

# COMMERCIAL STUDY AIDS: PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Students spend a fortune every year on commercial study aids, but often they do not have a good idea of how to use them so that they help, as opposed to hurt, class and exam preparation. The following are some tips you should consider if you decide to use sources outside of your class materials.

- A high-quality commercial study aid is best used for clarifying rules, or “black-letter law.” When you feel that your understanding of class discussions or your ability to put course material together for the exam could be enhanced by a clearer understanding of the rules that are the starting point for analysis, referring to a high-quality study aid can be helpful. Note, however, that commercial study aids should *never* be a substitute for talking with your professor about your questions.
- Before purchasing anything, talk to your professor. See what he or she recommends for outside reading to help clarify material covered in the course. Often, your professor will have put a helpful treatise or other secondary source on reserve, and reading this material will save you money and keep you focused on what your professor would like you to take from the course. Your professor may also be able to recommend a high-quality study aid, so that you do not waste money on those that may contain wrong or incomplete information.
- Keep in mind that a commercial study aid or other outside source can never be a substitute for work you must do yourself – organizing and synthesizing your course material in a way that helps you make sense of it all. The process of *preparing* an outline, not actually studying one, is a critical part of your exam preparation. Passively reading an outline or other material prepared by someone else will *not* give you this experience.
- Regular reading of commercial study aids is generally a waste of time. If referring to a study aid for selected topics helps you clarify your thinking, that is a productive use of your very limited time. If you treat a commercial study aid as another book to read for class, in addition to everything else you are doing, it will waste your time and could ultimately hurt you on the exam. Remember, **YOU** are supposed to be doing the heavy lifting of reading cases and figuring out how those cases fit together. If you do not develop this skill because of substantial reliance on commercial study aids, you will not have the skills you need to do well on the exam.



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