

## How to Study for the LSAT

BY MIKE KIM

Your LSAT score is the most important part of the law school admissions process, and where you attend law school is likely to have a significant impact on the overall trajectory of your legal career. And the LSAT is very, very learnable. If you put in the time, and study for it in the right way, you should expect significant score improvement.

It's also true that the vast majority of people who take the LSAT do so without having put themselves in a position to perform at their best.

Not even get close.

Nothing I'm about to discuss is meant to be particularly unexpected or unique. In fact everything I'm about to discuss is meant to be obvious and fundamental. And this advice is not specific to those who are studying with the Trainer. And the final caveat is that this is not the only way to effectively prepare for the exam—countless individuals have used countless methods to get themselves ready.

I do believe that the advice I'm about to give can apply to the majority of test takers, and, if you take all the steps that I suggest, the benefit to you should be that you can go into the exam proud that you've done all you can to perform at your best, and confident that you are more prepared than just about anyone else for the challenges that may appear.

To begin, picture yourself sitting in that room on test day with a very tough Logical Reasoning stimulus in front of you. What skills or characteristics do you need to have in order to deal with it successfully?

- 1) You need to be able to recognize what parts of it you ought to prioritize. The majority of the time this will mean that you'll be required to separate out a main point and support for that main point.
- 2) You need to understand the exact relationship between these important components. Most often, what you'll be asked to assess are the reasoning issues that exist between the support presented and a conclusion reached.
- 3) You need strategies for getting to that correct understanding and applying it. For example, you may want to get in the habit of reading the stimulus twice—the first time through to identify the conclusion and the second time through to locate the support for it.
- 4) You need plenty of experience. You'll feel a lot more comfortable dealing with the tough stimulus if you've successfully dealt with plenty of similar ones during your prep.

Here are the four keys again: correct recognition, correct understanding, effective strategies, and relevant experience. It's helpful to use these goals to guide your prep: they are all achievable if you know how to prepare in the right way.

So what's the best way to go about improving in all of these areas? From what I've experienced, successful students commonly do so by bringing together a powerful combination of four key study components—learning, drilling, practice exams, and review. On the flip side, hundreds of thousands of well-meaning, hard-studying test takers have underachieved at least in part because they have failed to cover at least one of these bases.

Let's discuss each of these study components in a bit more depth, and then finish by talking about how to bring them all together.

Here's a quick 4 minute video with some general suggestions for your LSAT prep. Please click on the above player to watch.

## Learning

In order to perform at your best on test day, you need a correct understanding of the issues that underlie the design of the exam (how the rules of conditional logic work, for example) and of the design of the exam itself (for example, what types of questions appear in a section). You also need to learn effective strategies for the test as a whole (how to allocate time during a section, for example) and for specific challenges (for example, how to diagram a particular type of Logic Game).

The most popular methods for learning about the LSAT include (in no particular order) study guides, live courses, recorded courses, and tutoring, and many students will use a combination of tools, such as a study guide in conjunction with live courses, or recorded courses in conjunction with tutoring. Any of these learning methods can be effective, and in large part their effectiveness will be based on your preferences—so, choose the study methods that you feel most comfortable with, and, just as importantly, don't be afraid to switch things up and try additional learning methods when you feel you need something extra.

One thing students new to LSAT prep often don't know, and need to know, is that there is a significant range in the quality and effectiveness of LSAT learning products, and some of the most popular products happen to be of some of the least useful. Even amongst higher quality learning products, there is great variation in how the LSAT is described and in the strategies that are suggested.

So you want to make sure to invest some time to carefully consider which LSAT learning products, whether they be courses, books, or whatnot, you feel are going to be most useful to you, and choosing wisely will help you get a lot more out of your overall LSAT prep.

Regardless of the resources you choose, ideally, you will want to get in most of your learning early on in your preparation so that you have plenty of time to get really good at applying what you learn. You should also expect to continue to add to your learning throughout the entire study process, but, again, in the best of circumstances the end of your prep should be mostly about practice.

The LSAT Trainer, and most every other LSAT teaching product, is primarily meant to be used for this learning phase. However, many parts of the Trainer are meant to help bridge, and integrate, your learning with your practice exams and with your drilling, which we'll discuss next.

---

The LSAT has three types of scored sections: Logical Reasoning, Logic Games, and Reading Comprehension. To learn more about the specific challenge that LSAT problems present, please check out the following posts:

» Logical Reasoning 101

» Logic Games 101

» Reading Comprehension 101

The LSAT Trainer Sample Chapters

For more detailed information about the LSAT, please check out the eight free sample chapters of The LSAT Trainer.

### Drilling

Many successful students, and in particular a very large concentration of those who have made giant leaps in score, credit drilling as being absolutely essential to their improvement. Drilling is the practice of isolating and practicing again and again a particular challenge that the LSAT presents. Study materials such as the Trainer have drills that can help you strengthen specific skills (such as translating conditional statements), but, for the most part, when students discuss drilling, they are talking about doing sets of LSAT questions, separated out by such characteristics as question type, game type, and so on.

The reason why drilling is so effective is because the LSAT is very consistent in its design. The first few times you try playing Logic Games they may all seem uniquely challenging, but, when you bring together all of the Logic Games from all of the administered exams, you can see that the realm of possibility is in fact fairly limited and that the same issues show up again and again—so much so that you can isolate and prepare for all of them. And, when you bring together, say, twenty Match the Reasoning questions and solve them all consecutively, you can see great consistency in how they are designed, and notice patterns in terms of what leads to success and what leads to trouble, and you can work to habitualize efficient and effective routines.

