Welcome to Hofstra Law! You are about to embark on what will probably prove to be one of the most exciting and challenging periods in your life. Students often ask what to do to prepare for this experience. Below you will find some recommended resources that we think are both useful and entertaining. Feel free to dip into some of these suggested readings and viewings to get a taste of what is ahead. None of this is required, so use it as you wish. Good reading, and see you in the fall.

**Orientation to Law & Law School**

*How to Excel in Your First Semester and Beyond*
by Herbert N. Ramy

Covers basic study skills essential to success in law school. Professor Ramy answers common 1L questions, such as: “What is a case brief, why do I need one and how can I write a good one?” Includes many exercises to test understanding, along with annotated sample answers, to help students identify their strengths and areas needing improvement.

*Succeeding in Law School*
by Herbert N. Ramy

Covers basic study skills essential to success in law school. Professor Ramy answers common 1L questions, such as: “What is a case brief, why do I need one and how can I write a good one?” Includes many exercises to test understanding, along with annotated sample answers, to help students identify their strengths and areas needing improvement.

**Exam Writing**

*Getting to Maybe: How to Excel on Law School Exams*
by Richard Michael Fischl and Jeremy Paul

The leading book on how to write — and think — like a lawyer. Provides both practical tips on how to write model exam answers and the theory behind why professors test law students using hypothetical situations. A top choice for anyone who wants to succeed in law school.

**The Puzzle of Interpretation**

*Pierre Menard, the Author of Don Quixote*, by Jorge Luis Borges, in *Ficciones* (Grove Press, 1962)

A meditation on originality, interpretation and reading old texts in new ways, in the form of a short story.

**Legal Reasoning, Writing & Argument**

*The Craft of Argument*
by Joseph M. Williams and Gregory G. Colomb

Reviews the Toulmin model of argument, considered by many the foundation of critical legal thinking, using terms that are accessible to anyone. Detailed descriptions and illustrations help students understand the fundamental elements of critical thinking and how to convert them into written analysis.

*Writing Style*

*Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*
by Joseph M. Williams

How to turn good writing into excellent writing. Explains what is good writing and why, and provides valuable information about how to write and revise well. Great for those who need to brush up on their rhetorical skills.

**Grammar**

*Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*
by Lynne Truss

A very refreshing refresher on the rules of grammar, manages to make the subject interesting and funny.

*The Elements of Style*
by William Strunk and E.B. White

A more practical, but still readable, and very clear guide to clear writing.

**Rhetoric**

*Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*
by George Lakoff

An essay on how metaphor works in ordinary language and rhetoric. Lakoff famously argued that political questions are more often determined by “framing” than by rational argument; this is his academic — and fascinating — exploration of why we argue in the way we do. Lawyers aim to persuade, and Lakoff explains how persuasion actually works.

**Nonfiction**

*Federalist Papers: No. 10*
by James Madison

The classic American defense of federalism and separation of powers as a defense against “faction.”

*The Constitution and Slavery*
by Frederick Douglass, in *The North Star* (March 16, 1849) (Available online: teachingamericanhistory.org)

Perhaps the classic defense of the Constitution from charges that it is based in slavery and therefore illegitimate. An early example of the continuing debate over the difference between the meaning of the text and the intent of its authors.

*Gettysburg Address*
by Abraham Lincoln (Available online: teachingamericanhistory.org)

Lincoln’s historic consecration of a battle site provides one of the best examples of well-written rhetoric because of its concise, powerful style. The speech evokes notions of equality, justice, law and order, governance and civil rights, and identifies the high price that society often pays when the legal system fails to achieve justice for all.

*Letter From Birmingham City Jail*
by Martin Luther King, Jr. (Available online: teachingamericanhistory.org)

Nearly 100 years after Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, King wrote this historic letter addressing the same issues of equality and justice for all. Often cited as one of the best-written pieces of rhetoric for its organization, style and powerful message, it addresses the tension that arises when the legal system fails to achieve justice. This letter at once provides lessons in writing as well as a philosophical framework for thinking about law, policy and justice — issues that underscore so many law school courses.
A Civil Action
by Jonathan Harr
Explores the real-life drama of a Massachusetts personal injury case involving a contaminated water supply linked to the deaths of several neighboring children. The story depicts the many obstacles faced by those entering our justice system, as well as mistakes lawyers make when they focus too much on winning and not enough on their client’s interests.

