



Juggling Acts:

Mastering Multiple Deadlines in Law School and Beyond

Second-year law students know the feeling all too well: everything seems due at once. That might sound dramatic, but anyone who's tried to balance appellate briefs, job applications, and law review work all in the same week knows it's pretty accurate. Here's the thing though—those multiple deadlines aren't going anywhere after graduation. They actually get more complicated in practice.

Welcome to Deadline Hell

By second year, the honeymoon with law school is officially over. Remember when you only had one or two big assignments per semester? Those days are gone. Now there's a never-ending parade of stuff due: appellate briefs, memo drafts, oral arguments, job applications, law review submissions, clinic work, and finals always lurking somewhere in the background. Every week feels like a strategic battle. Your con law brief is due the same week as your corporations problem set. Mock trial prep overlaps with law review cite-checking marathons. And somewhere in there, you're supposed to be networking and applying for summer jobs. Fun times.

The worst part? Everything connects. Miss too many constitutional law classes to work on that brief, and suddenly the final exam becomes terrifying. Put off law review work, and there goes your weekend. It's like a house of cards, except the cards are on fire and someone keeps adding more levels.

Plot Twist: Practice is Worse

Think graduation will save you from deadline madness? Think again. The jump from law school to practice is like going from juggling tennis balls to juggling flaming chainsaws. Blindfolded. While riding that unicycle.



Practicing lawyers handle dozens of cases at once, each with its own maze of deadlines. Discovery cutoffs, motion filing dates, depositions, client meetings, court dates, and those terrifying statute of limitations deadlines that can literally kill a case if you miss them. Unlike your professors who might cut you some slack, courts and opposing lawyers show zero mercy for missed deadlines.

Here's where it gets really fun: legal deadlines depend on other people doing things. That discovery deadline might change based on when the other side finally responds to your requests. Settlement talks can suddenly go from zero to sixty, demanding immediate attention. Emergency motions pop up like whack-a-moles, requiring instant research and writing while all your other deadlines keep marching forward.

And clients? They expect their stuff to get priority attention. Try explaining to a client that their contract review is delayed because another client had an emergency. Spoiler alert: it doesn't go well.

How to Not Lose Your Mind

Successfully juggling multiple deadlines isn't about being superhuman or surviving on three hours of sleep. It's about getting smart with systems and strategies.

Master Your Calendar - Don't just write down due dates—work backward from them. That motion due in three weeks? Break it down: client meeting, research, first draft, review, revisions, filing. Suddenly you can see exactly when you need to start each piece. Plus, you'll spot scheduling disasters before they happen.

Learn to Triage - Not everything is actually urgent, even when it feels that way. A statute of limitations deadline that could kill your client's case forever? That's urgent. A discovery motion that could be filed next week instead of this week? Probably not urgent. Learning this difference will save your sanity.

Communicate Like Your Career Depends on It - In law school, you mostly just manage your own expectations. In practice, you're constantly updating clients, colleagues, opposing counsel, and courts. Give people a heads up about potential delays early, and small problems won't become major disasters.

Build Your Safety Net

The lawyers who handle deadline pressure best don't just rely on being organized—they build systems that work even when everything goes sideways.



Create Buffer Time - Always assume things will take longer than expected. That brief you think will take two days? Give yourself three. Research might hit unexpected snags, key witnesses might become unavailable, or your computer might decide to update itself at the worst possible moment.

Find Your Backup Crew - Build relationships with colleagues who can help during crunch time. Maybe that means study groups in law school or mentor relationships in practice. When you're drowning in deadlines, having someone who can review a draft or handle a routine task makes all the difference.

Use Technology (But Actually Use It) - Calendar apps and case management software only help if you actually update them consistently. A sporadically maintained digital system is worse than a simple paper planner that you actually use every day.

The Silver Lining

Here's the thing about all this deadline chaos: it's actually making you better at being a lawyer. The ability to handle multiple priorities under pressure is one of the most valuable skills you can develop. Clients specifically seek out attorneys who can manage complex, time-sensitive matters without dropping the ball.

Those deadline management skills you're building in law school? They're your foundation, but you'll keep refining them throughout your career. Each practice area has its own quirks. Immigration lawyers deal with visa deadlines that wait for no one. Tax attorneys work around filing dates that shift based on holidays. Securities lawyers handle disclosure schedules that can change with market conditions.

Instead of seeing multiple deadlines as some cruel punishment inflicted by law schools and the legal profession, try thinking of them as essential training. The second-year student who learns to thrive under deadline pressure becomes the lawyer who can confidently handle the big, complicated cases that overwhelm everyone else.

The juggling act never really stops, but it does get easier with practice. Every deadline crisis you successfully navigate builds confidence for the next one. Before you know it, you'll be the person other people come to when they need someone who can handle pressure and get things done.

So the next time you're staring at a calendar full of competing deadlines, remember: you're not just surviving law school or trying to make it through another week. You're building the skills that will define your entire legal career. And that's actually pretty cool, even when it doesn't feel like it at 2 AM in the library.

To learn more ways to manage time and stress in a California attorneys' day-to-day practice, check out [CEB's Academic & Essential Skills Collection on CEB's Learning Platform](#).



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