

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL
Suggested Preparatory Reading / Listening / Watching: 2026-27

There's no obligation to read, listen to or watch anything before you start your degree. But if you have some time and feel like doing a bit of preparation, it's worth getting your mind into law. The suggestions below are intended to help you do that.

At this stage, thinking about interesting questions in law is more valuable than trying to get ahead by reading textbooks or anticipating exactly what you'll study in your first year. This is a long list. It is given in no particular order and there's no expectation that you'll work through it all. It's here simply to give you a curated starting point, if you are looking for ideas. Scan through it and go for whatever grabs your interest. Beyond these suggestions, pay attention to what's happening around you and think about how it connects to law. Keep up with the news, read a good newspaper (especially its legal coverage), and try some law-related podcasts.

Tip for 2026/27: Prioritise reading something written by Baroness Brenda Hale (aka Lady Hale) or at least learning a little bit about who she is. She'll be giving a talk to you on your second day. No this is not normal, yes other law students will be jealous!

For general advice and guidance on being a law student:

- **Charlotte Harrison, Amanda Millmore, *Glanville Williams: Learning the Law* (18th edn, 2025):** this one is the classic guidebook for a new law student. It has been regularly updated and will probably still prove to be a very useful companion.
- **Nicholas McBride, *Letters to a Law Student* (Pearson 2022):** organised as a series of letters between a lecturer and aspiring student, divided into chronological parts from thinking about a law degree to preparing to study law, studying law, writing like a lawyer, and thinking about the future.
- **Imogen Moore and Craig Newbury Jones, *The Successful Law Student: An Insider's guide to studying law* (OUP 2018):** the focus on this one is on your student experience, including making a smooth transition to university level study. It is a few years old now (so it won't have discussion of e.g. AI) but it still has a lot of useful guidance.

For thinking about law generally:

- **Allan Hutchinson, *Is Eating People Wrong? Great Legal cases and how they shaped the world* (CUP 2011)**
A lovely introduction to some of the best-known cases. You might have met one or two of these already, even if you didn't realise their significance to your studies at the time.
- **The Secret Barrister, *The Secret Barrister: Stories of The Law and How It's Broken* (Pan Millan 2018).**
How can you defend a child-abuser you suspect to be guilty? What do you say to someone sentenced to ten years who you believe to be innocent? What is the law and why do we need it? We'd recommend you start with this book by the Secret Barrister, but there are also others, if you like their style: look for 'Fake Law' and 'Nothing But The Truth'.
- **Lady Hale, *With the Law on Our Side: How the Law Works and How We Can Make It Work Better for Everyone* (Penguin 2025).**
This one is a brilliant place to begin because it is not a book that is aimed at lawyers. Instead, it is aimed at anyone who wants to understand a bit more about law. It's recently published which means that it also covers some of the most recent issues and cases.

- **Lady Hale and Rowan Williams, *Do We Have the Right to Die?* (Penguin 2026)**
We think you'll be able to guess what this one is about. This issue has been the subject of much debate in the UK, especially in the last year or two with the attempts to pass new laws legalising assisted dying. You'll meet the big cases during your first year of study.
- **Helena Kennedy, *Eve was Framed: Women and British Justice* (1993)**
A critical examination of how the British legal system discriminates against women through judicial prejudices, court procedures, and pervasive stereotypes.
- **Alexandra Wilson, *In Black and White: A Young Barrister's Story of Race and Class in a Broken Justice System* (2020)**
Wilson's memoir explores racial and class discrimination in Britain's legal system through her own experiences as a barrister.
- **The Hamlyn Lectures 2024, given by Exeter University's Professor Richard Moorhead titled *Frail Professionalism – Lawyers' Ethics after the Post Office and Other Cases*. [You can access the full text of this one online](#).**
Lawyers need to learn about ethics and learning something about the Post Office scandal is a worthwhile way to begin.
- **Isabel Hardman, *Why We Get the Wrong Politicians* (2019).**
This one is not strictly legal but, as you will learn, there is a strong relationship between law and politics. A good read if you want to grow your confidence in terms of understanding contemporary politics (which will help you out a lot as you study law).

If you want to start thinking about your Semester 1 modules, specifically...

