

**Fundamentals of Legal Writing Skills 561B**

**Pre requisite: 561A  
Fall 2021 12:00-1:35 pm  
Afary Syllabus**

**Course Description**

Fundamentals of Legal Writing Skills (LAW-561b) is the second of a five (5) unit course taken in two (2) sequential semesters. 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 continue to 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.

This class meets **In Person** for fifteen (15) weeks every Thursday, from 12:00 pm to 1:50 pm in Room 103 of the Law Building at Gould School of Law. **Class will effectively be from 12:00 pm to 1:35 pm.**

**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 Lena Afary

[LAfary@law.usc.edu](mailto:LAfary@law.usc.edu) (Primary communication) /

310-254-6994 (mobile secondary communication/ emergency use only) /

Office hours (Zoom): by appointment Monday – Friday, by appointment and before class.

**Student Fellow**

Unassigned at this time.

**Class Format**

Class sessions will start and end on time, in person, 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 the Weekly Schedule.

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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, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., by Deborah E. Bouchoux (2013)
- Handouts will be provided on Blackboard.

**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/ (log on in case of guest lecturers) 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.

**In Person Classroom Etiquette**

Because in class discussions and the written word are the centerpiece of the course, attendance is required. Five percent (10%) of the final grade is based upon attendance. Students are expected to write and present in the concise and clear style expected by trained readers using correct grammar and proper citation form; and act professionally by completing work in a professional manner with attention to detail; submitting work on time; being punctual to classes and meetings; and communicating with others in a respectful, timely, and professional fashion.

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**Zoom Etiquette (when necessary for guest lecturers)**

This course benefits from student participation. Classes are more enjoyable, and students learn more when students participate and share their opinions and reasoning. In order to encourage participation and to get to know your fellow classmates when we are all remote, please turn on your webcam when attending Zoom sessions. While you should be muted when not speaking, please do not hesitate to unmute yourself if you have something to contribute or use the Zoom chat function. Participation is still required even if you are remote.

Students are expected to log in to class using their University credentials. Zoom codes will be provided on Blackboard and via email. Please do not share them with those who are not in the 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.

- Assignments will be announced no later than the morning of class;
- Unless otherwise stated on the Weekly Schedule, all assignments must be submitted to Blackboard by 11:00 am on the due date after the assignment is given
- You have 7 (seven) days total to complete.
- 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. Students will receive feedback on their written assignments. Students who receive a final grade in the top of the class will receive a High Pass. The course will be graded as follows:

- Writing Exercises – 35%
- Formal Writings – 45%
  - (Legal Correspondence – 15%)
  - (Legal Memorandum – 30%)
- Attendance 10%
- Participation – 10%
- Sub Total: 100%
  
- Extra Credit – 10%
- Total: 110%

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**Academic Conduct**

Collaboration in the form of general discussions is **permitted and encouraged!** However, collaboration on 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/departement-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](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.

*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.

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*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)

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](http://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.

**Afary Biography:**

<https://gould.usc.edu/faculty/lecturers/?id=76660>

**Lena Afary Esq., JD MFA** teaches the fundamentals of objective legal writing and analysis to international Master of Laws (LLM) students at USC's Gould School of Law. This course is an exercise in cross-cultural communication and writing techniques, using both on-site and on-line resources. Afary attended the University of Minnesota Law School, where she was the managing editor of the *Journal of Law and Inequality* and the student clinic director of the Civil Practice Clinic which handled family law, housing and social security cases for impoverished community members. She externed with the Hon. Janet N. Poston in the Hennepin County District Courts, working on family and criminal law matters, and was also a student clinic member of the Minnesota Immigration Clinic, working on asylum matters of African refugees. She worked as Deputy Attorney General at the California Department of Justice for seven years, focusing on civil rights and disability issues as counsel for the State of California. Since 2018, Afary has served as a temporary judge with the Los Angeles Superior Court, presiding and adjudicating over hundreds of cases as a *pro tem* traffic court judge in arraignment and trial traffic courts.