



# Reading Like A Lawyer: Time-Saving Strategies For Reading Law Like An Expert

By Ruth Ann McKinney

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The ability to read law well is a critical, indispensable skill that can make or break the academic career of any aspiring lawyer. Fortunately, the ability to read law well (quickly and accurately) is a skill that can be acquired through knowledge and practice. The sooner the student masters these skills, the greater the rewards. Using seven specific reading strategies, reinforced with hands-on exercises at the end of each chapter, this book shows students how they can read law efficiently, effectively, powerfully, and confidently. Reading Like a Lawyer is divided into 3 parts: \* Part I introduces the reader to the fundamentals of legal reasoning upon which law-based reading builds; \* Part II introduces the reader to concrete strategies for reading effectively in law school; \* and Part III teaches strategies for reading law outside of the law school context.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"The author is an excellent writer and has produced a book suitable for introducing legal writing and reasoning in a variety of settings." --Bimonthly Review of Law Books

#### About the Author

Ruth McKinney is a professor of law at University of North Carolina School of Law.

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Introduction Exceptional law students, and exceptional lawyers, are expert readers. From the first semester of law school, fledgling lawyers commonly read hundreds of pages of dense, challenging law in a week, and thousands of pages in a semester. Later, in practice, lawyers read statutes, cases, and administrative regulations every day, decoding the words in the texts and reaching behind the words to the many possible meanings that could be attributed to the law they're reading. Law students – and lawyers – who read law well are getting something from their reading that is not shared by those who read law less proficiently. Starting with the first days of class, what law students understand about the reading process itself has a major impact on how they read their assignments. How they read their assignments determines what they are able to get from those cases and statutes, what they are able to bring to class discussions and take from class discussions, and – ultimately – what they are able to learn for exams. How they read in law school, in turn, directs the path of their reading in the profession. Practicing lawyers who have developed sound reading practices in law school approach their analytical work with confidence, secure in the knowledge that they can read the law powerfully, passionately, and accurately. Put succinctly, these lawyers read with conviction, knowing they are reading like an expert. The good news is that the ability to read law like an expert is not a gift that you're either born with or lack from birth. Students and practitioners have not been separated into the sheep and the goats prior to entering law school, relegated forever to green pastures or rocky cliffs. Rather, reading law like an expert is a skill that can be acquired by everyone with the curiosity, determination, and flexibility to adapt their prior reading skills to this new setting – and these skills can be acquired at any time. Once acquired and whenever acquired, the skill of reading law like an expert brings cascading rewards, enriching the reader's understanding of existing law and enhancing the reader's ability to create new paths to the law of the future. The purpose of this book is to teach you what the experts already know: how to read law-related material as efficiently, effectively, and powerfully as possible. There are three sections to the book: Part I introduces you to background information you need to know about the study and practice of law to get in the reading game. If you are already familiar with the structure of law school and the fundamentals of legal logic, you may choose to go directly to Part II. Part II focuses on casebook reading, the kind of reading that dominates the first years of law school. This second section introduces seven specific reading strategies, captured in the acronym E.M.P.O.W.E.R., that are common to all expert reading, and explores how law students can apply these strategies in the context of their casebook reading. Part III of the book moves outside of the casebook context, exploring how students and practitioners can read statutes and unedited cases accurately, confidently, and efficiently. There is a section of Appendices: Appendix A gives you a chance to test your baseline reading speed; Appendix B introduces a case-reading checklist that beginning students can use to develop healthy casebook reading habits; Appendix C introduces an advanced case-reading checklist to help successful students speed up their reading once they've developed sound habits. Appendix D offers a reading list for those who would like to explore the topic of legal reading in greater depth. You will find useful supplementary material on that website, including some of the responses I thought about as I wrote the Practice Exercises at the end of each chapter. Comparing my responses to your

own may help you gain confidence as you develop your legal reading skills. At their core, both law study and law practice are dependent on reading. If you learn to read law efficiently and effectively, you will be well on your way to achieving excellence in the study and practice of law. It is my hope that what you learn from this book will help get you started on the right page.

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