

Personal Background / LSAT / Law School

My path to and through law school was untraditional, with plenty of bumps along the way. After completing my undergraduate degree, I worked for six years before making the decision to apply to law school during the COVID-19 pandemic in an attempt to pivot to a legal career.

I never struggled with test anxiety prior to taking the LSAT. However, I experienced a panic attack for the first time in my life the first time I took the LSAT.

My body began to shake, my heart pumped out of my chest, my brain stopped working, I started hyperventilating because of the stress. Unfortunately, I experienced this while taking the LSAT (and other tests en route to get to the bar exam).

Naturally, I was disappointed with my first LSAT score. So, I took the LSAT an additional three times in an attempt to improve my score. Thankfully, I improved my score with each attempt. However, I also had a panic attack on each exam, with the same symptoms.

Eventually, I got my LSAT score to a 158 or 159 (I don't remember) -- something I was okay with but not happy about -- and banked on other facts from my undergraduate days, work experience, life experience, etc. to get into a law school. After sending out many applications, I learned I had been accepted to a top 50 law school in California.

At this point in time, with the LSAT in the rearview mirror, I thought my panic attacks would not return. How wrong was I!

Unfortunately, I struggled with anxiety the first semester of law school. In particular, I experienced panic attacks during all my finals for the 1L fall semester. So, I was caught off guard by the panic attack and felt completely humiliated and ashamed, especially because I had the panic attack in a classroom with 70 other people (as opposed to the LSAT exams which I took remotely from home).

However, my panic attacks began to subside with time and law-school test-taking experience. I may have had one or two more panic attacks in the 1L spring semester

during finals. However, I didn't have any additional panic attacks during the 2L and 3L finals periods.

As I would discover during my second bar preparation period, I needed to gain confidence in myself and my abilities by performing under timed conditions with tons of practice prior to sitting for any exam, as well as adopt different attitudes toward the process of preparing for any exam. I struggled with these two things throughout law school (and continue to wrestle with them to the present day). I'll touch more on this later.

Eventually, I graduated from law school. I think most people feel an overwhelming sense of pride or joy or excitement about graduation. While I certainly felt those emotions, the one emotion that stood above the rest was relief -- relief that I had completed three grueling years of law school and could put law school, like the LSAT, in the rearview mirror. I also figured that the panic attacks were a thing of the past. (As I discuss later, I haven't had a panic attack since 1L, but I still did not carry myself with the confidence necessary to pass the bar exam in July 2025).

Tired yet motivated to cross the next finish line -- to pass the July 2025 California Bar Exam -- I began to study in earnest after finals and before graduating from law school.

Preparing For The July 2025 California Bar Exam

For my first bar prep period -- which ran roughly from late May 2025 to late July 2025 -- I used Barbri and AdaptiBar.

I purchased Barbi's basic bar prep digital program because I had used Barbri to study for the MPRE. And, at the time, I figured if most people used Barbri (or Themis), then they'd have to work for me, right? I purchased AdaptiBar (my favorite study tool) because I had used it in a bar preparation course I took during my 3L year. I did not use [BarEssays.com](#) (a big mistake!) in part because I thought the sample answers provided by Barbi would suffice for comparing my fully written/outlined essays to some type of scored essay.

Preparation Routine

At first, I enjoyed using Barbri. I thought the video lectures were helpful for relearning subject matter I had not touched in years (e.g., real property or torts).

Also, I appreciated the daily assignment of tasks -- at least at the beginning of my prep period.

Over the first few weeks, I did my best every day to hit 8 to 9 hours of “studying” per Barbri’s definition of “studying.” This “studying” involved watching the aforementioned video lectures, taking notes, reading outlines (the longest outlines in the world haha), writing essays, outlining essays, and answering Barbri’s multiple-choice questions. I would complete one PT on each Saturday or Sunday.

Additionally, I would also do AdaptiBar question sets every day. If I remember correctly, I attempted to do at least 33 AdaptiBar questions every day based on a suggestion I had received from a mentor. At the beginning of my prep period, I would do these questions untimed and open note because I wanted to get the questions correct rather than see a ton of red (indicator of wrong answer choices) or a low “questions correct” rate on AdaptiBar.

During this time, I also tried to exercise every day (a run or a swim or a long bike ride if I needed to clear my head). I found exercising every day necessary to manage stress and improve my sleep at night. I also tried to spend time with family as a way to take my mind off preparing for the exam. However, I chose not to socialize with friends during this bar prep period because I thought socializing would consume too much prep time. Lastly, I viewed this process -- preparing for the bar -- as something “I had to do” to achieve my goal rather than something “I got to do” to achieve my goal. (I note this because I changed my attitude for the second bar prep period, which significantly enhanced my enjoyment of the process).

