

Fundamentals of Legal Writing Skills
LAW 561a
Fall 2018
Syllabus

Course Description

Fundamentals of Legal Writing Skills (LAW-561a) is part of a five-unit course taken during the fall and spring semesters (561a – 3 units and 561b – 2 units). This course is designed to help foreign law students succeed in our LL.M. program by focusing on and improving students' legal writing skills. Students will improve their English writing by learning proper grammar, punctuation, and word choice. Through various readings and writing exercises, students will learn how to structure arguments, explain the law, and organize information for a variety of legal documents. Students will become more proficient legal writers through both formative and summative assessments. By receiving and providing feedback, students will gain confidence in their written communication skills.

Course Learning Objectives

1. Students will understand the purposes and key elements for four types of written work product: predictive writing (objective legal memoranda), legal correspondence (client advice and demand letters), persuasive writing (motions and briefs), and scholarly writing (research papers).
2. Students will employ several writing techniques to construct clear, concise, and precise sentences and paragraphs.
3. Students will learn how to outline and structure rules and arguments to produce organized and coherent legal writing.
4. Students will identify and practice using three methods of legal reasoning for effective legal writing.
5. Students will properly attribute sources in their legal writing, and be able to cite to cases, statutes, regulations, and secondary sources in Bluebook format.

Instructor Information

Professor Timothy Fox

tfox@law.usc.edu / 909-455-8991

Office hours (in-person or phone): by appointment Monday-Friday 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Class Format

Class sessions will start and end on time, and lectures will be recorded. Students are required to complete all assignments required for each class session. Participation is required. Students who are not able to participate fully because they have not completed all assignments will have points deducted from their participation grades. All assignments are listed in a separate Weekly Schedule.

Learning objectives will be achieved through various means, including but not limited to:

- Readings to be completed before and/or after class sessions
- Lectures with PowerPoint presentations and polls
- Small peer discussions and in-class activities
- Viewing online writing resources such as videos and tutorials
- Short writing skill exercises
- Quizzes to assess knowledge
- Drafting and editing formal legal documents

Required Books

- Aspen Handbook for Legal Writers: A Practical Reference, 4th ed., by Deborah E. Bouchoux (2014)
- LAW-561 Course Reader (available in Copy Vision Room 18)

Blackboard

The university's Blackboard website will be used for all course correspondence, documents, and assignment submissions. Students are required to check the course's Blackboard website to monitor any announcements, updates, and materials posted.

Attendance and Participation

Class attendance is mandatory. Students should arrive at least 5 minutes before the start of every class to ensure they arrive on time and to avoid disruption after class begins. There will be grade deductions for every unexcused absence and lateness. Students who miss three class sessions without obtaining an excuse from the instructor will fail the course. See the "Excused Absence Request" on Blackboard for information on how to request an excuse.

Participation in class is also required. Participation includes asking and answering questions, submitting poll responses, providing peer feedback, and contributing during in-class group activities. Due to the interactive nature of the class, students are strongly encouraged to bring their laptop to every class.

Assignments

Assignments will be quite varied throughout the semester. They include readings, quizzes, exercises, and formal writings. Review the instructions carefully for each assignment to understand the requirements, objectives, and rubric/feedback focus.

- Unless otherwise stated on the Weekly Schedule, all assignments must be submitted to Blackboard by 11:59 pm on the Wednesday after the assignment was given.
- Late Policy: 10% deduction for every day late and no assignment will be accepted 3 days after the due date.
- See the "Late Submission Request" on Blackboard for information on how to request a deadline extension.

Grading

The course will be graded on a pass/fail basis. A grade of PASS requires a final grade of 60%. Students who receive a final grade in the top 25% of the class will receive a High Pass. The course will be graded as follows:

- Quizzes – 10%
- Writing Exercises – 35%
- Formal Writings – 45%
- Attendance and Participation – 10%

Academic Conduct

Collaboration in the form of general discussions is permitted. However, collaboration on quizzes, writing exercises, and formal writings is prohibited. You will have opportunities to provide peer feedback under my direction.

Plagiarism, or presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words, is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please review the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards: <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You should report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity: <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the Department of Public Safety: <http://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety>.

Support Systems

Various academic support resources are provided to USC students. For any questions and information on resources, please contact me or an advisor in the law school's Graduate & International Programs office.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.