

# Bar Exam Essay Questions

## HOW TO ANSWER BAR EXAM ESSAY QUESTIONS IMPRESSIVELY

Sharing tips from my Criminal Law Professor Atty. Ruben C. Talampas, Jr.

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By: Atty. Ruben C. Talampas, Jr.

The then Chairperson of the Committee on Bar Examinations, Madame Justice Ameurfina Melencio-Herrera, submitted a report to the Philippine Supreme Court her observations on the 1980 bar exams.

*According to her several examinees have made very unsatisfactory showing to such an extent that there is one who obtained a grade as low as 7% another obtained a grade of 11%; still some others obtained grades of 12%; 16%; 17%; 18%; 19%; 20%; 21%; 24%; 25%; 26%; 27%; 31%; 34%; etc."*

She pointed out the general weakness of the bar examinees. She said: "The reason for this high mortality rate, may be attributed to several factors among them in the opinion of the undersigned, may be due mainly to the following: . . . inadequate command of the English language".

*She further emphasized: "The examinees inhabiting the lowermost rungs of the grading scale manifested not alone an appalling lack of knowledge of the fundamental principles involved in the examination questions but also an inability to logically string their thoughts together compounded by an almost incredible deficiency in language skills."*

It was less than 35 years ago but still her remarks seem to be true at present.

The following are actual questions and answers of some examinees which demonstrate their lack of knowledge of the fundamental legal principles and inadequate command of the English language:

*Question No. 6(b) – "An accused was found guilty of double murder and was meted out two sentences of reclusion perpetua. How would the accused serve the sentences?"*

*Answer – "Both penalties must be served by the accused, and he was electrocuted and died then it washes out the remaining sentence to served by the accused."*

*Question No. 11. – "Patrolman Cruz, acting under orders of the Municipal Mayor, Who wanted to put a stop to the frequent occurrence of robbery in Sitio Masukal, patrolled the place. At about midnight, seeing three persons acting suspiciously in*

**Bar exam essay questions** represent a significant component of the bar examination that aspiring lawyers must navigate to gain admission to practice law. These questions test a candidate's ability to apply legal principles and reasoning to hypothetical scenarios, reflecting the practical skills required in the legal profession. This article delves into the nature of bar exam essay questions, their structure, strategies for effective preparation, common subjects covered, and tips for writing compelling responses.

# Understanding Bar Exam Essay Questions

Bar exam essay questions are designed to assess a candidate's legal knowledge, analytical abilities, and writing skills. Typically, these questions present a factual scenario involving legal issues that require detailed analysis. The goal is to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the law and the ability to apply it in a practical context.

## Characteristics of Bar Exam Essay Questions

1. Complexity: Questions often involve multiple legal issues, requiring candidates to identify relevant laws and apply them appropriately.
2. Factual Nuance: Scenarios are usually rich in detail, which means candidates must carefully analyze the facts to identify the legal issues at play.
3. Time Constraints: Candidates typically have a limited amount of time to read, analyze, and write their responses, simulating the pressures of real-world legal practice.

## Structure of Bar Exam Essay Questions

Bar exam essay questions usually follow a similar structure that candidates should familiarize themselves with to maximize their performance.

## Components of the Essay Question

- The Call of the Question: This is a specific directive at the end of the factual scenario that outlines what the candidate is required to address. It typically asks for an analysis of certain legal issues or for a conclusion based on the facts.
- Factual Scenario: A detailed description of events that raises legal issues. Candidates must extract relevant facts and determine how they relate to the law.
- Legal Issues: The primary legal questions that arise from the factual scenario. Candidates must identify these issues to frame their analysis.

## Common Formats of Essay Questions

- Single Issue Questions: Focus on one legal issue arising from the facts.
- Multi-Issue Questions: Involve multiple legal issues that require analysis of various laws and doctrines.

- Comparative Questions: Ask candidates to compare and contrast different legal principles or statutes as they apply to the scenario.

## **Preparation Strategies for Bar Exam Essay Questions**

Success in bar exam essay questions hinges on effective preparation. Here are several strategies to consider:

### **1. Familiarize Yourself with the Format**

Understanding the structure and format of essay questions is crucial. Candidates should practice with past exam questions from their jurisdiction to get a sense of the types of scenarios and legal issues that typically arise.

### **2. Develop a Study Plan**

Creating a comprehensive study plan that allocates time for reviewing substantive law, practicing essay writing, and receiving feedback is vital. A balanced approach can enhance retention and application of legal principles.

