

Contract Law: An Integrated Approach

By Martha M. Ertman, William K. Sjostrom Jr., and Debora L. Threedy

Because COVID-19 may require part or all of fall courses to be taught remotely, many professors face the daunting prospect of moving their Contracts class online, in whole or in part. If that includes you, take a look at our new casebook, [Contract Law: An Integrated Approach](#) (Foundation Press 2020). The book comes with videos and online quizzes that make a switch to a completely or partially online class much easier.

We spent three years designing and writing/recording a casebook that responds to new demands from the ABA and students by tightly integrating classic cases, experiential learning through drafting exercises, interactive online videos, and multi-level assessments. These innovations build on research and experimentation that we – and others – have done over the years. For professors new to online teaching and drafting exercises, the teacher’s manual and related materials provide a “course-in-box” with answers to problems, class notes, sample syllabi, PowerPoint slides and more.

The major online components of the new casebook consist of:

- **Animated videos introducing each major topic.** These videos work as the equivalent of the short introductory lectures or overviews you give in class as new topics arise. Students also find them helpful as a review at the end of the semester. West Academic broke new ground with the videos’ production values, integrating author-written and recorded scripts with colorful visual elements designed by an educational graphic designer. Many students – and faculty – should also appreciate that the avatars are race and gender-inclusive. Unless you happen to have a professional graphic designer and audio engineer on call, you won’t be able to produce this kind of high-quality video over the summer.
- **Short, black-letter law formative assessments following each of the videos to ensure student understanding.** These quizzes are a form of pre-testing that gives students a “scaffold” or “mind-map” for the new material they will encounter. Students often revisit the videos and quizzes as needed to grasp the concepts.
- **End-of-chapter formative assessments giving students the opportunity to “transfer” or apply doctrine to new fact patterns.** More than 100 end-of-chapter multiple-choice quizzes are longer and more challenging to mirror bar exam questions. Each answer includes an explanation so that students understand where they may have gone wrong and need further study. Like the end-of-video quizzes, the end-of-chapter quizzes may be taken multiple times, allowing students to assess their progress during the course and prepare for the final exam.

These online materials have a modular design to give professors a great deal of flexibility. You could choose between three general approaches:

- **Online videos and quizzes as supplements for a traditional law school course.** Professors could leave the use of the videos and assessments up to the students, with or without professor guidance. Our experience is that today’s students appreciate having access to the online materials, both as they learn the material and for review.

- **The major online portion of class that meets ABA Standards 306 and 310.** Standard 306 allows up to a third of instructional time in a law school class to be online, and Standard 310 requires 50 minutes of instruction for at least 14 weeks for each credit hour. For a four credit-hour Contracts class, these Standards allow up to 933 minutes of instructional time to be online. Each of the casebook's 29 videos plus short assessments constitutes about 8 minutes in online instruction, about 232 minutes altogether. If students spend an average of about 3 minutes on each of the 100+ questions in the end-of-chapter assessments, that adds another 300 minutes of online instruction, for a total of 532 minutes or more than 10 days of 50-minute classes. That's 19% of a course on-line, well under the ABA maximum. Of course, most professors skip topics, so their total would be lower. The point is that you can subtract the online instructional time from the overall required time for the course, thereby shortening the in-class instructional time. That kind of class could then be structured with shorter meeting times, fewer days of class per week, or fewer weeks of class.
- **As part of the online instruction in a fully online course.** The videos and assessments give the professor a leg-up on producing the materials for a fully online course. You start with online materials providing roughly 15-20% of the online content for a four credit hour course and then augment these with other online materials, such as short recorded lectures, online discussions (asynchronous or synchronous), small group exercises such as negotiations, and review of problem sets, drafting exercises, and practice exams. Handily, our casebook includes both problem sets and drafting exercises that could be used for online exercises. Of course, your school's policies may provide different limits on fully online courses, and currently the ABA strictly limits the amount of online credit that can count toward graduation.

Finally, each of us is available to engage questions you have about using any of the online or more traditional aspects of the book. As we created these materials with a hybrid course in mind, we had no idea that the fall of 2020 would make them helpful to so many professors so quickly. We did however know that these new methods can be daunting to adopt and fully expect to have engaging back and forth with professors as we all enter the brave new world of hybrid and socially distanced legal education.

Contractually,

Martha M. Ertman (U. of Maryland Carey Law School)
 William K. Sjostrom, Jr. (U. of Arizona Rogers College of Law)
 Debora L. Threedy (U. of Utah S.J. Quinney College of Law)