



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we are talking about ADHD strategies for law school, 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: Welcome back. Today we are going to talk about strategies for surviving law school with ADHD. As most listeners likely know by now, law school is challenging! To start, the amount of work is often overwhelming. And on top of that, there is an extremely steep learning curve during your first year. And if you are doing law school “right”, meaning preparing adequately for class, taking useful notes during class, and starting exam prep early, the work itself is draining. All of these challenges may seem intensified if you have ADHD, but they are not impossible to overcome. The key is understanding that your brain works differently than the brains of your neuro-typical classmates, and finding the learning styles and strategies that work for you.

Lee Burgess: Here is the good news – there is no law school requirement that you learn in “the same way” as everyone else. In fact, regardless of whether you have ADHD, you will likely be more successful in law school if you take time to experiment and identify the learning strategies that you find the most effective. In this episode, we are going to talk about some strategies you may want to try, especially if you have ADHD.

Lee Burgess: But before we get into specific learning strategies, we have two important practical reminders for surviving law school with ADHD. First, continue your regular [mental health](#) maintenance routine during law school. In other words, if you regularly talk to your psychologist or take a daily medication, law school is not the time to stop! This may seem self-evident, but it can be easier said than done. Remember, at some point in the semester, you will be unbelievably busy. When that happens, it may be tempting to cancel your weekly therapy appointment, or easy to forget to call in your prescription refill. The way to avoid disaster when things get hectic is to plan ahead. Specifically, we recommend setting reminders on your phone for anything that you must accomplish to support your mental health, such as scheduling a therapy session or picking up medication. If you have these reminders set before the semester starts, you will be less likely to forget an important task.



Additionally, the scheduled reminders can serve as reminders to prioritize your mental health, even when you feel like you don't have the time. Ultimately, you will likely do much better on your final exams if you take care of your mental and physical well-being. Keeping up your regular mental health maintenance plan is an important part of that process. So resist the urge to push it aside when things get hectic!

Lee Burgess: Our second practical recommendation also requires some pre-planning on your part. Research, apply for, and utilize any [accommodations](#) offered at your school. We will not get into the details of applying for accommodations and the pros of using them now. But it is worth mentioning that law school accommodations are there for a reason. If you qualify for them and would benefit from using them, do so! It will not only likely help you in law school; it may also benefit you with future testing experiences, such as applying for and using accommodations on the bar exam.

Lee Burgess: Now that we have emphasized two important practical reminders, let's move on to some more specific tips for managing your workload, studying, and preparing for exams. We will start with general organization strategies to help you manage your workload. Strategy number one is to develop a detailed reading schedule for each week. Here is an example of how to do this: Assume that you have three doctrinal classes – Con Law, Civ Pro, and Contracts. And you have one skills course, such as Legal Research and Writing. You have Con Law on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at 9:30. You have Civ Pro on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday at 11:30. And you have Contracts on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at 2:30. Then, you have Legal Research and Writing on Tuesday and Thursday at 4:30. You know you have about two to three hours of reading and class preparation for each of your doctrinal classes and assignments for Legal writing. Get out a physical or electronic calendar and block out the hours during which you prepare for each of your classes.

Lee Burgess: This is how to start: If you have Con Law at 9:30 on Monday and Contracts at 2:30 on Monday, you know that you need to get four to six hours of reading done over the weekend. So, plan to spend two to three hours on Saturday morning or afternoon knocking out Con Law, and two to three hours Sunday morning on Contracts. On Sunday afternoon and evening, get ahead on Tuesday's Con Law reading or work on your LRW project. On Monday, you have a break from 10:30 to 2:30 between Con Law and Contracts. If you have already done your Tuesday Con Law reading, you can use this break on Monday to prepare for Civ Pro on Tuesday. That way, when you finish class at 3:30 on Monday, you only have to focus on Contracts and LRW. Continue this schedule for the rest of your week.



Lee Burgess: As you move through the semester, look for pockets of time to get ahead, start outlining, and visit professor office hours. Additionally, be aware that you will likely have to adjust your reading schedule as you move through the semester. But starting with a detailed master plan is the best way to set yourself up for success. After all, if you have “no idea” when or how you are fitting in all of your reading for class, chances are, you won’t! On the other hand, seeing the tasks laid out in a realistic timeline may make the thought of finishing all your class prep less daunting. Once you have a plan, all you have to do is move through each task one-by-one until they are complete.

