

**Fundamentals of Legal Writing Skills  
LAW 561a  
Spring 2021  
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.

**Learning Outcomes/Course Learning Objectives**

1. Students will be able to draft the three types of written work product: predictive writing (objective legal memoranda), legal correspondence (client advice and demand letters), and persuasive writing (motions and briefs).
2. Students will employ legal writing techniques to construct clear, concise, and precise sentences and paragraphs.
3. Students will be able to outline and structure rules and arguments to produce organized and coherent legal writing.
4. Students will identify and practice using various methods of legal reasoning for effective legal writing.
5. Students will be able to read legal cases to extract rules and facts to use in their legal arguments.
6. Students will be able to attribute sources in their legal writing, and be able to cite to cases, statutes, regulations, and secondary sources in proper Bluebook format.

**Instructor Information**

Professor Timothy Fox

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Office hours 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 can 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 outcomes will be achieved through various means, including but not limited to:

- Readings to be completed before and/or after class sessions

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- 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)

**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.

- All assignments are due per the Weekly Schedule.
- 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 – 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 familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### Support Systems:

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298*  
[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

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Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](https://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](https://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.