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What you need to know before you start

In this chapter are the tools you will need to be familiar with in order to get a good running start with your study of business law. Please read the following and make sure that you understand reasonably well each of the principles (you can always come back to it). This will pay you huge dividends and put you ahead of the pack. I'll bet you that most of your colleagues who're heading for a First in this subject (you'll soon know well enough who they are) won't know a lot of the following. Also, they almost certainly won't be reading this book – it's not heavy enough.

Please don't forget that the law you will be studying is English law and is the law relating to England and Wales only. I will be reminding you of this again. So, no statements about UK law or British law please! It upsets law lecturers a great deal if you do this as there is no such thing as UK or British law.

Fundamental rules

The following rules will help you to get the higher marks in business law. These are some of the rules I've developed and they're based on having been both a student and a lecturer in this subject and believe me they work.

General points

Attend everything you can. By this I mean all lectures, all seminars, all 'surgery' sessions, and this means any one-to-one meetings with your lecturers, and finally all social events where you can meet your lecturers. Remember that your lecturers, probably for the first time in your academic careers, are the people who will have written your exam papers. Cultivate them.

Forgive me please but I want to tell you a true story – when I was a law student, the law department of my university went on several outings – students

and lecturers together. One particular event was a canal trip with a meal and a bar on board. On the outward trip we all had a meal and on the return trip the bar opened. One particular law lecturer started drinking when the bar opened (thinking about it they all did) and continued for the rest of the evening. As the evening progressed, most lecturers became mines of information about the exams we were shortly to take. The only trouble was, could we rely on what they were saying and indeed could we accurately interpret the indistinct method of speech they seemed to have adopted?

Very late in the evening one lecturer fell into the canal and we had to fish him out and dry him off.

My point is that you must do everything to become as friendly as possible with each lecturer in each of your subjects – when they'll let you. I very much doubt that any law lecturer has ever 'slipped' a law student a copy of a law exam paper but they'll almost always will give broad hints of what areas to concentrate on. It's in their interest to do so and in yours. They really don't want anyone to fail.

Be there

So, the best way to take advantage of any exam hints is to be present at every opportunity. You just don't know when some hint might come your way and also it gains you a good reputation. Remember, as alluded to above, that the university lecturers teaching you business law are the people who will be writing your exam questions. This is likely to be the first time this has ever happened to you. This is why it's really worth nurturing them. If you went the 'A' level route to university, there's no way that you'll ever have met the people setting the questions.

... And if you're not...

If you become ill, even for a day, you must contact the university administration people for your subject and let them know that you're unable to come in and why. This is also true if you have some family emergency or important event you have to attend. This is very important and I'll tell you why. I don't think I'm giving anything much away here because it's really just common sense. Someone, somewhere, in your university, is sooner or later going to notice that you're not present. There will be a record of your trail of non-attendance so you have to cover yourself. The reason why it is so important for you to do this is the following – at the end of each semester or exam period there will be a meeting of all your lecturers to finalise the total marks of every

student. This is where it gets interesting. Particularly interesting if you are a student at the edge of a grade or even if you are at risk of failing the year.

Now no one wants to fail you and most lecturers want to do the best for you. In these meetings it is just possible that you may've missed a First or have failed the unit by a mark or two. The chairperson of the meeting will ask of everyone present something like "does anyone know anything about this student?"

This the moment for any lecturer or an admin person to speak up. It could be that an admin person may say "Well, this student had a long period of absence owing to a documented illness or family bereavement or something similar. It looks like this may have affected their final marks". A lecturer may say, "I know this student and they were very hard working and generally seemed to have applied themselves throughout the course". The general consensus often is, "can we find it in our hearts to find the fraction of a mark needed to edge this student from an upper second to a first?" It could also be that by finding just that tiny bit more could save you from having to retake the whole year.

You don't want to be a student with a bad reputation. You want to be known as a 'good' student. It doesn't take lecturers long to discover which student is engaged with the course and which student isn't.

If you are the sort of person who can 'sail through' everything by seemingly doing nothing and still pass all your exams, then fair play to you. To be honest I haven't met too many people like this. Unfortunately.

Terminology (Jargon)

Studying Business Law is honestly not as difficult as it may seem at first sight. One of the main problems you'll face if you haven't studied law before is the terminology. ('Terminology' is just another word for 'jargon'. Please don't write the word jargon down as lawyers really don't like to hear this word used about their subject).

Remember that every subject has its own specific terminology and business law is no different. The only difference with law is that a good deal of the terminology tends to be in Latin. This situation is beginning to improve as in recent years there has been a movement in most areas of law to reduce the use of Latin in an attempt to make it easier to understand. So, why do you find still plenty of Latin words and phrases used in law today?