Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about how to regroup, triage, and get ready for your final exams. 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 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.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're going to talk about how to regroup, triage, and get the most out of your push for final exams.

Lee Burgess: Woo, here we are! It's a busy time of year, it's October. Everyone's had the October freakout when we're recording this and now we are fully thinking about how to prep for exams. So when you're listening to this, you are a few weeks out. These tests come fast and furious in the fall.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think at this point most people are probably starting to feel some combination of fatigued, overwhelmed, stressed out. This is all very normal; however, you do really need to take stock of where you're at at this point and develop that plan for the last few weeks, so that you can finish off strong and really do your best. That's what we're talking about here. We're not saying everybody needs to make an absolute A+ on every exam. We're talking about, with the time you have available and your resources and where you're at, how can you do the most with the time you have left?

Lee Burgess: Yep. Somebody was talking to me, not in this context, about exams and assessments, and reminded me that any sort of exam is just one snapshot in time of your performance on a specific day, under specific conditions. And it was just such a good reminder that what you're really doing is just training for that one moment, where you get to try and do your best. Don't give it any more power than that, it is a snapshot. But just like athletes who perform on one individual day or one individual race, you do a lot of prep to be able to show up, to be the best possible version of yourself. But this idea of the best possible version of yourself really gets lost in law school because it's usually a shell of a person who shows up to law school exams, and I don't know that's really the best snapshot of you as a law student. You want to show up as hopefully maybe a stressed version, but at least a prepared version of yourself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think those first semester exams in your 1L are so hard because you haven't gone through it before. You don't really have a very clear idea of what you're going to be asked to do. It's just a very intense experience. And so, I think even when you go in with the best laid plan, things still often go sideways. But there are some kind of common themes and common problems that we see a lot with students that we work with in this final exam push. So, we thought it just might be helpful to talk through some of those. And if you identify with them, we'll have a few solutions. So, Lee, what's first on your list?

Lee Burgess: Alright, first on my list is this idea that: "I'm spending lots and lots of time outlining, but it turns out I don't actually know any of the law." So, I'll go ahead and confess that this totally happened to me first semester. I had very long and beautiful outlines, and then I didn't really know how to apply that law because I was so focused on creating documentation – which I'm very good at – but I didn't realize what was really being asked of me in the exam, and that was a bit of a shock to my system.

Alison Monahan: Right. Luckily, you have two parents who are lawyers who, as I recall the story, kind of took you aside at Thanksgiving and were like, "Wait, you can't recite the elements of this very basic law with any degree of certainty. You have an exam in a few weeks. This is a very serious problem."

Lee Burgess: Yes, so basically they saved me. But we're here to save you, to pass along the advice. I mean, you really need to take a pause. And if you can't ask yourself some simple questions and either quickly find that answer in the outline or realize that it's already somewhat in your brain and you're a few weeks out from exams, you really need to take a moment and decide how you're spending your time. So outlines, I think, are some of the most popular busy work that students can do in law school. It feels so good to draft page after page and think about how much work you've done. But the real question is, is that work getting you any closer to performing on a test? 200-page outlines typically aren't going to do it.

Alison Monahan: No. And at that point people tend to get really obsessed with the formatting and does their table of contents look perfect? And that is not going to help you on an exam. That is just you trying to control a stressful situation with irrelevant work.

Lee Burgess: Yes. So, this is the moment where you want to take a step back and say, "What is the purpose of these outlines? What do my exams look like? And what are the study materials I need to perform in those exams?" So if you have a closed-book exam, it really doesn't matter if your table of contents is perfect.

Alison Monahan: So what?

