

## Irrational Basis

my brutally honest account of taking the California Bar, failing the California Bar, taking it again, finding a job, and living life in the moments in between

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Posted by: **irrational basis** | December 10, 2007

### **Tip/Site for Improving Essays on the Bar Exam \*esp for handwriters!\***

I haven't received the promised copies of my essays yet from the State Bar, but it doesn't mean I haven't been thinking about how I'm going to improve my performance in that area. I've emailed a couple of local professors who are known for providing solid, bar essay advice, but haven't been able to set anything up with them, so far. Apparently having read my [entries](#) about my poor-scoring essays, I was offered the chance to check out [BarEssays.com](#) at no cost. BarEssays is a relatively new website with copies of typed & handwritten *graded* bar essays and performance tests from prior California Bar Exams. Right now, there is a \$75 "membership" fee which grants you access to the forementioned copies of bar essays, as well as [up-to-date checklists and essay outlines for all of the California Bar subjects](#). (click link for samples!) I logged into the site today to just get a brief glimpse as to what the essays were like and whether it looked like it really was going to be helpful.

And – I already learned something.

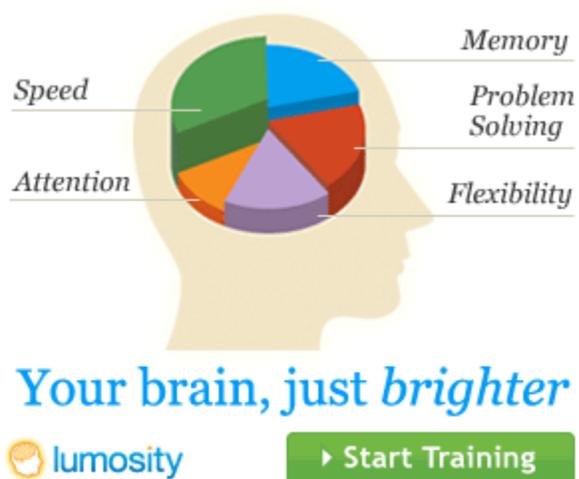
One claim made by the website is that it's one of the only sites – if not *the* \*only\* site – that offers the opportunity to compare the structure of high-scoring handwritten essays with that of high-scoring typed essays. When I hand-wrote my essays back in July, I abided by that famous idea that one should "respond with complete sentences." I underlined and capitalized words, etc, etc., to try to make my brilliant points stand out. And my paragraphs were bursting with full, complete sentences, although I did try to keep them relatively short and simple in hopes that brevity might win me a higher score (it didn't). So, today, when I looked at the highest scoring handwritten essays on [baessays.com](#), (community property = 80, con law = 77.5,) imagine my surprise when I saw that they were basically OUTLINES of the question. When I saw the 80 answer, my jaw dropped. Really? *That's* what the Examiners are looking for??? But, then again, it kind of makes sense, right? When the essays are handwritten – harder to read, taking up more pages – the grader probably just likes it when the rules are laid out nice and simple, in an easy-to-read outline format. It makes sense, seeing as how [Travis Wise](#) also comments that bar essays are just "comprehensive outlines" with a few sentences containing the facts thrown in for good measure.

Realizing that THIS structure could be what the examiners are looking for in handwritten essays will definitely make a difference in how I approach practice questions this time around. Granted, I am not going to proceed as though this is the end all, be all of "passing" essay writing, but it gives me an entirely new perspective on how to write the essays. I have only looked at the comm prop & con law essays on BarEssays, but I will certainly go back to see if there is a definite pattern among the high-scoring handwritten essays and adapt my style accordingly.

Another good thing about this website is that it offers to [purchase copies of YOUR exam answers](#) for \$50-65/set (name & ID redacted of course). The way I look at it is that, \*especially\* if you didn't pass the Bar, you might as well get *something* for your efforts, and give others in our same situation the opportunity to learn from our mistakes!

The only negative I've seen so far, having just pulled up the handwritten comm.prop & con law essays, is that there doesn't seem to be a HUGE number of essays offered just yet. Comm.Prop & Con. Law each had 3 handwritten essays. Since the majority of people type their essays, there may be a much larger selection of those, but I wouldn't know because I haven't looked yet! So, I'll check the rest of the site out over the next few weeks and let you know whether it is something that you might want to seriously consider looking into as part of your studying. Another thought – if you sell your essays to the site, it's only another \$10 or so to pay for the membership fee & get the outlines, essays, etc.. Anyway, check it out.... I'd be curious to know (and the owner would probably like to know as well!) whether you think this is a good service to offer and will be useful to students prepping for the CA Bar.

