In the Eyes of the Law Student: Determining Reading Patterns with Eye-Tracking Technology

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First-semester law students spend over twenty hours per week reading legal cases in their casebooks for their law school classes. By the time students have completed their first year of law school, they have spent upwards of six hundred thirty hours reading cases in casebooks. And upon graduation, graduates have slogged through over 1,550 hours of reading cases in casebooks. Does the human brain develop strategies to make this repetitive task easier and what might that mean for readers and writers of cases? Although researchers have looked into the reading skills of legal readers through an empirical lens since the late 1980s, almost all of their studies have focused on the critical reading and rhetorical skills legal readers use to comprehend text, and the data collection has been achieved through self-reported information from the legal readers themselves. This article attempts a different approach ? to look at the differences between novice legal readers and experienced legal readers through independent empirical evidence.

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