Lee Burgess: I mean, it's cool it'll be in your apartment, but it doesn't really do anything. Even if you have an open-book test, a long outline with a perfect table of contents may not make it easy for you to find the attack plans that you need or how you're supposed to write down the law on an exam question. You really need to remember that these are tools to help you study and organize the law and maybe reference during the exam. And if they're not working, please stop typing. Please stop.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think consider, does typing even help you? For me, I did realize my first semester pretty quickly that having a big typed up outline was not going to work for me. So, I just spent that time doing other things, like flowcharts, and I did a lot of handwritten notes, and I would color them and stuff like that. And that for me was much more effective than just like, type, type, type, type, type, type, type. So, I think also taking that step back and saying, "Has this worked for me in the past? Does it seem like something my brain would work well with? And have I applied it on an exam and actually used it and seen that was really helpful, or no?" When I got that question and I couldn't remember the elements of adverse possession, I had no idea where that was in my outline. Maybe that's a problem.

Lee Burgess: And I think you don't need to have a complete outline to test it. Let's use adverse possession, what you just mentioned. If you have outlined adverse possession, you can go anywhere and find a hypo on adverse possession. It's a pretty easy hypo to come up with. And if that outline doesn't easily give you that answer to do that analysis quickly and clearly – well, that's a huge red flag. So, don't wait until the full exam to test it, or even the full practice exams. Test it intermittently to give yourself that feedback, and make sure that these documents are working for you. I mean, you can spend so much time getting no value from these documents. It's a really dangerous habit. And it's in all the movies and everyone's talking about the magic outline. There is no magic outline. There's no perfect outline. It's only the outline that is perfect for you.

Alison Monahan: Right, and a lot of people tend to put cases still in their outlines first semester. Just get rid of that. The only thing you put there is a case name if it's a really important case. Otherwise, we do not care about the facts of some random case you read in September. It is not relevant.

Lee Burgess: No. Often you can just have the case name, you could say the name Fox, and then you could say it was about donuts, and then that might refresh your recollection.

Alison Monahan: You probably don't really need it. No one cares if it's about donuts. They're not going to give you a croissant question and ask you to talk about the donut case. That's not how this works.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's very true.

Alison Monahan: Alright, moving on.

Lee Burgess: Yes. So, number two is: "I feel like my study group isn't helping me get ready for my exams." I think this is the second biggest time waster for law students first semester, is the comfort of the study group.

Alison Monahan: Yes. And also the group collective thinking of the study group.

Lee Burgess: Group think. I think I learned that in my Psych classes.

Alison Monahan: So if you, along with your three or four study buddies are going over a hypo, and collectively you can all get to the right answer by the end – that's awesome. However, you don't get to take the exam together. So, I think at some point you have to really think about how you're using the study group. Are you using it to maybe get feedback on something you wrote personally? I think that's a great use of a study group. But if you're just brainstorming ideas for a hypo and going through it and being like, "Oh, we did great on that" – there's no "we", unfortunately, in law school here.

Lee Burgess: No, there really isn't. I think what study groups are really good for is teaching each other the law. I think teaching other people is a great way to test your own knowledge. And so, teaching each other, reviewing, giving each other mini lectures – I think that could be helpful, going over practice questions. So, each doing the practice question and then coming together to review it, I think that can be very helpful. I've also recommended students get together and write additional hypos and then trade them, because I do think that can also be helpful, especially if you have a professor that doesn't provide a lot of practice. So, that's a good use of study groups. But again, study groups are notorious for being huge time wasters, sharing massive anxiety and panic attacks, because the group collective anxiety is really real, giving you that false sense of security that you're talking about, Alison, and just this idea that you feel like it's a group project, and it is not. I will tell you I did not love study groups, but I did go to a Property study group, because I did not like Property. And one of my friends who basically taught me Property, like all the future interests and future estates – he got a C and I got an A. And that's because I took his lectures and then practiced all of it and got really ready for the exam. And even though he felt that he was ready, he didn't do the same amount of practice to execute the test. So,

even though he taught me Property, I still performed better. And I don't think that I'm unique in having that story.

Alison Monahan: It's not uncommon, we hear that a lot. The other thing that can happen combining outlining and study groups is, people think it's a good idea to split up the outlines in their study group and like, "Well, you make either this outline and give it to me, or you make this section of the outline and I'll make this other section." That's not going to work any better than just getting an old outline, and as we'll talk about in a second, there are situations where you might just need to get that old outline. But don't think that just because someone's in your study group making you an outline is going to be any different than something you can pick up off the shelf.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, so let's move on to that, which is another common thing that we see: "I haven't been working on outlines, and there's not enough time to get everything done." Classic triage moment here.

