Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we are talking about organizing your LRW project, 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: Here at Law School Toolbox, we talk a lot about exam preparation. We realize that preparing for and taking your first semester 1L exams is one of the most daunting tasks that students face during law school. But before you even get to your final exams, 1L students face another challenge – one that is just as, and sometimes even more daunting – completing a graded LRW project. First-year LRW projects vary a bit from law school to law school. But some of the most common are the closed and open memo during your first semester, and the closed and open brief during your second semester. Just like with law school exams, your LRW project usually accounts for most, if not all, of your Legal Research and Writing grade for that semester. So, it is just as important to do well on your LRW project as it is to do well on your final exams – maybe even more so.

Lee Burgess: As you have probably noticed if you have been in law school for any period of time, LRW is very different from your substantive legal classes. Rather than teaching you the basic concepts in a substantive area of law, LRW is designed to teach you the basic skills that you will use as an attorney, regardless of what kind of law you practice. For example, as a litigation associate in any area of the law, you will likely spend a lot of your working hours doing legal research and writing. And even if you do not plan to be a litigator, your future career as an attorney will likely involve a lot of writing and research-oriented tasks. For example, if you want to practice corporate M&A law, you will likely assist with drafting contracts, and a large part of your job may involve due diligence, meaning reviewing corporate documents in search of relevant information. In other words, knowing how to search for key information and write well will serve you in any legal career. So, understandably potential employers are looking to hire associates who have acquired those skills, and they look at your LRW grade to indicate whether you acquired those skills during your first year of law school. In short, a good LRW grade is the easiest way to show potential employers that you have the

skills that you will need to succeed as an attorney.

Lee Burgess: Now that we've talked about why doing well on your 1L LRW projects is important, let's talk about how to do that! To start, let's talk about some of the things that make 1L LRW projects particularly challenging. First, your 1L first-semester LRW project is usually the first graded legal writing assignment that you do in law school. And legal research and writing are usually brand-new concepts, so doing well on your first LRW project requires you to quickly develop and implement new skills.

Lee Burgess: Second, LRW professors may seem less than clear regarding exactly what they are looking for in your first project. Relatedly, since you have never done a project like this before, it may seem impossible to know if you are doing it "right". That's where we can help. Today, we are going to give you some pro tips for approaching and organizing your LRW projects. Hopefully these tips give you a clarity about when and how to get started with your project, as well as a better idea of how to approach each subpart of the project. With that goal in mind, let's jump into the tips.

Lee Burgess: The first tip is simple – start working on your LRW project as soon as possible. Typically, you will be given a set window of time during which you must complete your LRW project – the time from when you receive instructions and materials for the assignment and its due date. This time period will vary depending on your school and the assignment. However, regardless of whether you are given three days or three weeks to complete the project, it is important to start it right away. If you are new to legal research and writing, as most 1Ls are, it is easy to drastically underestimate the amount of time that each part of this project will take. This tends to be especially true if you did a lot of writing in undergrad and/or consider yourself a particularly good researcher and writer. Legal research and writing are completely different from the kind of research and writing you may have done outside a legal setting, so do not let your prior research and writing experience give you a false sense of security about your timeline. And do not use a non-legal research and writing experience as a benchmark for how long your LRW project will take. Remember, you are being asked to do something completely new, and most people do not complete brand-new tasks in record time. So accept that your LRW project will likely take way longer than you think and start on it as soon as you receive the instructions.

