

## What were the secrets to my success as a ranking student in HSC Legal Studies?

Brianna Fielding, Glenwood High School

13<sup>th</sup> in the state in HSC Legal Studies 2024

A key factor towards my success in HSC Legal Studies was the level of **engagement** I had with the subject. As I was also balancing five other subjects alongside my learning and studying for Legal Studies, making sure to consistently engage with Legal Studies outside of the classroom ensured that I was going that one step further to develop my skills in the subject.

To do this, I made sure to keep **up to date** with current news and events to ensure that I had the most contemporary and current LCMID available to me, which could be utilised in **short answer** and **essay style** responses. Some things I did to keep up to date with law-related news was join the **Sydney Morning Herald WhatsApp broadcast channel**, which provided me with media articles to explore current issues, as well as follow social media to remain in the loop with current news. Collecting contemporary LCMID, whether this may be current **BOCSAR statistics** or recently published media articles, gave me an arsenal of LCMID that I could use in my exams and assignments which I found very beneficial.

**Practice** was another key component towards my success. For each of the topics I studied, I would create my own **Google Form quiz** to test my knowledge, which I would update frequently as I learned more content. This was particularly useful for **multiple choice** style questions and **short answer** questions. To ensure that I was regularly practicing, I would also print out and laminate notes that I would stick up in **the shower**, so that I could review what I needed to know for upcoming assessment tasks. As part of my practice routine, I would **seek feedback from my teacher** for writing tasks that would be assigned to us in class, so that I would be able to see where my strengths were and develop my skills in areas of need.

I think it is also very important to have **a clear understanding of the HSC Legal Studies syllabus**, as well as the themes and challenges for each topic studied. When studying for my trials and HSC, I would go over each dot point and review what LCMID I could use to see what areas I lacked understanding and evidence in. Knowing the syllabus was also important for creating **essay plans** for the three essays in the exam, so that I knew what kinds of questions could be asked and prepare accordingly.

As the exam is quite long, a concern of mine was being able to write at a consistent pace and be able to finish the paper in time. During preliminary Legal Studies, I hand wrote all my notes and this gave me a lot of practice in writing for long periods of time. **I used my trial exam as a test** of sorts to see how much time I would need to allocate to each section of the paper, and to gauge how much I could write during the three-hour period. So, whilst it is important to know the content for the exam, I think it is

important to not neglect the length of the paper and to prepare to write for a long period of time. Making sure to **practice handwriting** helped combat getting a sore hand during the exam so that I was able to answer all the questions in time.

Lastly, I made sure to **utilise all the resources available to me** to prepare for the HSC exam. My teacher was kind enough to share excerpts of past students' work with myself and my peers so that we were able to **see what a Band 6 response looked like** and apply this to our own responses. Simply looking over past papers and past trial exams also provided useful insight into what kind of questions could be asked, so that by the time the exam came around I felt confident of being able to answer a variety of questions to the best of my ability.

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Jonathan (Xiao Fan) Chen, Knox Grammar School

Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in HSC Legal Studies 2024

Here are my top tips for success in this subject:

1. **Collaborative learning:** my school, Knox, has successfully fostered a very academic environment wherein collaborative and social learning is very accepted and popular. This culture allows fellow like-minded students to **frequently communicate and work together** to get through challenging concepts in the course and discuss best strategies to overcome common barriers in the exam, instead of seeing each other as toxic competition. This **friendly environment** allowed many of our top performing students in the cohort to thrive and achieve state ranks.

2. **Seeking feedback:** Revision never stops and your writing is never perfect! There are always opportunities for you to seek feedback to perfect your writing from your department and dedicated Legal Studies teachers, and maximising communication and dialogue with Knox's legal team was integral in my success.

3. **Watching the news:** We all at Knox knew Legal Studies to be a very contemporary subject and thus, were constantly watching the news and monitoring real-world domestic and international geopolitical landscapes to not only give insight into topics studied, but also to potentially provide crucial evidence (LCMID) for our **extended responses!**

4. **Past papers:** For short answer and multiple-choice questions, maximise your practice with every single **past paper** you can compile and find from online or from your teachers, such that by the time of your HSC exam, **no question can surprise you** and you will just be getting easy marks from there. I would like to also extend this point whereby you should ensure you are **frequently submitting these practice responses to your teachers for feedback**. Keep a record of all mistakes made in exams and practice or any confusing question you can find to quickly browse through before your next assessment to make sure you never make the same mistake twice!

5. **Essays:** Legal Studies is very writing-intensive with 3 essays in the final exam. To navigate through this with less stress, create **your own grid of topics/paragraphs/controlling ideas for every possible question** NESA can ask from the HSC syllabus dot points. You should also have a **skeleton essay** typed up or at least planned with evidence memorised for every one of these possible dot points (don't skip the niche ones).

6. **Handwriting:** make sure your writing is actually eligible for markers to read since if they can't, you will most likely not gain marks that are deserved. The best way is to **write big** and actually **practice** with pen and paper to warm up your hand muscles before exams as **writing speed** is also crucial in Legal Studies HSC success.

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Wil Firth, Knox Grammar, Legal Studies ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the state, 2024

## Multiple-Choice Q Tips:

- 1) **Read ALL parts of the Q** → underline key terms
- 2) **Process of elimination**
- 3) Options with **high modality language** are most likely incorrect – e.g. ‘all crimes must be reported’
- 4) Lots of practice!

## Essay Writing Tips:

- 1) Include **all LCMID** (legislation, case law, media articles, international law, documents) for each ‘idea’/paragraph
- 2) Your **evidence** should **substantiate**, not lead, your argument
- 3) Be very **concise + lexically-dense**:
  - Limit description (only subtly define the ‘issue’ mainly through stating legislation)
  - Maximise evidence
  - Use brackets to integrate evidence in a sentence seamlessly
  - Lexical-density (ie using legalese)
  - Use headlines of articles as your points to minimise words (ie. don’t restate the point after this)
  - Remove redundant words/phrases
  - Paraphrase legislation to save words (but do ensure you explain it sufficiently)
- 4) Use as many words from the **Q or theme and challenge** as possible  
THROUGHOUT
- 5) Foreground or background particular points based on their relevance to the Q; manipulate your argument; and, add/remove points to **best Answer The Question (ATQ)**
- 6) Prioritise **recent evidence**
- 7) For a **law reform Q**, you must include the chronological background/catalyst
- 8) Use **low modality** language in your topic sentences like ‘endeavour to’
- 9) Ensure **clarity, yet sophistication** → ‘cherry pick’ your evidence from multiple sources
- 10) Seamlessly and concisely integrate the **definition** for each ‘issue’

## How to Study Steps for Legal:

- 1) Perfect all paragraphs → take on all **feedback** from your teacher

2) Start **memorisation at least 1 week prior** (don't be like me; memorising basically everything the night before each internal exam)

**3) Memorisation tips:**

- Active recall based on the 'forgetting curve' [Editor's note: To combat the forgetting curve and improve long-term retention, create a study schedule that incorporates spaced repetition, reviewing material multiple times with increasing intervals between reviews].
- Separate points into a table to visually chunk it down
- Engage both your **auditory and visual memory** (ie. say your content aloud)

4) Only **memorise the evidence + understand the general gist** of each argument rather than memorise each sentence verbatim

- This saves time memorising, plus allows greater flexibility to answer any Q

5) **Practise introductions** rather than fully write out essays to save time and increase exposure

6) **Sleep at least 8 hours** the night before your exam (don't be a me – sleeping 1 hour before the HSC exam)