Alison Monahan: Well, I'll take this one, because that was definitely me second semester, first year. I had been clinically depressed for the first part of the semester, I had not been keeping up with my work, and at some point my therapist was like, "Look, you're a few weeks out from your exams. Are you going to take them or not? I can write you a note, you can take them later, whatever. But are you going to do it?" And I was like, "Yeah, yeah, I'm going to do it." She's like, "Alright, you're committing to take these tests today." I'm like, "I am going to do that." Yeah, talk about triage. I mean, at that point you literally just have to sit down and be like, "What is my calendar? How many days do I have? Where am I? These are all a disaster, but where am I in each class? What materials can I get?" I think two of the classes we were taking that semester were kind of non-standard things the school had made up. So there it's like, "Alright, I've got to get either a good friend to give me some outlines, I've got to get old student outlines. I can't just go get a book off the shelf." But for the other classes, it's like "Crim, I can go get a Crim outline, I can just buy the commercial outline." And yeah, then you just have to basically be like, "What is my absolute minimal amount of information I need to know? Where can I get that efficiently? And now I'm going to start applying it." And I pulled it out, I did okay. It wasn't my best semester, but it was not a total disaster.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think, one, it's very possible sometimes to pull it out; and two, fix this with some dedicated and focused work. I think we're in an interesting time, especially with AI tools, because you can feed AI some of your class notes and ask it to start building you an outline, which I think is interesting. We couldn't do that quickly back in the day. I mean, not even back in the day. Like, two years ago.

Alison Monahan: A year ago, probably.

Lee Burgess: A year ago, yeah. I don't know. So, I think that's interesting. But no matter what you do, whether it's pull an old student outline, pull a commercial supplement, use AI – you do still have to own what's in that outline. And I think that's one of the things that sometimes gets lost. It's like, "Well, I've got the outline." It's like, "Okay, well, have you cross-checked it with your syllabi? Do you know that it's covering what your professor wants you to cover?" Hopefully it was from somebody who took their class, but some professors change what they cover each year. I mean, a first-year class is still going to teach what a first-year class is, but they might have new cases or new pet projects that they bring into the class. So you still have to own the output, and I think that's incredibly important if you are using AI. AI is your friend, but it could also lead you down a bad path.

Alison Monahan: Well, but the other thing I would say too is I think you really have to evaluate efficiency here. So, if I'm looking at a scenario where I have a choice of two pretty solid old student outlines from the previous year – I've looked at the syllabus, maybe one case has been added, or Glennons, Emanuels, Gilberts type of situation with a commercial outline, or trying to get AI to summarize all of my notes that I was half awake in class taking – I'm probably not going to think that last option is my best. I'm probably going to get the commercial outline for the very black-letter law, the in-class outline for a few of the nuances. And then I'm going to start doing practice questions.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think so. And then making any supplemental materials to flush it out for yourself. Like, you were talking about flowcharts, right? This is a great way to use your time, because the making of the flowchart increases your understanding of the material.

Alison Monahan: Right. But honestly, even then, if we're really talking triage, I'm probably not making a flowchart.

Lee Burgess: That's probably true. I mean, if you're in a really dangerous spot, no flowcharting. You're right.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you're not trying to get an A+ here. You're trying to hit the curve, basically. If you hit the curve in this scenario, you have done really well. I think you just have to resist this temptation, because there's some guilt, there's shame, there's all this stuff about like, "I didn't do all this stuff. I need to do it to prove that I'm a good person." No, you've got to cut that all out and just be like, "I need the law, I need the practice questions, and I need to do as many of them