Lee Burgess: The second key to a successful LRW project is related to the first – create a time-management schedule and pace yourself. If you are lucky, your professor will give you mini-deadlines by which you must have certain parts of the project complete. For example, you may be required to turn in a

research summary two weeks before your final memo is due, and a draft of your statement of facts one week before the final due date. However, if your professor has not imposed mini-deadlines, you need to schedule them for yourself. Let's talk about how to do this. First, think about what you are being asked to do and break down the project into smaller parts. For example, if your LRW project is a closed-universe memo, your subparts may include: (1) carefully reading the instructions and facts with which you are provided; (2) carefully reading the provided case law; (3) analyzing and organizing the cases; (4) planning and outlining your memo; (5) drafting your statement of facts; (6) revising and editing your statement of facts; (7) drafting your analysis section, including all relevant legal citations; (8) revising and editing each subsection in your analysis; (9) drafting an introduction and conclusion; (10) editing your memo as a whole; (11) proofreading the text of your memo; (12) using your Bluebook to double-check all of your legal citation; (13) another round of proofreading both text and citations; and (14) adding final required components, such as a table of contents and a table of authorities.

Lee Burgess: If you are completing an open-universe project, you will need to add research tasks to your list of subparts to complete. Once you have a list of all of the subparts for your LRW project, create a timeline with deadlines for completing each subpart. As you do this, keep in mind pro tip number 1 – everything will take you longer than you think. In particular, be sure to leave yourself adequate time to revise, edit, and proofread all parts of your memo or brief. If you aren't sure about when to set personal deadlines or how long you should plan to spend on each subpart, talk to your professor. Your professor knows that this project asks you to do something for the first time, and most professors are more than willing to help you navigate your approach, especially if you start working on the project right away and ask your professor about a timeline shortly after receiving your instructions.

Lee Burgess: Once you have a time-management schedule in place, you are ready to start with your first task. That brings us to our next pro tip – carefully read, re-read, and triple-read the instructions. Make sure that you understand exactly what you are being asked to do. Additionally, pay attention to instructions regarding formatting, any templates provided, and any guidance your professor gives regarding what your final product should look like. You will also likely have a strict word limit to keep in mind. As you continue with the rest of your project, refer back to these instructions as often as necessary to keep them top of mind. It does not matter how thoroughly researched and well-written your memo is – if it does not address the specific questions you were asked, you will not receive a high grade. And if your memo is formatted incorrectly, exceeds the word count, or does not conform to what your professor wants, your grade will suffer, even if the content of your memo is

excellent.

Lee Burgess: As a side note, LRW professors are not overly particular about formatting, word limits, and deadlines because they want to make your life difficult. Rather, they are trying to prepare you to practice law. Courts usually have strict formatting requirements and word limits for documents. And to say that courts are not lenient about deadlines is an understatement. So, don't discount the importance of these technical restrictions.

Lee Burgess: Now that you know that your LRW professor is not trying to make your life unnecessarily stressful, let's talk about our next tip for LRW project success – take advantage of any opportunities for professor feedback and your professor's office hours. Most law school honor codes prevent you from getting outside help on graded LRW projects. However, most LRW professors are willing to fill this gap. As noted above, your professor may impose mini-deadlines for subparts of your project and may offer feedback on the subparts. If your professor does not freely offer feedback on subparts or other exercises, seek it out! This is the best and often only way to know if you are drafting your memo or brief the way your professor wants. Even more importantly, when you get feedback from your professor, take it to heart! You may think that the way your professor wants you to write is overly formulaic or boring. Nobody cares. Your professor is the one who will grade your project. So, your professor's opinion of what constitutes "good legal writing" is the only one that matters. Check your ego at the door and implement any feedback you receive from your professor as if it is the best and most important feedback you have ever received, because in the context of this LRW project, it is.

Lee Burgess: Now let's move on to some tips about tackling certain subparts of your project, starting with research. We have mentioned that some LRW projects are closed-universe, meaning you are given all of the statutes, cases, and other legal material that you are expected to use to write your memo or brief. Other LRW projects are open-universe, meaning that you are expected to do your own research using legal databases such as Westlaw and Lexis. Most students will complete a closed-universe project and then an open-universe project in that order. For either kind of project, you must develop a method to organize your legal sources. This is a little simpler in a closed-universe project. For example, organizing legal authority in a closed-universe project may involve creating a table in which you list each case and key information that you want to know about that case, such as the rule, the holding, the court, the date it was issued, whether it is binding or persuasive authority, and how you may use the case in your memo or brief.

