

## TIPS FOR STUDENTS FROM STUDENTS

# Preparing for class: Case summaries

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Considering the hundreds of assigned pages of readings law students get for each course, it can be difficult to filter out important information (aka. Information you need for your exams). I believe the best way to understand the main ideas of each class are through case summaries/case briefs. Since our Canadian legal system is based on common law, it is important to understand past decisions that shape how new decisions will be made in the future.

Personally, when I have very limited time to complete all of my readings, I stick to creating case summaries for the important cases my professors have highlighted to understand the main concepts. This way, when professors ask about each case, I can answer them confidently.

**Pre-Tip:** Since cases usually touch upon several issues or legal topics all at once, take a look at the paragraphs the professors assigned and the headings in the syllabus to figure out the main concepts your class will be focused on.

Here is how I structure my case summaries. Headings may look different depending on how you have been taught to write them in school:

### **FACTS**

I briefly write out the important facts of the case and eliminate any details that are not relevant to the topic that the professor wishes to teach us. For example, if your Torts Law class this Tuesday is under a “Duty of Care” heading, you probably will not need the facts describing the parties’ financial situations the judge uses to calculate damages.

### **ISSUE(S)**

Essentially, what are the problems or questions the judge is trying to answer in this case? Sometimes the case will explicitly number them off. Most will not. These could be yes or no questions, or they can be something more



substantive. Regardless, these are usually written within the first few paragraphs of the case. Common phrases or words to look out for are “the question is,” “whether or not,” or just plain old “issues.”

## HELD

I then write out the answers to the issues I listed above within one to two sentences.

## ANALYSIS

Here, you are trying to summarize the law and how it was applied to the facts of the case to answer the issues identified earlier. This can be as long or as short as you would like them to be and usually include legal tests and any important dissents.

## RULE(S)/RATIO

Finally, I write out the important takeaways of this case – why we need to know the contents of this case. Is it because the test used still applies to current cases? Did it add or change something to an existing test? Is it an example of how an important test was applied? Your rule/ratio should be something you can look back on and immediately understand when and why you should be citing this case in your fact-pattern exams.

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