### **3. Focus on Outlining**

Outlining responses before writing can help organize thoughts and ensure that all relevant legal issues are addressed. A structured outline typically includes:

- Introduction: Briefly state the legal issues and your conclusions.
- Body: Analyze each issue, applying relevant law and facts.
- Conclusion: Summarize findings and state any final conclusions.

### **4. Practice Writing Under Timed Conditions**

Simulating exam conditions by writing practice essays within a set time limit helps candidates become familiar with managing their time effectively. This practice can improve both speed and clarity in writing.

## **5. Seek Feedback**

Engaging with peers or instructors who can provide constructive feedback on practice essays is invaluable. Critiques can highlight areas for improvement and reinforce effective writing techniques.

## **Common Subjects Covered in Bar Exam Essay Questions**

Bar exam essay questions can cover a wide range of legal subjects. Familiarity with these areas is essential for effective preparation.

### **1. Constitutional Law**

Questions may involve issues related to individual rights, government powers, and the interpretation of constitutional provisions. Candidates should be prepared to analyze landmark cases and their implications.

### **2. Contracts**

Candidates often face scenarios involving contract formation, enforceability, breach, and remedies. Understanding the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) and common law principles is vital.

### **3. Criminal Law and Procedure**

Essays may address substantive criminal law, defenses, and procedural issues such as rights during arrest and trial. Candidates must be able to apply rules of evidence and constitutional protections.

### **4. Torts**

Tort law questions may involve negligence, intentional torts, and strict liability. Candidates should be ready to discuss the elements of different torts and potential defenses.

### **5. Property Law**

Real property and personal property issues, including ownership rights, leases, and easements, are common topics. Candidates should be familiar with relevant statutes and case law.

## **6. Agency and Partnership**

Questions may cover the formation and liability of partnerships, agency relationships, and the duties of partners. Understanding the legal implications of these relationships is crucial.

## **Tips for Writing Strong Responses**

Once candidates are prepared, writing effective responses is the next step. Here are some tips for crafting strong answers:

### **1. Read the Question Carefully**

Candidates should take the time to read the factual scenario and call of the question thoroughly to ensure they understand what is being asked before drafting an answer.

### **2. Organize Your Thoughts**

Utilizing an outline can help structure the response logically, ensuring that all necessary issues are covered sequentially.

### **3. Be Clear and Concise**

Clarity is key. Candidates should avoid overly complex language and focus on straightforward explanations of legal principles and their applications.

### **4. Use Proper Legal Terminology**

Employing appropriate legal terms demonstrates knowledge and professionalism. However, candidates should ensure that they are using these terms correctly and in context.

## 5. Conclude Effectively

A well-crafted conclusion should summarize the main points and clearly state the outcomes based on the analysis. This reinforces the candidate's reasoning and provides a satisfactory ending to the response.

## Conclusion

Bar exam essay questions are a critical aspect of the bar examination, testing candidates on their legal knowledge and practical skills. By understanding the structure, preparing effectively, and employing strong writing strategies, candidates can enhance their chances of success. With dedicated preparation, aspiring lawyers can approach these questions with confidence, showcasing their readiness to enter the legal profession.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What are the most common subjects tested in bar exam essay questions?**

The most common subjects include Contracts, Torts, Criminal Law and Procedure, Constitutional Law, Civil Procedure, and Property. Many jurisdictions also test Business Associations and Evidence.

### **How can I effectively outline my answers for bar exam essay questions?**

Start by identifying the call of the question. Create a structured outline that includes an introduction, a discussion of relevant rules and laws, application of those rules to the facts, and a conclusion. This helps organize your thoughts and ensures you cover all necessary points.

### **What is the importance of IRAC in bar exam essay writing?**

IRAC stands for Issue, Rule, Application, and Conclusion. It is a systematic approach that helps organize your answer, ensuring that you identify legal issues, state the relevant laws, apply them to the facts, and conclude logically. This format enhances clarity and coherence.

### **How much time should I allocate to each essay question during the bar exam?**

Typically, you should allocate about 30 to 45 minutes per essay question, depending on the specific requirements of your jurisdiction. This time includes reading the question, outlining your answer, and writing it. Practice managing your time during mock exams to build efficiency.

# What strategies can help improve my performance on bar exam essay questions?

Practice regularly with past essay questions, focus on mastering the IRAC method, review model answers for structure and substance, and get feedback on your writing. Additionally, familiarize yourself with the specific grading criteria of your jurisdiction to align your answers accordingly.

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