Lee Burgess: On the other hand, a research strategy for an open-universe project may be a bit more complicated, but that is all the more reason to have one. One simple way to organize your research is by using the tools available in the legal research database of your choice. For example, you can use the "Folders" feature in Westlaw to sort cases into categories such as "binding" and "persuasive", or cases that are analogous to your facts versus cases you think are distinguishable. You can also highlight in cases and add notes to cases that you save in the folders. Adding notes about each case in your folder will allow you to look at the list of cases in a particular folder and quickly reference the reason you saved the case. You can also use search history features in Westlaw or Lexis to keep track of your searches and what they uncover. Or you can make a checklist of searches that you would like to run, or cases that you want to check and mark off each one as you run the search or review the case. You can also use a tool like Trello to organize search terms and cases. Being organized about your research may take a bit more time on the front end; however, it will save you time in the long run. More importantly, being organized with your research will help ensure that you cover all of your bases and do not miss a key case. Conversely, an organized research strategy – such as running down a list of searches and marking each off as you do – will help you avoid going down the same rabbit hole repeatedly in search of a "perfect" case that does not exist. As you complete your research strategy, make sure that you keep your timeline in mind and stick to your deadlines. That way, you will have sufficient time to complete the rest of your project.

Lee Burgess: That brings us to our next tip, which addresses the inevitable task of actually writing the memo or brief. We have already mentioned several times that this writing process is likely to take more time than you expect. But that point is so critical that it's worth emphasizing again and explaining why: This is not a one-shot and you're done writing exercise. In fact, your first draft of the memo or brief will likely be pretty terrible, and turning in a first draft as a finished project is likely to result in a poor grade. So, instead of making that mistake, give yourself adequate time to revise and edit your memo or brief. Good legal writers often go through 10 to 15 drafts of a document before they submit it to a partner or the court. This is especially true if legal writing is a new skill. Additionally, starting your drafting and revision process early will ensure that you have time to seek guidance from your professor if the professor is willing to offer feedback on subparts or drafts. Regardless of whether you receive feedback on a draft from your professor, it is important that you know how to implement that feedback and further self-edit.

Lee Burgess: We could do an entire podcast on how to self-edit; however, we will give a few basic tips here to get you started. First, focus on saying exactly what you

mean as succinctly as possible. Good legal writing is simple and clear. Break up long sentences containing multiple points into separate sentences, and eliminate unnecessary words. Using a simple and clear writing style will not only make your document easier to read and grade, it will also help you stay within the word limit, which is often more challenging than students expect.

Lee Burgess: Once you have what you think is the final draft of your document, it is time to implement our next tip – proofread your document line-by-line from a hardcopy. At this point, you have probably been looking at your document on your screen for days, if not weeks. You are familiar with every paragraph and sentence. This familiarity will make it easy for you to miss typos and other small errors, especially if you only read through your document on a screen. Instead, print a hard copy of the document. Then, take a blank piece of computer paper and cover up the entire document except for the first line. Take a pencil and use it to make a mark over each word in the document as you read the word. This process will likely take more time than proofreading the document on your screen, but it is likely to yield much better results.

Lee Burgess: In addition to editing and proofreading the text of your document, you must also double-check and proofread your legal citations. So for our last tip, we recommend doing separate editing and proofreading rounds for your citations alone. In the editing round, use your Bluebook to make sure that all of your citations are accurate. Then, use the same paper and pencil method described above to proofread the citations for typos. This kind of attention to detail is the way to success on an LRW project.

Lee Burgess: And with that, we have wrapped up our discussion of organizing your LRW project. We hope that you found these tips helpful as you take on LRW. If you have any questions about these tips or legal research and writing generally, 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 excellent law school tutors. So let us know how we can support you as you hone your legal research and writing skills!

Lee Burgess: 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!

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