For Contract Law:

- **Read: The decision of the House of Lords in *Ruxley Electronics and Construction Ltd v Forsyth* (1996)**, available at <https://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKHL/1995/8.html>
This is a fairly simple case: if a builder constructs a swimming pool shallower than what was agreed, is the customer entitled to compensation for the (large) cost of rebuilding the pool to meet the agreed specification or only a (smaller) amount representing the customer's loss of enjoyment caused by the deviation from what was agreed? The decision is a good example of how, in contract law, the general rules tend to come with qualifications and of how the law often needs to balance competing values. Think about the arguments you might have wanted to make if you were the customer - or (conversely) the builder.
- **Read: A summary of the decision in *DAZN Ltd v Coupang Corp* (2025)**, available at <https://www.cliffordchance.com/content/dam/cliffordchance/briefings/2025/09/deal-or-no-deal-whatsapp-emails-and-the-goalposts-of-contract-formation.pdf>
This recent case illustrates the importance, in the age of digital communication, of determining whether negotiations have resulted not just in an agreement 'in principle' but a legally binding contract. Imagine if you had you been a lawyer in the room with the DAZN negotiators as they were writing the relevant WhatsApp and email messages: what advice might you have given them?
- **Watch: The BAFTA-winning, 4-part ITV drama series *Mr Bates vs The Post Office***, available at <https://www.itv.com/watch/mr-bates-vs-the-post-office/10a0469>.
The real-life miscarriage of justice at the heart of this drama was ultimately unravelled as a result of a successful contract-law claim brought by the victims (as recounted in Episodes 3 and 4), which shows that contract law is sometimes about much more than money. More generally, the drama provides a great insight into the workings of the English and Welsh justice system. Should going to court be as expensive as it was in this instance?

For Constitutional Law:

- **Browse / read some posts on: the [UK Constitutional Law Association Blogsite](#) and/or [Public Law for Everyone](#).** Some of this might feel ‘over your head’ in the sense that the writers are academics talking, mostly, to other academics. Please don’t be put off by this. Instead, aim just to expose yourself to some of the issues which are being discussed. And every time you read something complex, it gets a bit easier too – so let your brain start working on this even if you don’t think you are taking much in!
- **Read: Kojo Koram, *Uncommon Wealth: Britain and the Aftermath of Empire* (John Murray 2022).** This provides a more critical introduction to British politics/law. You could also watch a conversation about this book on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbnCG6ly9v8>
- **Read: Tony Wright, *British Politics: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP 2020).** Although you will be studying law, not politics, you will need to understand a little about politics if you are going to build a confident understanding of the law. If you don’t already have a good basic understanding of the UK political system, you’ll be doing yourself a big favour by getting to grips with it a little before you arrive. A fair amount of stuff has happened since this was published but the first couple of chapters of this book will still give you a decent steer.

For Legal Institutions and Methods:

- **Read: Rutherford, Kotecha and MacFarlane, *The English Legal System* (6th edn, OUP 2024),** chapters 1, 2, 8, 9. You’ll see this one crop up a lot on your reading list for this module so it’s a good place to begin, if you want to give yourself a little bit of a head start. You will be able to access the full text online through the university library once you arrive, but you can access chapters 1 and 2 for free via Google books before that. You will probably also be able to pick up a well-priced second-hand copy.

On the following pages we list other recommendations of ours. Again, this is just to give you some good starting points. There is no expectation that you consult them all!

Websites and blogs

If you are already career focused, or just want to demystify some of the language that is relevant to law careers:

- **[LawCareers.net](#):** contains news and advice on all things law.
- **[Legal Cheek](#):** an informal source of legal news, and gives information on how the legal sector is responding to the big issues of the day. They are also very active on social media.
- **[Lawyer Watch](#):** Research and Commentary on the Legal Profession written by Professor Richard Moorhead (Exeter Law School). You’ll recognise his name because we recommended his Hamlyn lectures, earlier in this doc.

Courses

[Inside the UK Supreme Court: Its Role, Its Work, and Cases that Affect Us All.](#)

If you are desperate to ‘learn’ then this is a great free course (select the ‘free, limited access’ option) which will lead you on exploration of the role of the UK Supreme Court (The UK’s top court). You will hear from its Justices and staff and learn about some of the Court’s landmark rulings.

Podcasts

- **Law in Action / The Law Show (BBC)**

Joshua Rozenberg presented Radio 4's 'Law in Action' show for years before it became 'The Law Show' presented by Dr Joelle Grogan. Although this has recently been decommissioned, you'll still be able to find the episodes through podcast providers or BBC Sounds.

- **Shreds: Murder in the Dock**

A young woman is murdered in a frenzied knife attack. Outside, a man is crying and covered in blood. What happens next almost defies belief... this is a great podcast for getting us thinking through some of the injustice in the legal system. A 13-episode BBC Radio Wales series investigating the 1988 murder of 20-year-old Lynette White in Cardiff, the wrongful conviction of the "Cardiff Five," and the subsequent police corruption trial.

