

Answers to practical exercises

Chapter 15: Answering problem questions

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The Post Office has introduced a system of calculating the cost of postage based upon weight and size. A letter is one which weighs less than 100g, has maximum dimensions of 240mm x 165mm, and is no thicker than 5mm. This costs 60p postage. A large letter can have maximum dimensions of 353mm x 250mm, weigh up to 750g, and be up to 25mm in thickness and costs 90p postage if it weighs 100g or less, £1.20 between 101g and 250g, £1.60 between 251g and 500g or £2.30 between 501g and 750g. You wish to post a package that weighs 90g and is 4mm thick, 240mm long and 170mm wide. How much will this cost?

Issue: What is the cost of postage of your letter?

Rule: Large letters can be up to 750g, 25mm in thickness and have a maximum dimension of 353mm x 250mm. Large letters cost 90p if they weigh 100g or less.

Application: Your letter is 90g in weight, 4 mm thick and 240mm x 170mm in size. It weighs less than 100g. It is a large letter.

Conclusion: The postage cost of your letter will be 66p.

Notice that the conclusion answers the question raised as the issue. The rule is not stated in full; only the relevant aspect of the rule is stated. This can be a useful strategy when answering problem questions as a lengthy recitation of a statutory provision takes up words that can be used more profitably elsewhere and can weaken the focus of your answer. Notice that the application stage refers to specific facts.

2. Your grandmother offers you a cash incentive to encourage you to study for your exams. She agrees to pay you £10 for every exam that you pass and £50 extra if you pass all five exams. You only pass four exams. How much money can you expect to receive?

Answer

Issue: How much money will your grandmother pay for passing your exams?

Rule: Each pass will receive £10 with a £50 bonus for passing all five.

Application: You have passed four exams so will receive £10 for each of these and you will not receive the bonus.

Conclusion: Your grandmother will pay you £40 for passing four exams.

It is important that you realize that the issue is a question of fact and that the rule is an abstract statement of the law. There is no scope to combine the two until you reach the application and conclusion stages.

3. You notice an advertisement for an essay-writing competition on the law school noticeboard. The first prize is £500 so you would like to enter. The competition rules state that the essay must be written by an undergraduate student under the age of 21 at the closing date (31 March this year) who has not yet studied tort law. Do you qualify to enter the competition (based on your own circumstances)?

Answer

Issue: Do you qualify to enter the competition?

Rule: the essay must be written by an undergraduate student under the age of 21 at the closing date (next 31 March) who has not yet studied tort law.

Application: Only you can answer this based on your own circumstances.

Conclusion: You either will or will not be able to enter the competition.

The questions that you will need to answer in order to reach your conclusion are:

- are you an undergraduate student?
- will you be under the age of 21 on 31 March next?
- have you studied tort law?

This may also invite questions of interpretation! For example, what does 'studied tort law' mean? Does it mean that you have started a module or completed a module. At what date does this study criterion take place? If you have not yet started studying tort, but will have done so by next 31 March will you qualify? In this example, the conclusion may well depend on the interpretation of these points – as is often the case in actual legal problem situations.