as I can." And if it's an open-book exam, focus on what you can bring with you that is going to help you do this analysis on the fly.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's very true. Alright, here's another common situation we hear: "I have practice exams for some of my classes, but when I sit down to write one, I have no idea where to start." This also happened to me. My school would do these mock exams where you could go sit in the lecture hall to do the practice exam, which I actually thought was very helpful because it is weird to sit in that hall and hear everybody type. There's like a din to that that is a bit unsettling. And I walked out of my first Civ Pro exam, because I had somebody else's outline. I had not made it my own. I had not been studying the law, I had been going to study groups. And I took the exam so I could do it later, but I left and realized that was not how I should be spending my time. And then I walked out of my study group after that, because I realized that they were not getting me ready for the test. It was a really scary moment, but I will say that I did not just throw the practice exam in the trash. I took it and without time constraints, started studying it and started teaching myself the law by what was being asked in those questions. And I did pull it out. My first-semester grades were not my best grades in law school. I had a learning curve, but it happens. So, I feel like so often you feel like everyone else has it figured out when you have these scary moments. Most people do not have it figured out, and you just have to find your path through whatever mistakes you're making, and you're probably making a few mistakes.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think if you really have no idea where to start I think that is totally normal, but I do think this is a scenario where you can get help. Maybe you do go to people, even if you're not in a study group. Like, I would sometimes get a few people together for a class and be like, "Can we work through this hypo together?" Or you can hire a tutor and we'll help you work through a hypo. Or you can go to academic support and see what they have to offer. But you're not the only person who's ever looked at this and been like, "Oh my gosh, I have no idea what to do." And everybody can get through it, but you might need, even if it's a 2L friend or your TA or whatever – somebody who could just be like, "Look, here's how you approach this and you can do this, and you need to calm down and actually work through it."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, don't let the panic take over. You do have to get this work done. Yeah. Alright, another one we hear often is: "Everyone seems to be working harder than I am and staying at the library until midnight. Do I need to do that to get ready for exams?" Alison?

Alison Monahan: You do not. I think honestly, most people are not studying full-time when they're in the library. Like, Columbia just sent me this email that they're so

excited about their fancy new law library, with this huge open atrium, with all these study tables in the middle, ringed by more study tables. I'm like, "Nobody's getting anything done in there." So, I think if you can be efficient, I'm not going to tell you that studying for law school exams is nine to five. I mean, some people say that. I think you're probably going to do more work than that, but I don't think you need to be doing 20-hour days or anything like that. I mean, you can't work that much.

Lee Burgess: No. And anyone who's in the library all day until midnight is not studying all day. Really, you have no idea what they're doing. They could be wasting their time, they could be playing games on their computer. There are lots of things people will do to use that time. So first, just sitting in a seat in the library does not mean that you're effectively preparing for exams. I think that's really important. I also think you need to be honest with yourself more about how much you are studying. So, do I think you need to stay at the library till midnight? No. I do not think clearly at midnight. I cannot study late, I'm not a night owl. That was a terrible choice for me. But I think what is important is for you to sit down and track your time and say, "Well, how much studying did I do today? Did I do 10 hours of real work, not 10 hours hanging in the library?" Well, then you've probably done your work for the day, and then you can go home. If you find out you're really studying six hours a day – well, that's probably not enough to get ready for your law school exams.

Alison Monahan: Or three or four.

Lee Burgess: Or three or four or whatever it might be. I also think it's really important, as you were talking about the beautiful new library at Columbia, to make sure that you are not distracted. So if you cannot sit in that library and focus on your work, then go somewhere else. Find somewhere that you can. But what we mean by "no distractions" is not the 2025 version of no distractions, which is like, I put my phone on silent. You need to put that phone away, you need to turn it off, you should maybe consider a social media break. You cannot be switching between tasks. We have been doing research on this topic, and I'm blown away by how much time we waste by all of these terrible habits that we have developed over the last like 18, 17 years that we've all had iPhones. But it is time to really dial it in and think about what you're doing. If you can't do one task for 45 or 50 minutes on getting ready for law school exams, you must really focus on removing distractions, turning off your Internet, and just working as thoughtfully as you can to build up to being able to have more focus.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I think this is where you take that monastic version of studying, where it's you and a carol in the library with walls around you, essentially. I mean, yeah, when I looked at this library I was like, "Oh my God,

