

■ EDU GUIDE ■

A guide to navigating LAW EXAMS

MD. NAYEEM HAIDER

Prior to choosing to pursue an undergraduate law degree, it is not uncommon for prospective students to underestimate the demanding nature of the legal discipline. Keeping aside presentations, assignments, and, of course, extra-curricular activities such as moot court competitions, the traditional metric to gauge a student's legal prowess remains their performance in examinations. As such, the foremost of a law student's concerns should be to do well in those exams. But how does one accomplish just that?

Law students, regardless of whether they're studying Bangladeshi law at public and private universities, or students of English law studying at recognised teaching centres of the University of London (UoL), broadly have two different types of questions to worry about: problem-based questions and essay-based questions.

A problem-based question comes in the form of an event, or set of events, to which students apply their knowledge and reasoning. An example could be a few paragraphs detailing the circumstances of a business dispute where the student is asked to advise one of the parties as a lawyer. Thereafter, the student has to analyse the facts and identify the parties, issues, and relevant areas of law. That accomplished, the student must then apply the relevant statutes and case laws to the facts and establish a clear line of reasoning to demonstrate the possible outcomes of the legal battle. On the other hand, essay-based analytical and narrative questions give the student either statements they must analyse and critique or doctrines on which they must present detailed, relevant, and eloquent discussions.

The method to writing these answers may take some time to master. Naomi Sharif, a second-year student at London College of Legal Studies (LCLS) (South), speaks of her own initial troubles adjusting, "As a student from a science background, there were a lot of things that I needed to teach myself. Although they are known as problem and essay questions, they were nothing near to what we used to write during our school days. I had to get acquainted with the form of writing, develop my critical thinking ability, and adapt it to that of a lawyer or legal advisor."

However, while a precise, persuasive style of writing is crucial, it is of equal importance to have one's statutes and case laws drilled into their mind. Tahsin Hasan Ameer, a law student at BRAC University, suggests some steps he took to make sure his preparations were solid, such as taking notes during class lectures, memorising the study material weekly, and creating his personal outline of the chapter lessons. Regarding overcoming his hurdles with answering problem questions, he says, "Although initially I struggled a bit, I took my lessons seriously and asked my friends and faculties for help. After taking their advice, I no longer had to struggle to answer the given problems. Moreover, the writing quality of my answers also changed drastically."

For students of law, the stepping stone to academic success is knowing the mistakes to avoid from the get-go. Riyadul Haque Khan Akash, a Senior Lecturer and Course Coordinator of LCLS (South), and an Advocate

of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, says, "The most common mistake that a student makes is that they write 'all you know' answers. They just see a common word in the topic and straight away start typing the answer without actually addressing what the question has asked for. In this process, they not only lose time as 'all you know' answers are typically long, they lose marks as well. Another mistake students make is that they do not effectively manage time in the exam hall."

As one would notice from all this, regardless of the institution, the basic skills needed to answer questions are roughly the same. The difference, however, reveals itself when one asks the right question: "How do I ace my exams?"

For students planning to sit for their UoL exams on English law, the best thing to do would be to practice past exam questions and read the examiner's reports for those questions. That lets them know what the examiners look for in an exam. They may also go to their teachers for feedback and ask them to grade their work based on the UoL standards, which are typically more stringent than grading in Bangladeshi universities. In contrast, in order for a student of

Bangladeshi law sitting for their midterms or finals at any private or public university, the ultimate key to success would be to pay attention to their professors, keep in mind what they would look for in an answer, and write to their satisfaction on the exam paper.

Dr Nakib Muhammad Nasrullah, Professor in the Department of Law at Dhaka University, describes how he would grade an examination, "If your answers are correct and to the point, you can expect sixty-five percent marks. If you show greater effort, let's say by giving more examples, then you may achieve seventy percent marks. After you've done that, if you explain with detail, it is possible to avail yourself of seventy-five percent marks. But the student can go even further than that. They can, in addition to writing correctly and adequately, also provide the relevant references. Where needed, they can analyse and criticise the relevant area of law, discussing the arguments for and against and delving into debates surrounding that doctrine of law. Through accomplishing all that, they can achieve the highest marks possible."

Nayeem is a student at LCLS (South).



ILLUSTRATION:
FATIMA JAHAN ENA