I felt like I was making progress with this schedule. After all, I saw Barbri’s progress bar move little by little every day, and I also saw the number of completed questions on AdaptiBar increase each day, too. Moreover, I managed to take care of myself physically and emotionally/psychologically/spiritually (or so I thought) by carving out some time each day to exercise and spend time with family.

Preparation Challenges

However, I soon began to fixate each day on doing all of Barbri’s assigned tasks. Likewise, I began to fixate on maintaining a high “questions correct” rate on AdaptiBar. Rather than being the dean of my own studies, I offloaded all my decision-making to Barbri by mindlessly following the suggested daily tasks. What’s

more, I identified so strongly with my “questions correct” rate on AdaptiBar that I would spend lots of time trying to solve each question correctly by reviewing Barbri’s extensive outlines (the ones that are hundreds of pages) to ensure I had the correct answer choice before selecting an answer.

I also began to feel like I wasn’t learning the material after sticking with this approach. But I was afraid of deviating from Barbri’s suggestions and the AdaptiBar MC questions because the unknown -- taking my studies into my own hands -- seemed too daunting a task at the time.

So, I continued following Barbri’s suggestions every day -- whether that be writing essays, outlining essays, watching video lectures, reading outlines, doing Barbri MC questions, etc. -- and continued doing the AdaptiBar multiple choice sets. Notably, I mistakenly thought the best approach to AdaptiBar question sets was to do 33 questions “mixed” (i.e., all seven or eight subjects tested on the MBE) for every question set. I think I didn’t target my weak topics and subtopics during my first prep period because I didn’t want to address my shortcomings (of which there were and still are many) when it came to understanding and applying legal concepts.

Of course, I did make small changes and improvements over time. I slowly but surely made the shift from untimed 33-question AdaptiBar sets to one-hour timed 33-question AdaptiBar sets. I found answering 33 questions in an hour a helpful strategy because it allowed me to develop a sense of timing for the MBE portion of the exam. That’s because answering 33 questions an hour approximates answering 100 questions in 3 hours. I also decided to stop reading the Barbi outlines (at least the ones that are hundreds of pages long) at some point during my bar prep period.

However, I really struggled with writing timed, closed-book essays. I avoided them like a plague. In total, I probably wrote 20 to 30 genuine closed-book, timed essays during my first bar prep. Most of the time, when I attempted to write a closed-book, timed essay I gave up on adhering to those restrictions and caved in by looking at an outline when I did not know the material. I told myself this was fine because I was studying -- and perhaps I was -- but I was also setting myself up for performing poorly on the bar exam because there are no outlines laying around while one takes the bar exam.

Anxiety Returns / Burning Out

As the summer days passed, I began to grow more anxious about the exam itself. I felt like I wasn't retaining enough of the information I studied, despite the fact that I consistently put in 8 to 9 hours of studying per day for seven days a week. Sure, there were some days where I studied less but also other days where I studied more. I also had to take a few half days or entire days off. In retrospect, I recognize I was mentally and emotionally/psychologically/spiritually burned out because I chose to study seven days a week, lock myself in my room for 2.5 months straight, and not socialize or create enough time and space for rest.

However, I pressed on and told myself I just had to endure it to cross that finish line. So, I kept moving forward, one day at a time, doing more or less the same set of study routines and practices. And then, just like that, the exam dates arrived.

July 2025 California Bar Exam - Experience

Like many people, I got a hotel room near the testing location. Again, like many (if not all) people, I didn't sleep the night before the first day. I tried everything to fall asleep and to remain calm, but I was in a fight or flight mode. So, I ended up walking around the city streets around my hotel at 3 am for an hour trying to calm my nerves and howling at the moon (i.e., wondering out loud why everything had to happen this way).

I started the first day of the bar exam, fearing the unknown and afraid I might have another panic attack despite my last panic attack happening nearly two years before in May 2023.

Thankfully, I did not have a panic attack the first day (or even the second day). But man, it was a rough first day! I didn't feel great about any of the essays, even though the PT arguably was easier than all the PTs I had used as practice in bar prep.

I was exhausted yet strangely wired (the adrenaline was still flowing) after the first day. So, I went for a run with a few friends who also sat for the exam, ate dinner, and tried to get some sleep. Thankfully, I managed to get some sleep the second night.

The second day went better than the first day. However, I felt sluggish in the afternoon session because I had not eaten enough food at lunch and generally was tired from the past 48 hours. I don't remember much from the MBE sessions, except that it felt like I had to work really hard to parse basic information in each question.