Lee Burgess: Now that you have your schedule, let’s talk about a strategy to help you stay on top of your task list – tracking your time. For example, if you plan to spend 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM on Saturday doing your Monday Con Law reading, start a timer when you sit down at 10:00 AM. If you get up for a break – which we do recommend and will talk about later – stop the timer and do not start it until you continue studying. Use time tracking apps like [Clockify](#) or other free software to help you with this. You may find that between 10:00 and 1:00, you spent most of those three hours sitting with your Con Law materials preparing for class. Alternatively, you may realize that what you thought was a five-minute break to move your laundry turned into a 35-minute towel folding expedition. Either way, it’s important to know how to spend your time. This will help you recognize and troubleshoot problematic patterns up front. For example, if every laundry break turns into a much longer break than anticipated, do your reading at the law school library or a coffee house, where there is no laundry to call your name. Or if you find that a bathroom break through the law library turns into 45 minutes of talking to friends in the lobby, consider moving to a “quiet section” of the library and taking bathroom or other breaks without leaving that section. In other words, once you know how you are spending your time, it is easier to adjust to ensure that you are using it as efficiently as possible.

Lee Burgess: Our next strategy is also aimed at efficiency – streamline your resources. Between your casebook, supplements, past student outlines, commercial outlines, [Quimbee](#), and every other resource out there guaranteeing to help you succeed in law school, it is easy to get bogged down with resource overload. This may be particularly true if you have ADHD. For example, students with ADHD sometimes find themselves spending the three hours they intended to spend reading Con Law, comparing a past student Con Law outline with a commercial outline or other supplement trying to reconcile minor differences in the language and/or figure out what information they really need to know. This is not an effective or efficient use of time. Simplify your resources to avoid distraction. For class preparation, start with your casebook. If you find it difficult to understand and follow the class using your



casebook alone, choose one solid additional resource. This may be a past student outline from the student who got the highest grade in the class, or the [Emanuel's outline for the subject](#). Check with your professor and/or TA if you have questions about the best resource to choose. Trust that once you have a single, accurate, and helpful resource, you can let the rest go. It may feel physically and emotionally cleansing to let go of the extra baggage! And it will help you keep up with your workload.

Lee Burgess:

Now that you are organized to begin studying, let's talk about some strategies for doing the actual work. We will start at the beginning with getting started. Students with ADHD sometimes express difficulty in starting a challenging task, such as class preparation for a class in which they are not particularly interested or do not understand. When you feel like you are stalled getting started, it is important to pinpoint why. Our tip here – consider factors other than motivation. You likely know that to accomplish a task, you need motivation to do so. And it is always good to reflect on your big picture “why” for going to law school and taking this “horrible” Con Law class in the first place. But with investigation, you may find that factors other than lack of motivation are causing your roadblock. Some factors may be easy to recognize – for example, if you have a resource deficiency, meaning you don't have the right casebook, or you have a skills deficiency, meaning you are struggling to understand the material. Those may be easy to spot, and they are also fairly simple to troubleshoot. In particular, remember what we just said about finding one good supplemental resource to help you understand difficult material.

Lee Burgess:

After you have addressed a potential resource or skills deficiency, if you are still struggling to get started, consider another factor that may be keeping you paralyzed – perfectionism. Is this task extra daunting because you feel the need to do it perfectly and have no idea how to do it? More specifically, are you delaying writing the first draft of your LRW closed memo because you want the first draft to be perfect and you know that it won't be? If perfectionism is delaying progress, adopt this motto: Do it badly. It is much more important to eventually start your open-memo assignment than it is to have a perfect or even passible first draft. So give yourself permission to write a terrible first draft. Once you have words on the page, the task of editing those words will likely be less daunting than filling a blank page with the “perfect” memo.

