

## ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW OFFICE OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT

### Some Tips to Make Your Exam Answer Readable

Taking a law school exam is a challenge, not only to the student, but also to the professor who has to grade it. The competitive student will strive to make the answer reader-friendly. (I know this stuff is pretty obvious, but when you're under pressure, you may have overlooked these simple things you can do to help your professor recognize the brilliance in your answer.)

- Label each section of your answer.
- Write legibly.
- Write on every other line.
- Write on only one side of the page of a blue book initially. That can leave you some room to insert a point you think of later....
- Try to use correct spelling.
- Don't abbreviate every other word. Write the word in full the first time, then abbreviate when using the term later in the answer. When using an abbreviation, be sure that the context is clear. Only use standard abbreviations, this is not a good time to demonstrate your personal brand of shorthand.
- Make new paragraphs frequently. Long, single paragraph answers can confuse and slow the reader down.
- Do not repeat the question, it is a waste of precious time.
- Do not repeat yourself.
- Develop a logical organization for your answer.
- Many essay exams lend themselves to an IRAC format:
  - Issue: Clearly state the issue, even when it is obvious.
  - Rule: Demonstrate that you can recite the applicable legal principles raised by the issue. Start with the word "under," as in "Under the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure...."
  - Application: Apply the relevant facts to the law. Explain "why" the facts either support or do not support a certain conclusion. Start with the word "here," as in "Here, the time for defendant to serve her answer ran from...." And use the word "because" a lot in this section to force yourself to explain why.
  - Conclusion: Reach a conclusion based on your analysis. Signal this effort by starting the sentence with the word "therefore."