I also remember I only finished the afternoon session in time by guessing on the last two to three questions.

When the July 2025 bar exam finished, I felt an overwhelming sense of relief -- there it is again -- and exhaustion. I truly did not know whether I had passed or not. So, when family and friends asked how it went, I told them I'd find out in November 2025.

Exam Results

I opened the results page and saw “FAILED” emblazoned on screen. Devastated, I shared the news with my employer, family, and friends. I received a total scaled score of 1346, with the threshold for passing score being 1390. I had done well on the MBE section, scoring higher than average. However, I struggled on the essays. I only had one essay scored 65 or better.

As you could imagine, the weekend the results were released, I went through a range of emotions. Anger. Sadness. Denial. Apathy. Disappointment. Bitterness. Jealousy. Grief. The list goes on. And so does life.

So, I went to work on Monday, kept my head down, and threw myself into work to distract myself from the pain. The law firm I worked for then (and still work for now) gave me the option to take a leave of absence, beginning whenever I wanted, to prepare for the February 2026 exam. I didn't feel ready to start preparing in early November 2025. So, I told my firm I would work until December 15. So, over the next month, I simply allowed myself to work -- and continue to work through the rollercoaster of emotions that come with not passing a bar exam.

Discovering Make This Your Last Time

In early December, I began to reflect on what I did incorrectly in my first bar prep period, and what I needed to do differently so that I could cross that finish line.

Luckily, while researching how other repeat examinees passed the California bar exam, I stumbled across Make This Your Last Time. I read a few of your articles, including case studies of individuals who had experienced challenges and other life events I found much more serious than my panic-attack issues but had still managed to cross the finish line. These stories inspired me, giving me hope that I too could pass the California bar exam.

I also noticed your attitude and thought-process toward the bar exam reflected the kind of candid, no-BS wisdom that’s gained through the pain of failure itself. That resonated with me because I had grown tired of family and friends and law school staff simply telling me that “you got this” when they themselves had not gone through this experience or had taken the exam decades ago when it was a different beast. I was also sick and tired of family telling me I needed to shell out thousands of dollars to hire a tutor so I could pass this test and move on in my life. So, I also liked how your approach, although cognizant that tutors can be helpful, was not built around the need to hire a tutor.

Preparing For The February 2026 California Bar Exam

So, when December 15th came and went, I traded going into the office to going to my local library for the next 2.5 months. This time around, I used AdaptiBar (still one of my favorite tools), your [Magicsheets](#), your [Appro sheets](#), and [BarEssays.com](#). I also approached my prep more strategically and with a better attitude this time around.

For example, I prioritized active studying rather than passive studying. Meaning, I didn’t spend any time watching instructional videos or reading hundred-page outlines. Instead, I spent the majority of my days writing essays, outlining essays, and answering multiple choice questions via AdaptiBar (no more Barbri MC questions).

I also reframed my attitude from “I have to do this” to “I get to do this.” I’m not a naturally positive individual and tend toward experiencing negative emotions quite easily. So, changing my attitude about preparing for the bar exam proved immensely difficult. But it also made the experience more enjoyable and helped me see the bigger picture. After all -- and it doesn’t always feel like it in the moment -- but having the opportunity to study for 2.5 months for an exam is not a privilege everyone has (e.g., one of my friends had to work three days a week and study the remaining four when preparing for February 2026).

For the first week, I likely wrote two to three essays a day -- open note and untimed -- just to get back into the swing of things. I used essay prompts from past bar exams via [BarEssays.com](#) and then would actually take the time to compare my answers to other students’ answers. Typically, I pulled the top-scoring essays as my guide to challenge myself to work through every issue within each essay. This helped me to

slow down and begin to notice the patterns or issue clusters that often appeared together.

Put differently, reviewing essays helped me to develop the mental muscle to identify patterns and see more clearly what high-scoring bar exam essays need to include (and what they actually looked like). I was a bit shocked when I reviewed high-scoring student answers for the first time because they're not what I imagined. Sure, they hit almost all, if not all, of the relevant issues but they do so without being well written (i.e., not grammatically correct, not making use of varied/interesting sentence structure, etc.).

For the first week, I also adhered to my untimed 33-question AdaptiBar strategy to get back into the swing of things.

After the first week, I had the fortune of reading another case study published on your website. This test-taker emphasized the need to transition to timed, closed-book essays and timed, closed-book MBE questions sets as early as possible in one's bar preparation. That advice resonated with me, forcing me to look at my first week's study schedule and reflect on how I could improve it. So, acting as the dean of my own studies, I ran with her advice. I began doing timed, closed-book essays and timed, closed book AdaptiBar question sets from the second week moving forward.

