

# ESSAY CHECKLIST

Please use this checklist to help you answer the questions on the Exam Self-Assessment Form about your exams. Please ask yourselves the questions in this checklist and think about what you did or did not do in your own exams.

## Format

- Was there sufficient white space to make it easy to read?
- Were there sufficient paragraphs – at least a few per page?
- Did you use headings to lead the reader through the answer? Did you bold or underline your headings so they would stand out?
- Did your paragraphs skip around or merge questions and issues?

## Organization

- Did you outline your essay before beginning to write it?
- Did you organize in a logical order (chronological or by issue)?
- Did you organize based on the call of question?
- Did you use IRAC?

## Content (IRAC)

- **Issues**
  - Did you spot the correct issues?
  - Did you miss issues?
  - Did you address issues that were irrelevant or not pertinent to the call of the question?
  - Did you focus on individual issues or did you merge issues?
- **Rules**
  - Did you state the rules accurately and completely?
    - Did you write the rule correctly? This can be a failure of memory or a failure to understand the law. Figure out which one is happening every time you misstate a rule.
    - Did you state the rule completely? Did you miss sub-rules? (When you leave out parts of a rule you hurt your score twice. You lose points in the rule section and you miss points in the application because you can't completely apply an incomplete rule).
    - Were there exceptions to the rule? Did the exception apply to the fact pattern? Did you explain an exception when it applied?
- **Application/Analysis**
  - Application requires two components – the facts and explanation – make sure you have both.
    - Facts – did you sort the facts into the right elements or factors or issues?
      - Did you use every legally significant fact in the fact pattern?
      - Did you include irrelevant facts?
      - Did you add facts not stated in the question?
    - Explanation – it is not enough to sort the facts into the right place.
      - Did you explain why that fact is important?
      - Did you link each fact to a particular rule or element of a rule?
      - Did you just repeat the fact and come to a conclusion?
      - Where applicable, did you include counter arguments?
      - Where applicable, did you provide an analysis for any exceptions to the general rule?

- **Conclusion**

- Did you come to a reasonable conclusion?
- Did you state this conclusion explicitly and clearly?
- Did you state a conclusion for each issue or did you merge everything into one conclusion?
- Did you answer the question that was asked?

## **Writing Style**

- Did you avoid unnecessary waffling? It is okay to conclude with “likely” if the issue is a close call, but don’t avoid taking a stand. Pick a side.
- Is your tone appropriately confident? Avoid appears, seems, might, or maybe.
- Did you use abbreviations appropriately? Using P or D or other well-known abbreviations (ex: IIED or A instead of Alexander) is fine if you explain it the first time, but if you are not going to use the term thru out the answer, don’t abbreviate.
- Is your writing style clean and coherent? You can’t write perfectly and you won’t have time to proofread. But you can’t have excessive typos (more than a few per page), or fail to use reasonable capitalization and spelling so the answer is readable.
- Did you use proper punctuation and grammar?
- Did you follow instructions?
- Did you allocate your time wisely for each issue?

## **Time Management**

- Did you finish? If not, when did you realize you were in trouble? Learn to keep an eye on the clock. The sooner you see the problem, the more options you have to fix it.
- Did you outline before starting to write your answer? The best answers are rarely the longest answers. A well-organized and well-written answer that is shorter will score higher. A good rule of thumb – use ten minutes per hour to outline.
- Did you allocate time for each portion of the exam according to the points available? For example, you spent an hour on a portion of the exam that was worth 50 points and thirty minutes on a portion of the exam that was worth 25 points.