders

You have all the skills you need to pass the bar exam. You know how to prepare (and, perhaps, how not to prepare). You've experienced the exam. In fact, you already earned a lot of points on this test. *You have come so far.* It is not fun to have to do it again, but you **can** do it.

Although retaking the bar is a very individual process, you are not alone. If you're studying with Helix, our Helix attorney directors are happy to speak with you, review your score report, and help develop a plan for success! Reach out today to schedule a coaching call.

Retaker Checklist

HAVE YOU:

- Registered for the next bar exam?
- Requested your written exam answers (if your jurisdiction permits)?
- Reflected on what you need to be successful at studying next time – from loved ones, colleagues, coworkers, and yourself?
- Spoken to your employer about time off and other ways they can support you?
- Spoken to your loved ones about needing time to study and other ways they can support you?
- Reflected on your previous study process – time/quality spent on various study activities and study tools for memorization?
    - Assessed the percentage of the previous bar course you completed?
    - Reflected on your previous schedule (e.g. How many weeks did you study? How many hours per day did you study? What percentage of time did you spend on lectures, material creation/review, and doing/reviewing practice questions?)
- Reflected on your previous work, including number of completed questions, process for reviewing question sets, and method for organizing rules/concepts from missed questions?
- Reflected on your previous written work, including number completed, conformity with IRAC/CRAC/HRAC structure, and focus on strong analysis tying facts to each part of the rule?
- Identified concrete things you will do differently?
- Identified your overall subject-matter, test-taking, and studying strengths and weaknesses?
- Scheduled time with a law school resource to review your exam results and written exam responses (if your jurisdiction permits)?
- Made a plan for when you will study?
- Made a plan for how you will study? Does it include time every day for reflection and self-assessment of study tasks for the day and/or week?
- Made a plan for taking care of your physical health during the study period?
- Made a plan for taking care of your emotional health during the study period?
- Called a Helix coach to talk about study planning?
- Found a peer/colleague who is also studying for (or even retaking) the bar exam? Consider talking with them about setting up an accountability system with regular check-ins on maintaining your study plan, including tasks for physical and emotional health.

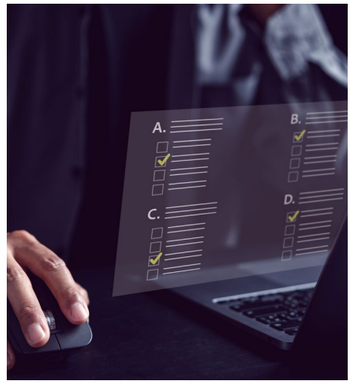
Weekly Bar Prep
Reflection Questions

Take some time to reflect on these questions as you move through your studies. Don't assume that reflection is a waste of time when you could be doing more practice questions or memorizing more. Reflection is essential!

The benefits of critical self-reflection are vast, but here are five ways this practice will help you improve your test-taking.

1. Self-reflection helps you **identify patterns in how the doctrine is tested.** Hypothetical facts can only be manipulated in so many ways to test the black letter rules. Once you've begun to really study a topic – and answered several practice questions on the same subject – if you're engaging in purposeful reflection as you study, you will begin to see patterns in how the bar examiners test that rule.

2. Reflection will help you **identify your test-taking strengths and weaknesses.** Recognizing patterns in your testing skills will help you develop strategies for disrupting them. Perhaps you determined that you answered a question incorrectly because you did not fully understand the rule. Great! Now you know how to answer the question correctly the next time – you just need to spend more time with the rule. Or, perhaps you answered a question incorrectly because you made a test-taking error. For example, you read too quickly and missed an important fact. Or, you picked an answer to a multiple-choice question that looked right because it had a legal-sounding buzzword in it, when, in fact, it was a made-up rule. If you're taking the time to meaningfully reflect, once you answer a few sets of multiple-choice questions or a few practice written questions, you will have a good sense of test-taking mistakes that you tend to make repeatedly. Then, you can come up with specific action steps for overcoming those mistakes.



3. Reflection **improves memory retention.** By going back to a question and comparing your response to the correct answer, you will help your brain remember the rule and example for the next time you see a similar fact pattern. This process (sometimes referred to as "reflection-on-action") requires retrieval and critical thinking about learned information – two learning tasks that enhance long term retention of material. Plus, even if you feel frustrated or confused while reflecting on practice performance, it's still helping you learn. The more times your brain struggles with a concept, the more likely it is to remember it.

   This is why it is critical that you review not only questions you answered incorrectly, but also the questions that you answered correctly. You want to make sure that you got the right answer for the right reason. If you just guessed, it's great that you were correct, but it won't help you answer a similar question right the next time you see one. The same is true for written work – just because you reached the same conclusion as a model answer, this doesn't mean your rules and analysis were sufficiently thorough. So, always take the time to meaningfully reflect.