this would be like my absolute worst nightmare." I mean, I'd be happy to go hang out and chat with my friends there, but actually get work done, no way. I had a whole rotation of places I would hide out in different libraries. Like, I'd go to the architecture school, because no one was ever there and it was beautiful. I'd go to teacher's college, I would go to the business school if I wanted some light stuff, because they were always just hanging out. I literally had an actual hideout room in the top level of the undergraduate library. And this was all very Hogwarts-style stuff too. So, you could find beautiful places, but I basically just didn't want anyone I knew to find me.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. We read recently in some research that just having your phone next to you – which right now it is, I'm not looking at it, but it's on the table – lowers your IQ by 10 points. Just by having your phone next to you, because your brain is wondering what is on it. It is really terrifying. So that is why, especially if you're in a triage situation, everybody should worry about this. But especially if you are limited in time, you must have as much brain power as you can to throw into this problem. And I think reeling in your technology is a great place to start, and that should also be about where you spend your time and just manage all sorts of distractions and interruptions. Friends interrupting you is also a huge waste of time. So, just be left alone, go find somewhere quiet. I studied at the medical school near my law school, and they sleep in the library. Nobody talks to you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, no, I've even heard of people renting hotel rooms if it gets really bad and they have to get away from their friends and family or something. So yeah, I just think we so rarely now actually go and try to focus intently on one thing just by ourselves, but this is really the time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. You were just at a talk recently where a very successful, famous person was discussing how hard it is to block time for creative deep work. Everyone is struggling with this, folks, everybody. It's not just you. But school is one of those situations where you absolutely have to make this a priority.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I'm going to take this next question, because this was definitely something I really struggled with: "I'm sleeping four hours a night and I'm struggling to focus when I'm studying. How am I going to get all my work done?" Well, let me tell you, I had actually blocked out like eight hours a night, because I looked at my schedule and I was like, "I'm going to be responsible." However, I was studying so late into the night that I thought I could just stop at like 11:30 and brush my teeth and go to bed at midnight. Well, that didn't happen. So I would lay awake in bed until like three or four in the morning being like, "I can't sleep. I can't sleep. I can't sleep. I can't sleep." And then I would get four hours of sleep, and it was not great.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, no. We've had our friend Lindsay Scola on this podcast a few times talking about sleep. There is no data that shows that we perform well on four hours of sleep. All the data says it is terrible, you're basically drunk, you cannot retain information.

Alison Monahan: You get clinical depression.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, your cognitive abilities are super diminished. You must find out how to get some rest, and if you are having serious issues around this, you should go talk to somebody at your school. You will not be the first person that they have talked to with this issue, but sleep is incredibly important, you must do it. And also, you will likely get sick. I think this is what's tough about fall, is that the weather changes, the flu starts going around. If you get the flu as you're getting ready for finals, that is not a good thing. And sleep is one of the things our immune system needs, so it must be part of your study plan. As Alison said, you can't just pencil it in; you actually have to set yourself up for success. We'll link to the episodes with Lindsay, because they're great. They're an easy snack to listen to while you're taking your walk, to take a break from studying. But you need to make sleep a priority.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and it's hard. It's definitely hard, because it does take time, and time is what you don't really have here. But there're also meds. Let's be honest.

Lee Burgess: You need to get help if you need help, basically. Four hours of sleep is not the answer. Okay, we know a lot of our listeners get accommodations – the most common accommodation we see is time and a half. So, what if a student says: "I got my accommodations, which are for time and a half, but I'm not sure how best to utilize this extended time. What do I do?" So Alison, how do you study for extended time?