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The advertisement features a central graphic of a human head profile in silhouette, facing right. Inside the head is a 3D pie chart divided into six colored segments: green, blue, red, purple, orange, and yellow. Lines connect these segments to labels: 'Speed' (green), 'Attention' (orange), 'Memory' (blue), 'Problem Solving' (red), and 'Flexibility' (purple). Below the head, the text 'Your brain, just brighter' is written in a blue, sans-serif font. Underneath that is the 'lumosity' logo, which consists of a small orange head icon followed by the word 'lumosity' in a blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. To the right of the logo is a green rectangular button with white text that says 'Start Training' and a small white arrow pointing to the right.

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## Responses

1.



Yup, that's pretty much true. My understanding is the scorers are underpaid and overworked, and having graded essays for some law classes, you pretty much start wishing everyone would just outline

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it all for you, so that you could easily spot the issue, rule, analysis and conclusion. Half the time, if you at least nail the issue and help me see that you saw the issue, I'm liable to give extra points.

PMBR and Bar/Bri explained it the same way. You have to remember, these folks are so tired of reading the same stuff (and a lot of it is probably really bad) by the time they get to yours, they just want you to do the work for them.

○

By: [J](#) on December 10, 2007  
at 5:20 pm

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2.

I handwrote my exams, and I got my answer books back a few days ago, and I believe your observations are true too!

My essay scores were all over the place.  
But what really surprised me were the similarities among my high-scoring essays.

They were all short in length.  
I'm talking 4 pages.  
And they all look like outlines.  
Literally, I had all my issue headings and then a short paragraph in each section.

And I really don't think that the factual analysis portions were that great. Just 1 or 2 sentences.

\*sigh\*  
And then I look at the really bad essays....

Are you going to handwrite the Bar again?  
I'm not sure myself... the advantage of legible answers vs. the stress of taking the bar on a laptop..

○

By: [Weezy](#) on December 12, 2007  
at 12:54 am

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3.

Thanks J.

Weezy~ I actually AM going to handwrite again in Feb. I know it sounds crazy, but it was SO stressful watching people come in at the beginning of every portion, keeping their fingers crossed that the

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computer program wouldn't screw up. THAT is a stress I do NOT want or need. Granted, my handwriting definitely needs to improve & I need to re-adapt to more of an outline-type style, but I think, for me, handwriting is the way to go. Plus, I would have to rent a computer & pay the \$125 and I've already spent way too much money on this stupid exam as it is. So, I'm going to handwrite again, but this time, at least, I'll just be with other handwriters. Not with all the laptoppers like I was last time. And I think that will make some difference to me.

o

By: [irrational basis](#) on December 12, 2007  
at 6:15 pm

[Reply](#)



4.

QUESTION to PAST BAR TAKERS USING LAPTOPS:

Do they give you a hard copy of the questions for the essay & PT portion? The reason I ask is that when reading the laptop instructions, it states that the questions will be downloaded to my laptop.

Can we write all over the questions they give us?

o

By: **judy** on March 6, 2008  
at 6:50 pm

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- ..

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## Pages

- [~About Me~](#)

December 2007

**M T W T F S S**

1 2  
3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
10 11 12 13 14 15 16  
17 18 19 20 21 22 23  
24 25 26 27 28 29 30  
31

[« Nov](#)      [Jan »](#)

## Archives

- [February 2010](#)
- [January 2010](#)
- [December 2009](#)
- [November 2009](#)
- [October 2009](#)
- [September 2009](#)
- [August 2009](#)
- [July 2009](#)
- [June 2009](#)
- [May 2009](#)
- [April 2009](#)
- [March 2009](#)
- [February 2009](#)
- [January 2009](#)
- [December 2008](#)
- [November 2008](#)
- [October 2008](#)
- [September 2008](#)
- [August 2008](#)
- [July 2008](#)
- [June 2008](#)
- [May 2008](#)
- [April 2008](#)
- [March 2008](#)
- [February 2008](#)
- [January 2008](#)
- [December 2007](#)
- [November 2007](#)
- [October 2007](#)
- [September 2007](#)
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- [July 2007](#)
- [June 2007](#)

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