Goal Setting for Law Students

Written by Jeremy Fernandes

It's no secret that law school is an intellectually challenging and rigorous experience. Wherever you're at in this journey, setting goals can help you stay focused, motivated, and on track for success. Having goals to work towards will support your progress through school, and serve as stepping stones to a thriving legal career.

Here, we'll explore the importance of setting goals as a law student. We'll also provide a few examples of potential goals, explain what it means to set SMART goals, and discuss strategies to ensure your success.

Sign up for Clio's Academic Access Program to gain valuable experience with legal technology and set yourself up for a successful legal career.

Why setting goals is essential for law school success

You've already put in a ton of planning and focus preparing for (and writing) the LSAT and submitting your law school applications, so the thought of putting more planning effort into setting goals for your law school years might feel overwhelming. But setting clear goals in law school isn't just helpful—it's essential. Effective goal setting helps you prioritize coursework, manage your time, and lay the foundation for a successful legal career.

What's more, you can start anytime—whether you're just starting or nearing graduation, law school goals can help you stay focused on developing a thriving legal career.

Leveraging SMART goals for law students

Put simply, SMART is an acronym that stands for:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Timebound

The SMART framework provides a structured and effective way to create goals (and to stay focused and achieve success in a demanding academic environment like law school). Let's dive deeper into each component of the SMART goal so you can assess whether your goals meet this criteria.

1. Specific

Instead of general goals (e.g., "do well in my classes"), focus on a specific outcome (e.g., "maintain a 3.5+ GPA") and clearly define what you need to do to measure it.

2. Measurable

Measurable goals let you track your progress. For example, you can define how many hours a week you'll study to achieve your GPA goal (you might say, "I will maintain a 3.5+ GPA by studying 20 hours a week"). Then, track your hours and exam results to stay on course (and adjust if needed).

3. Achievable

Your goals should be challenging, yet attainable. For example, using the GPA example, you'll need to focus on a study schedule that is realistic with your current workload and won't lead to burnout.

4. Relevant

Relevant goals should align with your ideal legal speciality and intended career path. For example, if you're pursuing a career as a family law lawyer, you could set a goal to "attend a networking event for family law professionals by the end of the semester."

5. Time-bound

Giving your goals deadlines will help you avoid procrastination. For example, a time-bound goal could be to "apply for a summer internship at a law firm by the end of March."

Strategies for achieving your law school goals

Now that you've set some SMART law school goals, it's time to start thinking about how you're going to achieve them:

- **Create a structured study schedule:** Allocate time blocks for different courses, networking, bar exam prep, and breaks to avoid burnout.
- **Try time management techniques:** Optimize your studying time and try different approaches like the Pomodoro Technique**,** which involves 25 minutes of focused work followed by a 5-10 minute break. This method helps you stay refreshed while improving efficiency.
- **Hold yourself accountable.** Find a study partner or join a study group to stay motivated.
- **Check & adjust.** Track your progress and be open to modifying your goals as needed.
- **Use campus resources.** Take advantage of professor office hours, legal research and writing centers, and career services to support your academic and professional journey.

Examples of law student goals

You should set a mix of academic, personal, and professional goals to set yourself up for success in law school and beyond.

Below, we've covered a number of example goals that you can use when deciding what types of goals you want to set for yourself.

Academic goals

Academic goals focus on your educational growth and should help you excel in your coursework, develop strong legal research and writing skills, and prepare for exams. For example, you could:

- Start a study group to work through legal concepts and prepare for exams with your classmates. Here, an academic goal might be to "meet weekly with a study group throughout the semester."
- Set a GPA target—for example, "maintain a 3.5+ GPA."
- Commit to studying for a certain number of hours each day. For example, you might set a goal to treat law school like a 40-hour per week job and "aim to either be studying or in classes between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM each weekday."

Personal goals

Personal goals are centered around maintaining some semblance of balance and well-being during law school and should help you prioritize mental health and personal growth while staying energized and motivated throughout your academic journey. For example, you could:

- Prioritize maintaining work-life balance by getting enough sleep, eating a nutritious diet, and fitting in time for exercise. For example, you might set a goal to "get at least 8 hours of sleep per night" or to "exercise for at least one hour three times per week."
- Ensure you are taking time for yourself by aiming to "read one inspirational (and non-legal) book every month" or "spend at least five hours per week doing [insert your hobby of choice here!]."
- Focus on personal development. For example, if you're interested in becoming a litigator but struggle with public speaking, you could set a personal goal to "join the local Toastmasters group and regularly participate in meetings."

Professional goals

Professional goals can help you build the skills, experience, and network necessary for a successful legal career. These goals focus on gaining practical experience, developing industry connections, and positioning yourself for job opportunities after graduation. For example, you could:

- Seek out a summer internship at a law firm. A relevant professional goal might be to "apply for five summer internship positions each week until the end of the semester" or "reach out to one law firm each week to discuss a summer internship."
- Develop a robust professional network and find mentors to guide your early career decisions. As an example, you might set a goal to "attend one networking event each month" or "find a legal mentor and get together for monthly coffee dates."
- Familiarize yourself and become proficient with practice-management software to gain a competitive edge as you enter the legal job market. An example goal would be to "join Clio's Academic Access Program and become proficient with the software by the end of the semester."

Conclusion

Setting SMART goals is key to achieving success in law school and in your future legal career.

By staying focused and adaptable, you can continuously assess your progress and refine your approach while staying aligned with your overall goals.

Mastering legal technology early can help set you apart. With Clio's Academic Access Program, you'll gain hands-on experience with industry-leading tools that give you a competitive edge in your legal career.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.