- **Just Theory**

A podcast by our own Dr Emilia Mickiewicz (Newcastle University Law School) & Aleksandra Wawrzyszczuk (Graduate Division, NYU Law School, LLM Candidate '21). Championing female-led scholarship in analytic philosophy and legal theory. Great chats, including one with Baroness Hale of Richmond, former President of the UK Supreme Court.

- **Law Pod UK**

Law Pod UK covers developments across all aspects of civil and public law in the United Kingdom. It is by the barristers at 1 Crown Office Row, which is a leading set of barrister chambers, specialising in civil and public law. Look out, for example, for episodes discussing the Palestine Action cases. Start by looking for episode 233: Proscription and Protest: The Palestine Action Decision, which was published after the first judgment (in the High Court) and will give you the context. Then you could update your understanding with episode 240, which was published after the subsequent judgment by the Court of Appeal. This is worth your time because you are guaranteed to meet this case during your first year. In fact, it's going to be exciting because the story here is not yet finished – the Supreme Court will hear the case in November!

- **Life, Law, Bim**

A YouTube Channel by Nia Marshall, a former Newcastle Law School student (graduated 2020) and now Barrister. The channel features individuals' journeys to the Bar demonstrating the diversity of backgrounds that are currently practising at the Bar of England and Wales. It also offers insight on scholarships and other award opportunities. Given that the producer and host is Barbadian, some videos reveal her experience overcoming obstacles on her way to the Bar as a Caribbean or West Indian woman in the United Kingdom. Occasionally, the Channel features other students' experiences pursuing further studies in other disciplines; and a focus on the international student experience. Quite a few videos specifically reference studying at Newcastle Law School.

- **First Hundred Years series**

A series of 10 podcasts tracing 100 years of women in law. Progressing decade by decade, each 45-minute episode features discussions with legal pioneers, historians, academics, and practitioners, exploring key themes such as stereotypes and gender diversity. Lady Hale is interviewed but there are also other great stories to browse.

Law in TV and Film

- **What is the Supreme Court?** (Find it on YouTube)

Why was the UK Supreme Court established in 2009? And what issues does it hear about?

This introductory film presented by Stacey Dooley is primarily aimed at GCSE/Standard Grade students and explores the role and the workings of the Supreme Court, but it will be a useful little recap for you before you get going with thinking about this Court in more detail during your first year.

• **UK Supreme Court: The Highest Court in the Land Documentary** (Find it on YouTube)

A fantastic BBC documentary, which gives you a bit more to think about than the shorter Stacey Dooley film mentioned above. Four of the Justices talk openly about the nature of justice and how they make decisions. A valuable watch ahead of your first semester studies.

• **12 Angry Men (1957)**: A classic legal drama starring Henry Fonda about a single juror attempting to prevent a miscarriage of justice by forcing his colleagues to reconsider the evidence. The film is a good reminder that jurors are human and come into the courtroom with their own experiences that will impact the way they view the case.

• **Legally Blonde (2001)**. This one is a pop-culture classic for law students. The story follows Elle Woods, played by Reese Witherspoon, as she tackles Harvard Law School. There is a lot of silliness but there are also some strong messages about challenging biases, challenging misconduct and supporting each other. Some of these messages still resonate in modern discussions about workplace equality and stereotypes.

• **Judgment at Nuremberg (1961)**: Stanley Kramer directed this portrayal of the Nazi war crimes trials set in 1948. It focuses, in particular, on charges brought against four German judges who are accused of allowing their courts to become accomplices to Nazi atrocities.

• **Official Secrets (2019)**: The true story of a British whistleblower who leaked information to the press about an illegal NSA spy operation designed to push the UN Security Council into sanctioning the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Covers some constitutional law themes (which you will study in your first semester).

• **Small Axe, 'Mangrove' (2020)**: In the 1970s, 150 black protestors marched peacefully on the police station in Notting Hill to demonstrate against racial harassment by the police. The trial that followed was the first judicial acknowledgment of behaviour motivated by racial hatred within the Metropolitan Police.

• **Kramer vs Kramer (1979)**: This film focuses on the wider implications of divorce and places particular emphasis on just how stressful it can be for a child who is caught up in the middle. It shows how even the bitterest of breakups can ultimately be resolved in a way which puts the child first. A must watch for anyone interested in family law.

• **A Separation (2011)**: Simin desperately wants to leave Iran with Nader, her husband of 14 years, and their daughter, Termeh. Nader, however, is concerned for his elderly father, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease. Simin files for divorce, but the family court judges the couple's problems insufficient to warrant divorce.

• **The Children Act (2018)**: Based on the book by Ian McKewan, this centres on the question of whether a 17-year-old boy, a Jehovah's Witness, should be forced by court order to have a blood transfusion. Emma Thompson plays the High Court judge with the difficult decision.

