

IRAC: Structuring legal analysis

Law assessments often use scenario-based problem questions requiring you to advise, discuss, or draft legal documents. The IRAC method (Issue, Rule, Application, and Conclusion) is the standard framework used in both university study and legal practice to analyse legal problems and structure clear, well-reasoned responses.

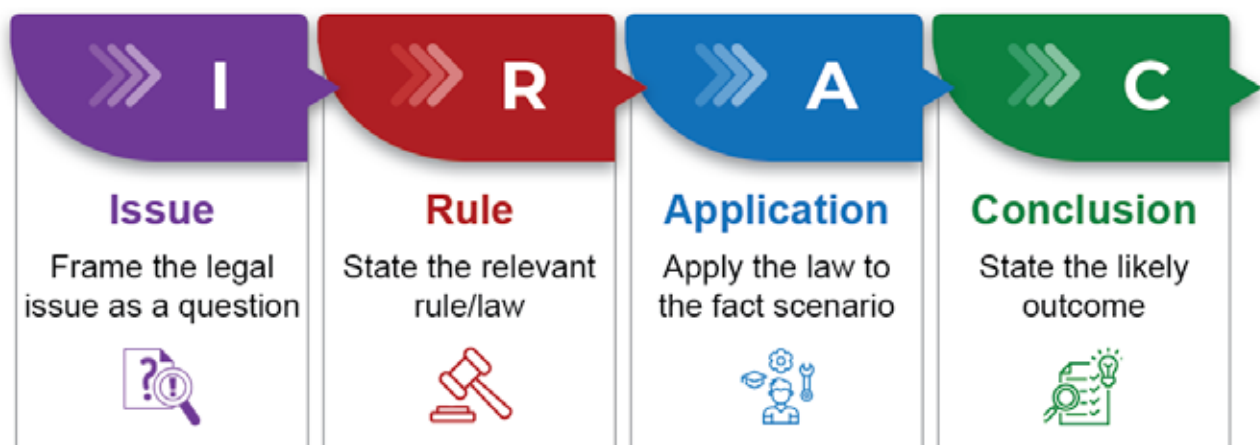
Mastering the IRAC method will strengthen your legal reasoning and academic writing skills.

This guide supports you to:

1. Identify and isolate the key legal issues in a problem
2. Articulate the relevant legal rule or law applicable to the issue
3. Apply the law to the facts of a legal scenario
4. Construct a conclusion about the likely outcome of a legal dispute.

Throughout this guide, the four components of the IRAC method are colour-coded across all tables and worked examples. Use this key to trace how each component functions within a legal analysis: **Issue** (purple), **Rule/Law** (red), **Application** (blue), and **Conclusion** (green).

Image 1: Infographic illustrating the four components of the IRAC legal analysis method and corresponding colour-code.



Applying the IRAC method

Table 1: Explains each of the four steps to apply the IRAC method.

Issue:

Frame the legal issue as a question

Focus on the key facts and determine the legal issue. Frame the legal issue as a question.

Rule / Law*:

State the relevant rule or law

This comes from case law and legislation. Cite your sources in accordance with AGLC4.

Application:

Apply the law to the scenario facts

Focus on relevant facts and apply legal rules to the specific actions in the scenario. Clearly link the law to the facts (e.g. “In this case...”). Move from describing the law to answering the legal question reasoning). Support reasoning with relevant facts. Where relevant, compare with cases (e.g. “Similar to...” / “Unlike...”).

Conclusion:

State the likely outcome

Identify likely outcome and its significance. State a clear conclusion based on your analysis. Ground it in the legal principles applied to the facts.

***Note:** A common variation, ILAC (Issue, Law, Application, Conclusion), replaces “Rule” with “Law” but follows the same overall approach.

Scenario examples

The two following scenarios include an example response, read these carefully and consider how the IRAC (or ILAC) method structures the answer.

Scenario 1

Jack was waiting to collect his child from the school bus in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and was smoking a cannabis cigarette (joint) whilst he waited. As the bus arrives and the children begin getting off the bus, Jack extinguishes his joint.

Question: What possible offences has Jack committed? Explain your answer.

Table 2: Example responses to scenario one using the IRAC method.

Issue

The legal issue involved in the scenario is whether Jack has committed an offence by smoking a joint at a bus stop.

Rule*

Under the *Drug Dependence Act 1989* (ACT) it is an offence to smoke cannabis in public or near a child (s171AB). Section s.171AAB (3)(a) provides a defence if a person takes all reasonable steps to ensure that the child is not exposed to the smoke.

Application

As Jack is smoking cannabis in public, he has committed an offence under s.171AB (1) of the Act. He may have committed a further offence of exposing a child to cannabis smoke under s.171AB(2)(b) unless he can show that extinguishing the joint before the children finished getting off the bus is defensible under s. 171AB (3) by virtue of taking reasonable steps to not expose a child to cannabis smoke.

Conclusion

It is likely that Jack has committed the offence of smoking cannabis in public, however, he may have defences available to the second offence of exposing a child to cannabis smoke.

***Note:** A common variation, ILAC (*Issue, Law, Application, Conclusion*), replaces “Rule” with “Law” but follows the same overall approach.

Scenario 2

P attended Cronulla beach and hired a locker in the dressing rooms of the local council at the beach. P placed his watch, mobile phone and wallet in the locker and checked it was locked and secured. P was not supplied with a locker key but informed the attendant of the locker number and was issued with an identification disk. When he returned two hours later P handed the disk over and the attendant opened the locker. P was shocked to find it was empty. P now wants to sue Cronulla Council claiming they were bailees of his belongings and as such owed him a duty of care.

Question: What is the legal position? Write your answer in one sentence.

Scenario two requires a one-sentence answer. The example demonstrates how the ILAC method can produce a concise response.

Table 3: Example response to scenario two using the ILAC method.



[the 'issue' element (purple font)] The contract between P and the Council is likely to be characterised as a licence (and not a bailment) **[the 'Application' element (blue font)]** because there was no transfer of possession of P's goods, **[the 'conclusion' element (green font)]** meaning that the Council does not owe a bailee's duty of care to P (and therefore is not liable for P's loss). **[the 'law' element (red font)]** ¹ [footnote as per AGLC4 referencing style]

¹ *Greenwood v Council of the Municipality of Waverley* (1928) 28 SR (NSW) 219.



Key takeaway

Use the IRAC method to structure your response to legal problem questions:

1. Identify the legal issue and frame it as a question
2. State the relevant rule or law (citing your source in AGLC4 format)
3. Apply the law to the facts of the scenario
4. State a conclusion based on your analysis.

Whether your answer is one sentence or several paragraphs, these four steps structure your legal reasoning.



Quick tip

The examples in this Quick Guide are simplified to demonstrate the IRAC structure. In your assessments, use the word count and marks allocated in the assessment task to guide the length and depth of your response, and to manage your time effectively in writing your response. If you are unsure about the expected length of your response, check with your Unit Assessor.



Related resources

- Southern Cross University – Library [AGLC4 referencing guide](#)
- Southern Cross University – Student Learning Zone – [Quick Guide resources](#)



Learning Experience Team
Email: learningzone@scu.edu.au Phone: 1800 72 4357