This made a HUGE difference in my preparation. It stunk at first, but I found that opting to do more closed-book and timed studying revealed my weaknesses while forcing me to engage with the process of bar preparation more strategically and find joy in incremental gains.

For example, I did a few mixed, closed-book, and timed AdaptiBar 33-question sets over a few days to see what topics and subtopics amounted to my weaknesses. Then, rather than doing more mixed AdaptiBar question sets, I targeted my weaker topics and sub-topics with my daily sets. This strategy allowed me to strengthen my weaknesses through repetition, gain confidence, and develop better pattern recognition.

I also spent a lot more time outlining essays rather than writing full essays during this bar prep period. I found outlining -- “cooking” -- essays helpful because I worked

through many more fact patterns and developed a better grasp of rule statements with this approach. I also enjoyed outlining/cooking essays because it allowed me to spend some time handwriting rather than typing. I found handwriting paired well with this type of outlining because it forced me to remember the elements or factors for rule statements in my own words (rather than trying to remember the rules verbatim). I also enjoyed handwriting these outlines of essays because it provided me with a much-needed break from staring at a screen. Lastly, I found the [Appro sheets](#) helpful when reviewing my essay outlines to ensure I understood the analytical flows for each legal area and the subtopics within each area.

I also made better use of AdaptiBar’s simulated exams this time around. During my first bar prep period, I only did the Barbri simulated MBE exam and one of the two AdaptiBar simulated exams.

However, I used both of AdaptiBar’s simulated MBE exams this time. I used one simulated exam two to three weeks into my February 2026 bar prep period to set a benchmark. Then, I used the second one with roughly two weeks remaining until the bar exam itself so that I could reassess my weaknesses prior to the exam and shore them up in time for the exam.

I also modified my study and social schedule during this second bar prep period, with beneficial results.

First, I found transferring PT practice from Saturday/Sunday to Tuesday was incredibly beneficial because I was more energized earlier in the week than over the weekend. I also gave the PTs much more attention this time around, trying to develop my own system for how to work through all the necessary information in 90 minutes. Notably, I only got to completing PTs in 90 minutes within the last week or two of bar prep. I wrote at least one PT every week. I also found it helpful to print out all the materials and to separate the library from the file as different documents to align with the test-day experience.

Second, I allowed myself time to socialize with friends and made time to surround myself with people -- even people I didn’t know too well -- a couple times a week. For example, I started attending a weekly run club, which gave me something to look forward to each week. I also went to the birthday parties of a few friends to ensure I

found some social balance between all the studying. I went to a weekly Bible study as well.

I think allowing myself the time to socialize benefited my studying because I had no days where I felt so completely mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually burned out that I had to stop studying all together-- and I took fewer (if any) half days as well.

Third, I would review the [Magicsheets](#) for the material I studied each day during meals (over breakfast, lunch, dinner) rather than setting aside dedicated time to review these outline materials as I did with Barbi's expansive or condensed outlines. I appreciated that the [Magicsheets](#) were only five to six pages at most. This length is much more manageable and helpful than the hundreds of pages provided by Barbri!

Overall, I probably wrote and outlined 100+ essays and answered around 2,200 AdaptiBar questions (including the 400 from the two AdaptiBar simulated MBE exams) during the 2.5 months I studied for the February 2026 bar exam.

At the end of this bar prep, I felt more confident heading into the bar exam than I did the first time. I felt I had made the most of my bar prep period, I had overcome a lot of the anxiety I had experienced around the exam (particularly with the essay and PT sections) by practicing how to perform under timed, closed-book conditions, and I felt that I could improve my MBE score as well because I effectively targeted my weaker topics/subtopics.

February 2026 Bar Exam

Once again, I got a hotel near the testing center. However, despite having taken the July bar exam, I still could not fall asleep the night before the first day of the exam. Honestly, I was a complete mess the night before the exam and the morning of the exam.

I went for another walk at 3 am around the city streets of the hotel and howled at the moon some more. I also called a friend to take my mind off the exam. Luckily, she was awake and spent half an hour talking with me, helping me to calm down. Worst of all, I even threw up the morning of the exam because I stress-ate too much food and had worked myself into a tizzy about the test.

Despite all this, I knew I had put in the time and hard work to have a shot of passing the exam if I just managed to get through it. I was confident I could handle the pressure and nerves of the exam that day once I actually got into the exam itself.