Alison Monahan: Well, I think there are two things. One is, you've got to figure out how you're going to use it on the test and actually practice doing that. So, if it's a standard time would be a three-hour test and you're going to get four and a half hours – well, you need to do some four and a half hour practice and see how that plays out. And then also when you're studying, the reality is, there's a reason you're getting extra time on a test, which also suggests that there's a reason you're going to need extra time to prepare. So I think the time aspect and being efficient and really focusing on things that are going to move the needle for you are just even more important. And also, thinking about why you are getting accommodations and what you need to prepare to make yourself as efficient on the exam day as possible. So, if it's ADHD, which is one we hear a lot, or anxiety – you probably want to go in with a very clear attack plan and very clear

elements, because that is the only thing that's going to keep your brain kind of anchored. Yeah, so I think it's a tricky situation.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and if you have a three-hour exam that is now four and a half hours, that is a very, very long time. I think that is one of the kind of cruel jokes about getting extended time, especially with ADHD, is you're being asked to take a very long test. And you have to be honest with yourself about where your own strengths and weaknesses are. Some folks really cannot focus for more than 30 or 45 minutes, and if that is you, that is okay. You need to acknowledge that and then figure out how you're going to take four and a half hours and turn it into 35, 45-minute chunks. And what are you going to do in between? Are you going to go wash your hands? Are you going to go put water on your face? Are you going to stretch? These are the things that you have to figure out to make the most of this time. Sometimes it's not as straightforward as "I get accommodations because for whatever reason, I'm a slower reader and I need more time to read." I think that is a little bit easier to say, "Okay, well, it's a long period of time, but I just needed that time to plod through the work." That's a little different than often ADHD, which is, "I'm likely to lose my focus. How am I going to get it back?" And part of that extended time is to allow you to kind of right the ship. What's your plan on how to right the ship?

Alison Monahan: Right. Also, what can you bring in in terms of food and caffeine, and different schools have different policies. We were basically allowed to bring whatever, so I would literally have all these different snacks and water bottles and cold coffee, and if I was flagging a little, I'd be like, "Well, I'm going to take a few shots of my Starbucks drink now." I mean, it sounds silly, but a little piece of sugar might help your brain three hours into this.

Lee Burgess: It's so true.

Alison Monahan: But you want to practice and think about it.

Lee Burgess: You have practice it. Yeah, you have to practice and try things out. You don't want to experiment in the exam room.

Alison Monahan: Right. So, protein or sugar, or how do those combine? It sounds silly, but stuff like that can really actually tank you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Oh, I love a good chocolate covered almond.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, something like that. Yeah.

Lee Burgess: Something like that. Well, we were already talking a little bit about AI, but we are starting to get more and more student questions about using AI, and so this is a version of what is coming up: "I've started using ChatGPT to help me study for exams. It's so confident in its feedback. Should this make me feel confident?"

Alison Monahan: No, it should not. I mean, the base level reality is, these tools are designed to make you feel good about yourself so you'll keep using them. They may not be providing you correct information. It's actually shocking to me how good they are in some ways and how bad they are in other ways related to the law, like they don't understand conceptually necessarily the difference between a plaintiff and a defendant. So, you see some really weird, very wrong answers that it's giving you. So I think there are ways that this could be good, but you have to be careful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. If I was thinking of different ways to use ChatGPT, once I had it make a flowchart from some direction I gave it, because I just wanted to see if it could do a visual representation, and it did make something that was downloadable and easy. I think that could save you time, especially if you're one of those perfectionists who spends way too much time drawing or like futzing with things. I think that's great. That's more along the lines of making coloring pages for kids, which is possible. I've also used ChatGPT for that. Just saying. I think that it can help you search for information, especially if you're giving it a document and you're asking for things. But we see really inconsistent results with it looking at hypos. We've fed it student answers and tried to see what it would do with them. It's not pretty. I just wouldn't use it that way. I'd be really honest about what it can do. What I do think that it can also be used for is to help you manage your workload in some ways. So, I just found this new trick that apparently is new to me, but not new to everybody, which is that you can use ChatGPT to create calendar invites for Google Calendar. So you could tell it that you want 45-minute blocks throughout the day, balanced between two different classes, and you could give it all of these parameters and ask it to develop a study schedule in 45-minute blocks with 10-minute breaks, and then to create a Google Calendar invites based on that, that you can upload to your Google Calendar, and it will do that. And I think that's pretty cool, because for students who really need that level of granular accountability, you don't have to sit there and do all of that work yourself. And so I like that. I like that idea to use it for that.