4. Relatedly, **reflection aids in deep learning.** While you will ultimately have to memorize rules for the bar exam, rote memorization is just one part of solid exam performance. To really excel, you want to internalize the concepts and how they are applied so that you can recognize the specific rules that are implicated by a hypothetical problem and explain how you would reason to a solution. If you've internalized the rules through reflection during your bar study period, even when you don't remember everything word for word on exam day, you will still be able to analyze your way to the correct answer because you have a deep understanding of how the law works. Reflecting on each question and your test-taking process will help you reach that level of understanding.

5. Finally, **reflection will help you become a better and more efficient learner.** Don't just reflect on your performance on practice questions – take some time each week to also reflect on your study skills. How did you manage your time? Think about the goals you set to accomplish. Did you finish them all? Or, were several tasks started and abandoned? Think about the study tasks that you completed. Did they help you to learn the material? Did they take too much time in light of the learning benefits? Reflecting on each week of study will keep you on track and quickly course-correct when you recognize that you're falling behind. Pair what you learn from self-assessing your study skills with those identified test-taking patterns and your personal strengths and weaknesses, and you'll be able to make more informed decisions about where to spend your precious (and limited) study time.

Week	Reflection Question(s)
1	Reflect on how you will use practice questions differently during this bar study period than the prior study period. Create a study schedule for a week of bar study. • What kinds of study materials do you need to memorize the rules? Develop a concrete plan to create these materials as you move through the bar preparation course.
2	Reflect on your experience completing a PT. • If you followed a plan, how well do you feel your plan worked? • Did you derive your structure from clues in the assignment memo and cases? • What would you like to do differently moving forward?
3	Thinking about learning and memorizing doctrine, what is the most helpful practice that you developed during law school? Name something that you'd like to do better going forward to learn and memorize doctrine for the bar exam.
4	Reflect on your study process over the first few weeks of bar prep. • In particular, are you practicing/developing a strategy for approaching each type of bar exam question? • What are the biggest challenges when answering each style of question, and what techniques can you use to mitigate those challenges? • How will you create accountability for adjusting your approach next week? • Which strategies can you commit to executing over the next week?
5	Reflect on your bar exam writing and how your HRAC/IRAC/CRAC structure has evolved. • What have you improved upon? • What part of writing in the format is still challenging? • Looking at your "A" part of the structure, how are you integrating facts in the analysis to prove the rule you've stated in the "R" part is met or not met?
6	Reflect on your progress over the course of the bar study period. • What do you know now about approaching each component of the exam that you did not know at the beginning? • For each type of question, what are the top three personal tips that you want to keep in mind as you continue to practice in the future?
7	In Week 1, you developed a concrete plan for creating study tools to aid in understanding and memorization of important rules. • With the bar exam a few weeks away, what adjustments will you need to create memory tools to be ready for each major subject on the bar exam? • What strategies will you use to develop big picture memory tools for each subject?
8	Do a full simulated bar exam and ask yourself these questions: • What were some of the strengths you successfully executed on the simulated exam? • What were some of the main challenges you encountered on the simulated exam? • After reviewing the answer explanations and completing the MCQ Reflection Chart, what patterns could you identify with your question performance? Did you perform better or worse in certain subjects or find patterns where you read too quickly or with less focus? • What did you notice about your physical needs during the exam in terms of nutrition, focus, and fatigue? What can you do to improve your physical strength for another long practice set or on the bar exam? • Name three concrete strategies you want to focus on practicing the next couple weeks.
9	Review the written assignments you have completed previously. • Are the issues and rules from these written assignments represented in your memorization tools? If not, consider adding them, even if in an abbreviated form.
10	Studying for the bar is an exhausting and stressful process for everyone, and it is difficult for anyone to feel "ready." Write a letter to yourself as if you were writing to your best friend to provide support and encouragement. According to Dr. Kristin Neff, the three tenets of self-compassion are: 1. Self-kindness — we are gentle and understanding with ourselves rather than harshly critical and judgmental. 2. Recognition of our common humanity — we feel connected with others in the experience of life rather than isolated and alienated by our suffering. 3. Mindfulness — we hold our experience in balanced awareness, rather than ignoring our pain or exaggerating it. Think about those three tenets as you draft a letter to yourself.

Retaking the bar exam is never easy — but you can do this. You made it through law school, and you will pass the bar.

One of the biggest challenges the first time around is the unknown — the sheer size and weight of the exam can feel overwhelming. But this time, you're not stepping into the unknown. You've been there. You know what it's like to sit in that testing center, to navigate the logistics, to manage your time. That experience gives you an advantage over first-time test-takers.

Trust yourself and trust your study process. Be patient with yourself, and take care of your well-being — mind, body, and soul. Bar prep is a journey, and it's important to stay strong, focused, and balanced along the way.

Breathe in confidence. Breathe out doubt. Prepare for success.

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