



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we are talking about ways to bounce back when you have gone off course, as part of our "Quick Tips" series. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolBox.com, and we'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Lee Burgess: This is Lee from the Law School Toolbox. Here's the situation: You finished your first semester of law school and spent a relaxing holiday season with your family. At the beginning of January, however, you are hit with an unwelcome surprise – your first semester grades. Maybe you feel like you were "getting it" your first semester, but your grades do not reflect that. Or maybe you know how you got behind last semester, but were hoping that some last-minute cramming would help you out of the hole, like it did in undergrad. You can see from your grades that cramming was ineffective and you want to do better this semester but don't know how. Maybe you feared that your grades would reflect how little you studied last semester and aren't surprised, but don't know how to find the motivation to turn things around. Or maybe you feel like you spent too much time "studying" in the wrong ways or the wrong things, and you need guidance on how to study the right way. Maybe your grades are only moderately disappointing, as you were expecting As and ended up more in the B to B- range. Or maybe you are now on academic probation and under a lot of pressure to perform better this semester if you want to remain in law school. Regardless of your exact situation, we are here to help.

Lee Burgess: Everyone faces setbacks, disappointment, and failures at some point in their life. The key to success despite these challenges is being able to recover, regroup, and bounce back. So today, we are going to talk about how to do that. Specifically, we are talking about bouncing back and resetting your law school trajectory after a disappointing term. We will discuss how to diagnose when and where things went off course last semester, and we will suggest strategies for avoiding those same mistakes again. We will also talk briefly about how to take advantage of academic support resources at your law school and when to reach out for additional help.

Lee Burgess: Let's start with the first step to bouncing back: diagnose the problem. It is hard to fix something if you don't know what is broken. That concept applies



to law school study habits as well – it is hard to know what to do differently this semester if you are unsure when and where you went wrong last semester. So, the first step to bouncing back is figuring out exactly what the problem was with the way that you studied last term. In order to accurately diagnose the issues with last semester, we recommend that you complete the following tasks in the order discussed.

Lee Burgess: Your first task is to self-reflect. This task may sound simple, but resist the temptation to skim over it. The key to useful self-reflection is honesty. You have to ask yourself the hard questions: How many hours did you spend preparing for each class last semester? How many hours did you spend outlining and preparing for finals? How do these numbers compare with what your professors and TAs recommended? If you aren't sure about a recommended number of hours to spend preparing for class and/or studying for finals, hold that thought – it can be one of the questions that you ask your professor when you complete your next task. But before you seek outside information, you need an honest assessment of what you did last semester. Without your honest account of what you did, it will be difficult for anyone to tell you what to do differently.

Lee Burgess: So let's get into some more detailed self-reflection questions: Of the time you spent preparing for class, how much of this time was spent passively reading cases versus actively engaging with the material? When you were outlining, did you think about the material that you were organizing, or did you copy and paste your notes into a new document with nicer formatting? Did you spend time doing practice exams, or did you read through practice exams and sample answers thinking that you understood them and would therefore be fine? Did you study alone or in a group? If you were in a group setting, was it helpful or distracting?

Lee Burgess: Once you have the answers to key questions about your study habits, it's time to dive deeper into the "why" behind these habits. For example, if you did not spend enough time preparing for class, why? Was this an issue with motivation? Did you find the material uninteresting? Or did you simply not know how much time you needed to spend to master the concepts? On the other hand, did you spend a lot of time studying in ways that you feel did not help you on the actual exam because you just didn't know what was important? For example, do you feel like you focused on the wrong things, such as the factual details of cases you read, rather than the legal rules and key takeaways from those cases, because you did not realize what the professor was looking for in an exam answer? Knowing the "why" behind your study habits will help with the second major part to our "bouncing back" strategy – fixing the problem. So it is worth taking a few minutes or even an



hour to honestly assess your mindset studying last term – specifically, what you did, where you may have gone wrong, and why.