Alison Monahan: It's not bad. I think it's good at transforming things. So if you gave it, say for example, a 200-page outline and asked, "Please only use this document, but I want you to condense it down to a 20-page outline and maybe a two-page attack plan" – something like that could be worth experimenting with.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, at least as a starting place. I do think, especially for ADHD students, sometimes that first task is really hard to do. It's like, "How do I get started on a more condensed outline? How do I get started?" And you can have it start for you. I think that is really great. Comparing documents, comparing your outline to another student outline to make sure you didn't miss anything. Cross-checking things it's very good at. Making sure that you didn't use the wrong names or inconsistencies. But yeah, I think you just have to be smart about what it can and cannot do. But I would say at this point in time, I would not use it to give yourself feedback. I would not really even use it to explain areas of the law to you. I do not think that it is sophisticated enough to do that right now. And oh my gosh, I feel like it's even getting worse at how pleasant it is to me. I mean, I'm a pretty compassionate, extroverted person, I like to connect with people. But I'm also a little dry and very busy. And I was doing something on Claude and I really want to be like, "Stop being so nice to me. I just want the answer. I don't want to read all of this text."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I've had to do that. I'm like, "I don't want you to explain what you're doing, I just want you to output what I asked you for. Go."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And please don't tell me how nice I am or smart I am, or what good questions they were, or when I caught you making stuff up and called you on it, how apologetic you were for going off script. No, it's just such a waste. I don't even want to use my cognitive load to...

Alison Monahan: Like manage your AI relationships.

Lee Burgess: Manage the emotions of the LLM. I just cannot do it.

Alison Monahan: Also, I will say, I think this could be a huge place people could waste time.

Lee Burgess: Oh yes. Good point. Down the rabbit hole one goes.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so if we are thinking about efficient ways, I do not necessarily... I mean, I can think of like 10% of cases where I would say there's a real argument to be made for using this to do something for you. Otherwise, I think you are probably wasting time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know. And the thing is, you are handing ChatGPT the work that you could get something out of, right? That cognitive offloading. So not only you're wasting time, but you're not doing that heavy lifting to get struggle into your brain. I was recently reading something on learning, and the struggle is where the retention comes from. And so, all these shortcuts that we take where we

prevent ourselves from struggling and making mistakes really slow down our learning.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you have to actually sit down at some point and do the hard work. You can't just be like, "Claude, tell me what you think the answer to this question is. Oh, great. Okay, cool. That sounds like what I would've said. Next question."

Lee Burgess: Totally. Well, everyone's got to get back to studying for finals, so we're going to have to wrap up here. But the bottom line is, you need dedicated work time without distraction. So turn off your phone, even take a social media break. Yes, we're still on ours, for anyone who has been listening since August, and it's going incredibly well. We'll get an update on that later. But just so you know, it really does free up a lot of your time and mental space. And then once you've done that, you need to make sure that you have solid study materials that you can actually learn from. And then you need to do practice and get feedback from study groups, your academic support, or our tutors. And then you need to make sure you get some sleep and eat some real food and not just pizza, so you can perform your best on exam day. And if you do that and be realistic about your calendar, I think you can come out of this unscathed.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely. I think we've seen a number of students who have triaged at the last minute and come out fine, we've done it ourselves on different occasions. It is not an uncommon situation to find yourself in, and I really think the biggest thing is just don't give up. It's not something that you can't get through and do okay.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And life happens. I've talked about it before on the podcast – my dad had emergency surgery during the reading days before one of my first law school exams. He was fine, but it was stressful and I wasn't exactly at my best, but I still had to study because it was still happening. Sometimes you just have to let yourself realize that life is happening. You do the best that you can. But definitely, just make the most of the time that you do have to study. Don't waste time.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I would say the same question that therapist asked me is, "Are you actually going to take these exams?" Because you can always get out of them. You can always go and tell them why you can't do this. And the school will let you postpone, whatever. But if you are going to do it, then now is the time to commit to it and just figure out how to get it done in the best way you can. And you can walk away saying, "Hey, I did my best." That's all we're asking for.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. 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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