

## *Introduction*

IMAGINE YOURSELF IN YOUR FIRST LAW SCHOOL CLASS. After some wandering around, you have found the classroom. The room has rows of tiered seats, many of which are already occupied. Everyone looks nice, if a bit anxious. You slip into an empty chair and pull out your laptop. A few more students begin to trickle into the classroom, lugging massive books. There is some chattering and a sense of excitement in the room, but mostly everyone is focused on the front of the room or on their books.

The professor walks in and the room falls silent. You know her name is Armstrong—it was printed on your class schedule. She sets down a book like those most of your classmates have on their desks, and unfolds a large piece of paper that appears to have small photos and names on it.

Suddenly, you hear your name. The professor is talking to you, asking you a question: “Will you please recite the facts and the holding of *Pierson versus Post*?” Every head in the classroom turns to look at you.

You panic. Your heart begins to race. What are “facts” and “holding”? How are you supposed to know anything about *Pierson versus Post* before the professor begins lecturing? Did you miss something? You find yourself speechless (perhaps for the first time).

Another student raises her hand. You feel relieved—for a moment. But then she begins to talk about “the plaintiff” and “the New York Supreme Court” and some foreign words you don’t even catch, as the professor nods approvingly. You can’t follow the conversation very well—except that a fox is somehow involved—and feel a sense of panic. And you still haven’t taken any notes because you don’t have a clue what to write. Your neighbor kindly shows you her textbook, open to a page that says “*Pierson v. Post*.” Apparently, you were supposed to have read an

assignment before class—before the very *first* class! How did those other students know that?

You begin to read, desperate to catch up. But things only get worse. The material is even more mystifying than the conversation between the professor and the student. The text is written in English, but is otherwise impossible to follow. It is filled with words that are either unfamiliar or don't seem to make any sense in the context in which they are being used. And while you read, you are missing what's being said in class. Professor Armstrong has continued to ask questions of students. Sometimes they sound confident about their answers, but just as often they seem as confused as you feel. You can't figure out whether you should write down everything that is said or prepare for the possibility that she'll call on you again.

It is your first day of law school, and you are already behind.

After your first class, you find where the class assignments are posted, and you begin to read for your next class. But this reading is equally baffling. You can't possibly memorize everything you're reading, so how can you tell what's important? How do you determine what the "facts" and "holding" are in case you're asked again (and you wonder whether a different professor *will* ask that same question)? What should you do if you don't understand a word and you can't find it in the dictionary? What is a "standard of review" or a "precedent," and how are they relevant?

This book helps you avoid this frightening prospect. It takes some of the guesswork out of the first year of law school, providing information on a variety of levels:

- Basic, like *how do I know what to read?*
- Foundational, like *why are professors asking questions instead of answering them?*
- Practical, like *what am I supposed to get out of the reading assignment?*
- Technical, like *what do those unfamiliar words and concepts mean?*

This book offers a carefully organized account of what you need to know and why. Frequent illustrations and exercises allow you to apply what you are learning and practice using it while you read. And text and graphics offer you resources to which you can turn as you prepare for classes in your first year and beyond. The book reflects input from law professors and students about what they wish first-year law students knew when they began law school.

Whether you are about to start law school or are just thinking about applying, this book will help you prepare. You may think that you're ready for law school.

You've probably excelled at school for much of your life. You read well, you have developed good study habits, you know how to learn. That's a great start, so why would you need a book to help you prepare for law school? The answer is that law school is different from any of your previous educational experiences, and not just because it is about an unfamiliar subject. The reading assignments, the classroom dynamic, the purpose of your classes, and the professors' expectations will all be different from anything you have experienced before.

We have been teaching first-year law students for a combined total of 40 years. We know that the first year is exhilarating, but we understand that it can also be intimidating. We wrote this book to reduce that intimidation and to help beginning law students become productive and effective as quickly as possible. We've also included resources to help students *maintain* an edge throughout their law school careers. Think of this book as your secret weapon for doing well in law school.