Lee Burgess: After you have honestly self-evaluated your work last semester, it is time to move on to task two: talk to your professors. This may also be easier said than done. After all, who wants to go meet with a professor who gave them a disappointing grade and talk to the professor about why? But it is important to overcome the instinctual resistance. In fact, meeting with your professors about what you could do to improve your grades next semester is one of the most valuable things you can do. And most professors are more than willing to talk to students who genuinely want to improve and are willing to put in the work to do so. Approach meetings with your professors with that attitude and be open to their comments and suggestions.

Lee Burgess: Once you know what did not work last semester and have some idea of what you can do to improve, it is time to move on to step two: develop a success strategy for next semester. Your unique success strategy will depend on your situation. But we will discuss some of the most common situations that lead to the need to bounce back, and strategies to address these issues.

Lee Burgess: So let's start with common issue number one: You fell behind during the semester and did not have time to catch up before the exam. This could happen for any number of reasons – insufficient time studying, too much time studying one area and neglecting others, outside obligations that pulled your focus, and so on. But regardless of the reason that you may have gotten behind, we recommend that following strategy:

Lee Burgess: Develop a weekly study schedule and stick to it. Start by writing out your class schedule in a planner or calendar. Then determine how far in advance you would like to do the reading for each of your classes. Ideally, plan your study schedule so that you stay at least one day ahead on your class preparation. For example, if you have Torts on Monday/Wednesday/Friday, plan to do your Torts reading for Monday on Friday right after class, your reading for Wednesday on Monday, and your reading for Friday on Wednesday. Then, spend a few minutes before each class reviewing your case brief or notes to refresh your memory. That way, you can follow class, take good notes, and respond to questions if you are cold called. Preparing for class a day or two in advance may seem like an ambitious strategy, but being ahead on class preparation will come in handy if something unexpected comes up that would otherwise cause you to fall behind.

Lee Burgess: In addition to developing a schedule for class preparation, incorporate time for review, outlining, and exam preparation into your weekly study schedule.



For example, you could schedule a few hours every Sunday evening to go through notes from the previous week and start outlining the topics you discussed that week. Alternatively, if you feel like you did not understand a particular topic the previous week, you could use this block of time on Sunday to review the topic, talk to your TA, or schedule a time with your professor to try to clarify the material. In other words, you could use two hours on Sunday as flexible review time and address whatever you feel is most important for you to review from the previous week. As with anything, planning a study schedule is not a one-size-fits-all approach, so think about how to create a schedule that will work for you, and most importantly, ensure that you keep up with the material during the semester.

Lee Burgess:

Now let's talk about the second half of the "develop a weekly study schedule" strategy: sticking to it! In particular, if you noticed that you lacked motivation to study last semester, it is important to have a plan for overcoming that hurdle if it creeps up again. Law school is full of things to distract you from studying – legal clubs, social events, extracurriculars, professional development, etc. This is all the more reason to have a specific plan regarding the hours that you will block out for studying each day. Even with that time blocked off, if you anticipate that you may still struggle to stay focused, it is important to have a plan to troubleshoot that. This is where accountability may be helpful. This can come in many forms. For example, you could have a friend outside of law school be your accountability partner for keeping up your planned study schedule. Or you could have a "silent study buddy" for the semester, meaning a classmate you meet at the library to sit across from while you both study. If you want someone outside your personal life to help you with accountability, this is when it may be time to look into tutoring options, both inside and outside your law school. We will talk more about those options shortly. For now, make sure that you are thinking about ways to hold yourself accountable and stick to your study schedule!

Lee Burgess:

Now that we have talked about how to troubleshoot time management and accountability issues that may have derailed your studying last term, let's talk about ways to address more substantive issues. For example, what if no matter how many times you review your Contracts readings and class notes, you cannot figure out how the concepts fit together? Or what if the phrase "Erie doctrine" sends you into a frustrating spiral of confusion and anxiety? Alternatively, what if legal writing still does not make sense? For example, what if your professors told you that your exam answers were too conclusory and that you need to include a more in-depth legal analysis to earn more points. but you are still struggling to understand what the professors mean by "legal analysis"? There are countless resources available to help you



address these and any other substantive challenges you may face in law school. Let's talk about several of them and how to choose the right ones for you.