Eventually, I made my way to the testing center and got settled in for the written portion of the exam. Thankfully, I sat next to another repeat taker. She and I chatted to keep our minds off the exam and to share experiences about what we did differently to prepare for the exam this time. After some more small talk, the proctors instructed the testing room to quiet down and get ready for the test.

Although I struggled with the first essay, I found my footing with the second and third essays. After the lunch break, we jumped back into the exam, and I found the fourth and fifth essays manageable. In fact, I thought I nailed every issue on the fourth essay -- a civ pro fact pattern straight from a 1L exam -- which gave me confidence heading into the PT.

Unfortunately, I did not perform as well on the PT. I struggled to grasp the assignment from the file, and I couldn't make sense of the statute included in the PT under the time constraints. Something simply wasn't clicking for me on the PT.

However, rather than panic and throw in the towel -- something I may have done on the first exam -- I remembered what you had said about “scooping up as many points as possible” on the exam day. It doesn't need to be perfect or even pretty -- it needs to be enough to earn a “Pass.” So, I ended up outlining the entire second half of the PT. It's all I could do with the time I had left after spending so much time trying to figure out what the heck I needed to do with one of the statutes. But I wrote down what I thought was relevant from the statute and applied some facts to the statute -- all in bullet points.

I left the test center that day feeling better than I had when I left after the first day of the July 2025 exam. As for my PT performance, I simply had to accept it and move on so that I could perform well the following day. After grabbing dinner, I returned to my hotel and got a decent night's sleep (again, not great but just enough).

The MBE sections the next day went well. I found myself recognizing patterns much more quickly and confidently as I moved through questions that would have cost me precious minutes on the July 2025 attempt. I also did not allow myself to get bogged

down if I didn't know the answer to a question. I simply eliminated clearly wrong answer choices and made an informed guess based on my AdaptiBar repetitions.

As for timing, I moved through the morning session on pace, finishing with around one to two minutes on the clock (literally . . . bring a clock into the exam--it helps!). I moved through the afternoon session more quickly, finishing with around five minutes on the clock. With the extra time, I reviewed several questions I had doubts about and ensured I filled my scantron completely.

I reflected on my performance after the exam ended. I knew I had done a better job with the multiple-choice questions, but I had reservations about the essay section again -- particularly, the first essay on which I stumbled and the PT.

Over the next two months, I tried not to think about the exam too much. Occasionally, I would think about the outline I made in the PT and thought that if I didn't pass it would be because of that outline.

February 2026 Results and Top 10 Insights

I shook and cried when I saw “Pass” on the screen. I couldn't believe it. And, in some ways, I still can't believe it. I texted my employer and let them know the good news. Then, I called family and friends to share it some more. And, once again, I felt a huge sense of relief flooded over me. Relief that life would move forward once again and that I would not have to dedicate any more time to studying for an exam that stood between me and whatever comes next -- whether it's in the legal profession or not.

I started working toward this goal of passing the California Bar Exam in December 2020 when I made the decision to study for the LSAT and go to law school. So much had happened -- and so much had changed -- in the five and a half years it took to pass the California Bar Exam.

Thank you, Brian and the MTYLT Community, for playing a part in helping me cross the finish line.

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Brian,

I know this story is a bit long and rambling. So, I want to distill my top ten insights from studying for the California bar a second time. Hopefully, these echo what I laid out in this narrative and reinforce what I learned from Make This Your Last Time.

- 1) Prioritize active studying (writing/cooking essays, reviewing essays, and answering multiple choice questions) over passive studying (watching videos, writing/filling in/reading outlines).
- 2) Prioritize addressing your weaker topics and subtopics through outlining/cooking essays and targeted multiple choice question sets.
- 3) How you practice is how you perform, so practice like you want to perform -- and perform more under closed-book and timed conditions rather than open-book and untimed conditions.
- 4) Be the dean of your own studies (i.e., take ownership of preparation) and don't get caught up in what everyone else is doing.
- 5) Find joy in the process and satisfaction in incremental gains.
- 6) You will never have the perfect night's sleep (perhaps any sleep!) prior to the exam -- trust that your preparation and the adrenaline will carry you through the exam.
- 7) You will never have the perfect test day -- scoop up as many points as possible, even if that means outlining a portion of an essay (or a PT!).
- 8) Exercise to reduce stress and socialize to maintain sanity.
- 9) Repetition builds confidence and confidence leads to performing under pressure.
- 10) Failing the bar exam does not define your life. Passing the bar exam does not define your life. But passing the bar exam opens up new opportunities -- within and outside the legal profession.