Jurisprudence

The following books and articles raise the big questions that sometimes get lost in the details of law school.

The Bramble Bush: On Our Law and Its Study
by Karl N. Llewellyn
The essay that inspired the modern law school curriculum.

Law’s Empire
by Ronald Dworkin
Four decades after Llewellyn, a philosophic attempt to make sense of the idea that judges must strive for consistency.

Second Treatise of Government
by John Locke
and
Common Sense
by Thomas Paine
The classic defenses of limited government from the time of our revolution, Locke defending England’s Glorious Revolution and Paine calling for our own American Revolution.

On Liberty
by John Stuart Mill
Perhaps the clearest justification of the liberal ideal of freedom of speech and conscience that motivates much of our constitutional jurisprudence.

Economic Analysis of the Law: Some Realism About Nominalism
by Arthur Allen Leff (60 Va. L. Rev. 451 [1974])
This book review of Richard Posner’s treatise Economic Analysis of the Law presents a thoughtful introduction to the theory of economic analysis of law and its critics. If you are going to read just one essay by a law professor on how to make a legal argument and the limits of rational debate, this is a great choice.

Fiction

Hard Times
by Charles Dickens
Not one of Dickens’ finest novels, this work is set in the factories of Victorian England. Like the writings of the American muckrakers (for example, Sinclair Lewis’ The Jungle — also recommended), this work of polemical fiction helped transform public opinion and, eventually, the law of contracts, torts and employee and consumer protection.

War and Peace
by Leo Tolstoy
Really, are you going to have time to read something this big once you start law school? The Second Epilogue is one of the great meditations on the puzzle of causation, one of the central issues in tort and criminal law.

Crime and Punishment
by Fyodor Dostoevsky
If you haven’t read it yet, maybe you should. A classic for the education of every budding lawyer. While you are puzzling over questions of good and evil, you may also want to read the Grand Inquisitor’s speech in Dostoevsky’s masterpiece, The Brothers Karamazov.

To Kill a Mockingbird
by Harper Lee
Uses memorable characters to explore civil rights and racism in the segregated southern United States of the 1930s. Told through the eyes of a young girl, you learn how her father, an attorney, hopelessly strives to prove the innocence of a black man unjustly accused of rape.

Close Case
by Alafair Burke
One in a series of mysteries featuring prosecutor Samantha Kincaid, by Hofstra Law Professor Alafair Burke. After a star investigative reporter is murdered and a suspect confesses, the case looks straightforward until the man recants, claiming coercive police interrogation. Kincaid finds herself caught in a struggle between the police and the District Attorney’s Office. This fictitious depiction of legal procedure and the potentially perverting effects of well-intended but aggressive policing, as well as the influence of politics on high-profile cases, is utterly authentic.

Where the Wild Things Are
by Maurice Sendak
Not everything in law school is serious or deep, but this children’s book is. Read it and see if you can figure out why it’s listed here.

Films

The Paper Chase
Often cited in discussions about legal education, this classic film portrays the life of a 1L. It depicts the traditional Socratic method and the struggles law students face on their way to triumph over the study of law.

A Civil Action
Film based on the book, listed earlier

Erin Brockovich
This fact-based story demonstrates that the justice system, while slow, often works well. When litigation proves untenable for the victims of toxic contamination, their lawyers recommend alternative dispute resolution (ADR) as a more satisfactory means to a faster result for their clients.

The Corporation
A classic documentary, insisting that the legal rules regulating corporations make them fit a psychologist’s definition of a sociopath.

The Chamber
Based on a novel by John Grisham, this film portrays the story of Adam Hall, a young attorney fresh out of law school, who meets his Klansman grandfather in a Mississippi prison, where the man awaits execution for murdering two Jewish boys. While Adam fights to stay the execution, scheduled to occur in a few short weeks, he learns a lot about his family and himself.

Up for Grabs (Crooked Hook Productions)
A comedic documentary about the legal battle over the rightful owner of the 73rd home run ball hit by Barry Bonds in 2001. Alex Popov argued that he should be deemed the owner of the ball because he was the first person to catch it in his glove. The ball, however, fell out of Popov’s glove when several people pushed him, and eventually ended up with Patrick Hayashi, who also claimed to be its rightful owner. Watch the film to find out what legal principle was applied to determine who would be the ball’s true owner.