

by Debra Elsbury, CLM



Lessons Learned from the CLMSM Exam

Deciding to take the Certified Legal Manager (CLM)SM exam represents a **commitment and a challenge** – and it's so worth it in the end. So, where can you learn all the tips and tricks? From a fellow member, of course! Here, ALA member **Debra Elsbury, CLM**, shares with us her personal experiences and what she learned while seeking certification.



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- I learned you need to quit mulling it over and just do it.
- I learned that the educational requirements were not as big of a deal as I had originally thought they would be.
- I learned that most of the educational requirements can be met by attending ALA Annual Conferences, Regional Conferences and Webinars.
- I learned that I could reach out to Sue Powers, ALA's Education Staff Writer & Program Administrator, to help me with organizing my education and applying it to the appropriate categories.
- I learned that I didn't have to take the test under the cloak of secrecy. My friends, family and colleagues were very supportive of me.
- I learned that studying again after 25 years is a tough task.
- I learned that classical music could help to keep me focused on my studies.
- I learned that I am easily distracted by hummingbirds when studying on my front porch.
- I learned that I did not need to purchase every book listed on the suggested reading list. Many people are willing to share their books, and some of them are available at the local library.
- I learned that colored pens and highlighters not only made my notes look pretty, but also helped me in organizing my notes by topic.
- I learned that flash cards are not just for elementary students.

- I learned how to jump on a good deal when offered. When I asked my managing partner (somewhat tongue in cheek) if I would get a pay raise if I passed the test and his quick reply (with a smirk) was that he would make me a deal and not fire me if I didn't – I jumped on it!
- I learned that my chapter members were rooting for me.
- I learned I could do this without being part of a study group.
- I learned that when I reached out to other CLMs for advice, and they helped me in any way they could.
- I learned things I didn't know I didn't know.
- I learned that when family members had a hard time not talking to me while I was studying, I instituted a rule that, if I was wearing headphones (listening to classical music, of course), they were not to bother me unless the house was on fire and I was in mortal danger.
- I learned that having a friend to root me on was invaluable.
- I learned that I can drive to St. Louis in the pouring rain while my husband asks me questions from my flash cards – and find the experience soothing.
- I learned to keep all of my study materials together in a briefcase by themselves.
- I learned not to take the sample test thinking I would ace it.
- I learned that I had to read the *Law Firm Accounting and Financial Management* book twice – many parts of it out loud. The hummingbirds weren't too impressed.
- I learned that walking through the door of the testing room was like walking into the first class at a new high school.
- I learned that an afternoon test should be preceded by brunch by at least a couple of hours.
- I learned that I felt better once I found the testing room and assured myself of the route there.
- I learned that an old dog can be taught new tricks.
- I learned not to answer the first handful of questions and then start flipping through the test booklet, previewing questions ahead. It would only serve to freak one out.
- I learned not to make tally marks on the pages of the test booklet to track the questions I thought I knew the answers to, the questions I was unsure of and the questions I had no clue about. This, too, would only serve to freak one out.
- I learned that once I had done these things that served to freak one out, I should put down my pencil, shut the book, close my eyes, take some deep breaths and start again.
- I learned to read each question twice before looking at the answers and then to read each answer option twice.
- I learned to not think beyond the question.
- I learned to not review my answers when done, as I would tend to talk myself out of my original answers.
- I learned that a small solar calculator was all I needed to take with me.
- I learned that no matter how much I had studied, I left the room thinking I must be the dumbest ALA member on Earth.
- I learned that coloring 120 circles in a three-hour period can be physically draining.
- I learned that, even though I wanted to pass the test on my first try, I would try again if I didn't.
- I learned that I could be very proud of my efforts without even knowing the results.
- I learned that opening the results envelope when it arrived was a very emotional moment.
- I learned that I felt an indescribable sense of personal satisfaction and accomplishment when my letter opened with the word "Congratulations."
- I learned that, when results were posted, I received congratulatory e-mails and notes from ALA members I call friends and some people I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting.
- I learned that even though I didn't get that big raise when I passed the test, I did boost my self-esteem, confidence and job knowledge. All of this was not only a result of passing the test but knowing that, in my preparation, I had learned more than I ever expected. The entire process made me a better administrator, a better ALA member and a better person.

So ... what are you waiting for?

For more information on the CLM exam, see the "certify" section of this magazine or visit www.alanet.org/clm. ♦

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DO YOU HAVE A STORY YOU WANT TO SHARE? If so, contact Amy Dvorak at advorak@alanet.org.
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