• **My Name is Leon (2022)**: TV series about Leon, a mixed-race boy, and Jake, his white baby brother, are separated after their mother has a breakdown. Leon is determined to find him and gets unexpected support along the way. Deals with institutional racism.

• **Philadelphia (1993)**: Tom Hanks won an Oscar as an Ivy-educated gay attorney who claims his big-time law firm fired him after discovering he contracted AIDS. Denzel Washington is the personal injury lawyer who takes the case when everyone else turns Hanks' character down, and who comes to terms with his own homophobia.

• **Made in Dagenham (2010)**: A dramatization of the 1968 strike at the Ford Dagenham car plant, where female workers walked out in protests against sexual discrimination.

• **Pride (2014)**: UK gay activists work to help miners during their lengthy strike of the National Union of Mineworkers in the summer of 1984.

• **On the Basis of Sex (2018)**: This biographical law film is based on the life of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, an icon of the American legal system. Becoming a lawyer at a time when women were severely discriminated against on the basis of gender, and when more than 100 laws discriminated against women, she fought for women's rights and positioned herself in the upper echelons of the legal sphere.

- **The people vs Larry Flynt (1996):** The story of a controversial pornographer publisher and how he became a defender of free speech.
- **Rainmaker (1997):** A struggling lawyer takes on a corrupt insurance company which refuses to pay out a legitimate claim for a dying young man.
- **A Civil Action (1998):** On its surface, this is a David vs. Goliath: Small-firm Boston plaintiffs lawyers up against two conglomerates whose tannery, they've decided, is responsible for the leukemia-related deaths of eight children.
- **Erin Brockovich (2000):** Based on a true story. A 'cause lawyering' film. A clerk in a small law office pursues an action against a corporation suspected of land pollution.
- **Dark Waters (2019):** A defence lawyer goes up against a corporation to stop it from polluting a water source and endangering the lives of the people.
- **Inherit the Wind (1960):** Based on the colloquially named Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, This film charts Tennessee's decision to ban the teaching of evolution in schools in favour of creationism. The film shows the age-old battle between science and religion and how in extreme cases, the courts have had to mediate this.
- **The Trial of the Chicago 7 (2020):** tells the story of Vietnam War protesters who are put on trial and accused of inciting a riot at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.
- **To Kill a Mockingbird (1962):** This three-time-Oscar-winner is based on the novel by Harper Lee and stars Gregory Peck as the lead character Atticus Finch. Based in the 1930's Alabama during the great depression, the film deals with the issues of racism and segregation, all too prevalent in 1930's USA. This is a great law film to watch for those interested in human rights and criminal law.
- **My Cousin Vinny (1992):** Vincent "Vinny" Gambini is a brash Brooklyn lawyer who only recently managed to pass the bar exam on his sixth try. He's representing his cousin and a friend—two California-bound college students who are arrested for capital murder after a short stop at a convenience store in rural Alabama. The movie packs in cinema's briefest opening argument ("Everything that guy just said is bullshit.").
- **In the Name of the Father (1993):** This is about a real-life father and son falsely accused of participating in two separate IRA bombing sprees outside London. The film chronicles their struggle to convince British courts of their innocence.
- **The People v's O.J. Simpson (2016):** This dramatization traces the twists and turns of O.J. Simpson's murder trial.
- **Stephen: The Murder that Changed the Nation (2018 (BBC documentary):** Documentary series examining the murder of Stephen Lawrence.
- **A Confession (2019):** Based on the true story of DS Stephen Fulcher and his hunt for missing 22-year-old Sian O'Callaghan, and how it led to the arrest of Christopher Halliwell. The beginning of the capture of a prolific serial killer and the detective's own downfall.
- **Making a Murderer Season 1 (2015):** The show tells the story of Steven Avery, a man who served 18 years in prison for the wrongful conviction of sexual assault and attempted murder of Penny Beerntsen. He was later charged in 2005, and convicted in 2007, for the murder of Teresa Halbach.
- **Vera Drake (2004):** Abortionist Vera Drake finds her beliefs and practices clash with the mores of 1950s Britain.
- **Fruitvale Station (2013):** This film is based on the events leading to the death of Oscar Grant, a young man who was killed in 2009 by BART police officer Johannes Mehserle at the Fruitvale district station of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system in Oakland.
- **Prima Facie:** Jodie Comer's play. Comer plays Tessa, a young, brilliant barrister who has worked her way up from working class origins to be at the top of her game; defending; cross examining and winning. An unexpected event forces her to confront the lines where the patriarchal power of the law, burden of proof and morals diverge in this "unforgettable moment of theatre".