Lee Burgess: As an initial matter, we recommend that you start your search for substantive resources inside your law school. Resources available at your law school are usually the most cost effective because they are often available to students for free. All you have to do is know about them and take advantage of them!

Lee Burgess: So let's start with some of the written substantive resources that may be available at your law school. First, most law schools have past student outline banks, and if you are lucky, banks of past exam questions and answers. If you are struggling to pick out rules or see how concepts in a particular subject fit together, a good past student outline might help you gain perspective on where your professor is going with the class. We will talk more about how to find a "good" past student outline later. But for now, make sure you know whether your law school has a past student outline bank, and if so, how to access it. Additionally, even though you may not want to jump into looking at past exam questions from your professor on the first day of class, it is good to know whether and what resources your professor offers students for exam prep. That way, you can incorporate time into your study schedule to use those resources.

Lee Burgess: Now that we have talked about written resources particular to your law school, let's talk about supplements. If used correctly, supplements can help you clarify the material you are learning in class, see how it fits together, and test your understanding with practice problems. In particular, we recommend looking for a good [Emanuel's](#) outline and an [Examples & Explanations](#) supplement for the subject in which you want additional help. Your law school library may have either or both of these available for free, so make sure you look there before purchasing any supplements.

Lee Burgess: What if you feel overwhelmed by the amount of written materials you have already and want more direct help from a person? Your law school likely has resources for that need as well. First, meet and make friends with your TAs. They are there to help you and able to do so in several ways. For example, your TAs can point you toward good past student outlines for your classes and offer tips on how your professors tend to write their exams. Of course, your TAs are also available to answer substantive legal questions and help you see how the concepts you are studying fit together. In other words, your TAs can impart a wealth of useful information. Reach out to them early in the semester, make a connection, and absorb as much information from them as



you can.

Lee Burgess: To some extent, this same advice applies to your professors. In particular, make sure that you are taking advantage of your professors' office hours, especially if you are struggling to understand key concepts in a particular class. Like TAs, your professors are there to help you learn, and as we talked about earlier, most professors are more than willing to meet with students who genuinely want to learn and improve.

Lee Burgess: Another resource that may be available at your law school is some form of academic support program. Specifically, many law schools have programs that pair 1L students who struggled during their first semester with 3L student tutors. If you are eligible for this kind of support, take full advantage of it! It is usually free, and 3L student tutors can be excellent teachers, mentors, and friends. If you are not eligible for a particular tutoring program based on your first semester grades, check with your law school about other academic support resources. Some law schools offer free student tutoring and/or other mentorship programs. Make sure to take full advantage of everything that your law school has available.

Lee Burgess: Once you have fully tapped into your law school's resources, but you feel that you still need additional help, that is when it is time to reach outside your law school for assistance. That's where we can help! If you like what we have to say, you may also find the Law School Toolbox website and blog helpful. Additionally, we have a team of excellent law school tutors happy to help you navigate the task of "bouncing back" after a rough term. Most importantly, as you work to bounce back after disappointment in law school, remember that one disappointing grade or semester does not define the rest of your law school experience. And it certainly does not dictate the rest of your legal career. Bouncing back from adversity is not only possible; it is also a way to demonstrate to your professors, potential employers, and most importantly yourself, that you are strong and capable of making positive changes in your life. We hope that the steps we discussed today get you started on the right path this term. If you have any questions about these tips or anything else, please reach out to us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com. We would love to help you find additional resources or put you in touch with one of our tutors.

Lee Burgess: And with that, we're out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com



or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at LawSchoolToolBox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

RESOURCES:

[Tutoring for Law School Success](#)

[Emanuel Study Aid Series](#)

[Examples & Explanations](#)

[Improve Your Second Semester Law School Grades!](#)

[Tips for Second Semester Success in Law School](#)

[How to Bounce Back If Your Grades Were Disappointing](#)

[Podcast Episode 79: Making the Most of Your Second Semester in Law School](#)

[Podcast Episode 226: Bouncing Back Second Semester in Law School](#)

[Podcast Episode 373: Not Happy with Your First Semester Law School Grades? How to Do Better in the Second Semester \(w/Nicola Rossi\)](#)