Alternatively, imagine how much harder it would be to recognize such patterns and develop such routines if you only prepared by taking full practice exams, where you will see a Match the Reasoning questions every once in a while, and where you'd end up reviewing and thinking about Match the Reasoning questions while simultaneously trying to learn about and habitualize strategies for many other question types as well.

You can purchase questions for your drilling directly from LSAC (the makers of the exam) in the form of books of 10 exams (which is the most cost-effective way to purchase problems), or individually. Finally, as I alluded to before, it is very useful to consciously bridge together your learning and your drill work.

For example, you learn about a certain type of Logical Reasoning question, and then drill a set of those questions. In my opinion, this is the best way to get good at applying what you learn.

## LSAT QUESTIONS BY TYPE

You can use the free LSAT Trainer Questions By Type Tool to organize questions based on similar characteristics and to create your own Drill Sets.

### Practice Tests

In general, I recommend that you take just a few practice tests throughout the early and middle stages of your preparation, and that you save the majority of them for the tail end of your practice. The final phase of your prep should mimic the real exam more and more, and, ideally, the majority of your final prep time will be spent taking and reviewing full practice exams.

Most students prefer to use the older published exams mostly for drilling and the more recent published exams, which are slightly more indicative of what you are likely to see on test day, mostly for full tests.

It's human nature that, for most of us, when we take practice tests, what we'll think about immediately is how well we performed overall, and what this means for our test day and for our futures.

But it is also helpful to remember that thinking about those things doesn't actually help you get any better at the exam, and that the purpose of these practice tests is to ensure, as much as possible, that you score as high as possible. To that end...

- 1) Make sure to take the exams as realistically as possible. Most importantly, don't give yourself extra breaks and such between sections. You need to build up your stamina.
- 2) Use practice exams to find weaknesses to address. In fact, this should be the primary purpose of the practice exams that you take earlier in your prep.
- 3) Use practice exams to fine-tune and habitualize general test-taking strategies. This is especially important, and if you do this effectively, it can give you a huge leg up on most other test takers.

Most students waste a lot of time, energy, and focus during the exam having to make tough decisions about when to keep working on a problem versus when to move on, how to allocate the remaining time in a section when it doesn't seem to be enough to finish all of the problems, and so on.

All of these types of challenges are predictable, and you want to use your practice exams to get yourself ready for them. Don't just focus on the best ways to solve problems—make sure you've also worked on secondary strategies and practiced making the tough decisions.

trainer study schedules

The free LSAT Trainer study schedules can help you organize your learning, your drill work, and your practice exams.

## Review

Your ability to review plays a large role in determining how much you get out of your learning, your drilling, and your practice exams. Students who are better able to identify and address their weaknesses are far more effective in their prep than students who are not, and the ability to review well plays a huge role in that.

The most important tip I have for review is to think about problems in terms of the actions that you took to solve them. Remember that the LSAT is not a test of what you know, but rather how you think, and so your thought process should be a huge focus of your self-assessment. Be hyper-critical of each step. Even for the questions that you get correct, think about how you could have made things easier for yourself—for example, think about why a certain wrong answer was attractive to you, and what steps you could have or should have taken that would have prevented that.

You can group incorrect actions into three general categories:

- 1) I read it wrong (and this includes not paying attention the right things / paying too much attention to the wrong things).
- 2) I thought it wrong (for example, you didn't see the reasoning issue in an argument correctly).
- 3) I solved it wrong (for example, you didn't correctly and fully work through chain of inferences after being given a conditional Logic Games question stem).

And from there, you can get deeper into whether you had trouble because you are lacking some understanding or effective strategies, or if it's a matter of execution—your skill set isn't as strong as it ought to be, or you haven't habitualized the right actions.

Throughout the entire process, I strongly recommend that you take and keep notes about the questions and challenges that cause you the most trouble. These notes can be very helpful for seeing patterns, and for tracking the areas where you need to improve in order to get to your goal score.

## How to Bring it All Together

Learning. Drilling. Practice Tests. Review. I believe that these are the four critical components of a successful prep schedule.

## LSAT Study Timeline

As mentioned before, you want to get most of your learning done early on in your study process, so that you have plenty of time to practice applying what you know. Then you want to transition into drilling, and it can be helpful to connect the strategies and lessons that you learn with specific drill sets. Then

you want to finish your prep by focusing mostly on practice tests. And throughout the entire process, you want to spend plenty of time reviewing your work.

Roughly speaking, if you have twelve weeks to study, that means you might spend the first three weeks focused on getting your feet wet (it can be helpful to take a diagnostic) and learning about the exam, the next three weeks bringing together your learning and drilling, the next three focused mostly on firming up habits through drilling, and the final three mostly on full practice exams (again, with plenty of review and overlap throughout). You also want to make sure to also build in plenty of flexibility—most specifically, give yourself some extra cushion in those final weeks so that you go back and address any remaining weaknesses.

If the above schedule seems too cramped for you, it probably is. The LSAT is enormously important for your future, and though life gets in the way for just about everyone, you want to try your best to be as prepared as you possibly can for it, no matter how long it takes. Having said that, it's also true that one can make enormous strides in a small period of time, and if your time is limited, there are still, always, a lot of steps that you can take to raise your LSAT score.

No matter your situation, I hope that you've found this article helpful, and that it's given you some ideas for how to get the most out of your study efforts.

#### About the Author

Mike Kim is the author of *The LSAT Trainer*, the most popular and acclaimed new LSAT learning product to be released in over a decade. Previously, he co-created ManhattanLSAT. Inspired by self-study students who prepare for the exam on their own, Mike set out to write the ultimate self-study guide, and *The LSAT Trainer* is the result.