Lee Burgess:

This brings us to our second “getting started” tip – start with the least daunting task first. Some people find it easiest to get started by knocking out the task they are dreading the most. However, students with ADHD often find that the “start with the hardest task first” strategy makes getting started



more difficult. If that is the case for you, think about starting with the least daunting task. For example, if you know that you have to get through a difficult Con Law reading, start with a single Con Law supplement that you chose. Read through the outline or an overview of the case from the supplement. Then, turn to your casebook. It may be easier to get into the case – and understand it – after you have used the supplement as a “warm up”.

Lee Burgess: That wraps up our list of “getting started” strategies. With that complete, let’s move on to the next part of the work – [staying focused](#). As we talked about, keeping track of your time may help you here. For example, the idea of getting the timer up to three hours of focused reading by 1:00 PM may be enough motivation to focus for at least some period of time. But how can you maximize efficiency and brain power by incorporating planned breaks into your focus time? This is where a specific focus method may help.

Lee Burgess: One popular method is the [Pomodoro Method](#). The Pomodoro Method is a time-management strategy in which you do 25-minute stretches of focused work broken by five-minute breaks. After four consecutive work intervals, take a longer 15 to 30-minute break. In this method, each 25-minute block of work is called a “Pomodoro”. And here is the key – the Pomodoro is sacred, meaning once the 25-minute timer starts, your focus does not break, unless the building is on fire! You can even make this a game: How many unbroken Pomodoro can you get through in a day? If you get 25 unbroken Pomodoro, reward yourself with your favorite coffee drink, yoga class, or even an hour of your favorite guilty-pleasure TV show.

Lee Burgess: If you want an additional focus method option, there are variations on the Pomodoro method that many students find helpful. For example, we find that a lot of students like the [Circles Method](#). Here is how the Circles Method works: Figure out how many hours you need to work that day, then double it – that is likely the amount of time you actually need. Next, get out a piece of paper and draw one circle to represent each hour of work. Then, label your circles.

Lee Burgess: For example, if you are starting with three hours of Con Law reading, you will have three circles labeled “Con Law”. Once you have circles for your work tasks, add other circles for things that are important to you. You may have a circle labeled “gym” and another labeled “TV with roommate”. Now you are looking at your plan for the day and you have one simple goal – color in the circles. You get to color in a circle each time you complete an hour of work. But here is the best part – if you focus for 50 minutes straight without any breaks to check your phone, email, etcetera – you get to color in a whole



circle after only 50 minutes. However, if you break the 50-minute streak, you have to subtract that time from your hour of work and work for a full 60 minutes. As with the Pomodoro Method, you can think of this as a game! How many times can you “cheat” and color in a 60-minute circle after only 50 minutes of focused work?

Lee Burgess:

Hopefully, these time-management and focus strategies help you stay engaged and accomplishing the tasks that you must complete to be successful in law school. Before we end, we have one last tip for surviving law school with ADHD, regarding exam preparation. As with all of the strategies discussed today, this tip is likely to benefit all law school students; however, we find it is sometimes even more important for students with ADHD – start writing out full answers to practice questions long before you feel ready. It is fine to do these open-book, especially during the first half of the semester. The purpose is to practice the skill of translating an analysis from your brain into words on a page. We sometimes hear students with ADHD report that their brain jumps around at a million miles a minute, and their fingers cannot type fast enough to keep up. This may result in an exam answer in which you bring up a lot of key issues, but fail to fully analyze any of them. To avoid this pitfall, start practicing the skill of slowing down your analysis from day one. The best way to do this is using practice questions and practice exams.

Lee Burgess:

With that, we have finished our list of strategies for surviving law school with ADHD. Of course, this list is just the beginning – there are plenty of additional resources and suggestions for law school success with ADHD. But we hope that this list gives you a good place to start! If you have any questions about any of the tips or strategies we discussed today, 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. 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](mailto:lee@lawschooltoolbox.com) or [alison@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto: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](#)



[Clockify](#)

[Quimbee](#)

[Emanuel Study Aid Series](#)

[Pomodoro Technique](#)

[Need to Get More Done in Law School? Try the Circles.](#)

[Podcast Episode 123: Mental Health in Law School and the Legal Profession \(with Sarah Weinstein\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 134: Strategies for Maximum Personal Productivity](#)

[Podcast Episode 220: More on Accommodations in Law School \(w/Elizabeth Knox\)](#)

[Exercising Your Focus and Attention Muscles](#)