

**Fundamentals of Legal Writing Skills 561A  
Spring 2022  
Afary Syllabus**

**Course Description**

Fundamentals of Legal Writing Skills (LAW-561a/b) is a part 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 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 for fifteen (15) weeks every Wednesday morning In person in Room 12 of the Law Building or by Zoom (on an as needed basis) from 10:00 am to 12:50 am Pacific Standard Time, Starting Wednesday, January 12, 2021.

**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 (Indigo Book) format.

**Instructor Information**

Professor Lena Afary  
[LAfary@law.usc.edu](mailto:LAfary@law.usc.edu) (Primary communication) /  
310-254-6994 (mobile secondary communication (emergency only)) /  
Office hours (Zoom): by appointment and after class for open discussions.

**Student Fellows**

Jason Wu [jason.wu.2023@lawmail.usc.edu](mailto:jason.wu.2023@lawmail.usc.edu)  
William (Will) Lane [william.lane.2022@lawmail.usc.edu](mailto:william.lane.2022@lawmail.usc.edu)

**Class Format**

Class sessions will start and end on time, and lectures will be recorded when in zoom sessions. Students are required to complete all assignments required for each class session. Participation is required. 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 slide (PowerPoint, etc.) presentations
- Small peer discussions and in-class activities
- Viewing online writing resources such as videos and tutorials
- Short writing skill exercises
- Guest lecturers with question and answer sessions
- Drafting and editing formal legal documents

**Required Books**

- Aspen Handbook for Legal Writers: A Practical Reference, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., by Deborah E. Bouchoux (2017) (printed copy or ebook).
- 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 (in Person or by Zoom)**

Class attendance is mandatory. Students should arrive/ log on at least five (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 unexcused absences and lateness. Students who miss multiple class sessions without obtaining an excuse from the instructor may fail the course.

Participation in class is also required. Participation includes asking and answering questions, participating with guest lecturers, providing peer feedback, and contributing during group activities.

In person class attendance is mandatory when available, and especially for guest lecturers. If school is in session and in person you are expected to attend in person. If school is in session by zoom you are expected to attend by zoom. You may NOT appear for an in person class by zoom unless you have a documented illness with physician note, preapproval from professor, or similar excused attendance.

**In Person Classroom Etiquette**

Because in class discussions and the written word are the centerpiece of the course, attendance is required. Five percent (15%) of the final grade is based upon attendance and participation. 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

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work on time; being punctual to classes and meetings; and communicating with others in a respectful, timely, and professional fashion.

**Zoom Etiquette**

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 onto zoom using university credentials. Otherwise you may be not admitted or admitted with delay. Zoom codes will be provided on Blackboard. Please do not share them with those who are not in the class.

**Zoom Meeting**

Information for 561A Wednesday January 12, 2021 10:00 am to 12:50 am and thereafter on an as needed basis (also on Blackboard, under Announcements):

Join Zoom Meeting (This is a hyperlink):

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/93989408859?pwd=aGRQaF10YjJjRW5BUEgxMGc2V3lCQT09>

Meeting ID: 939 8940 8859

Passcode: GEOSd3ilCa

**Assignments**

Assignments will be quite varied throughout the semester. They include readings, extra credits, 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 **Wednesday** of class;
- Unless otherwise stated on the Weekly Schedule, all assignments must be submitted to Blackboard by 10:00 am on the next **Wednesday** after the assignment is given (or otherwise noted).
- Late Policy: 10% deduction for every day late.
- Grades for each assignment are based on a Pass Fail system (-√; √; √+).
- Students need to provide detailed information to submit a "Late Submission" after one week. Please note that if you fall very behind in these assignments it is quite difficult to catch up and puts you in danger of failing the course.

**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 25% of the class will receive a High Pass. The course will be graded as follows (100%):

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- Writing Exercises – 35%
- Formal Writings – 45%
  - (Legal Correspondence – 15%)
  - (Legal Memorandum – 30%)
- Attendance and Participation – 15%
- Extra Credit – 5%

### Academic Conduct

Collaboration in the form of general discussions is permitted and encouraged. However, collaboration on writing exercises, and formal writings is prohibited. You must submit your own work. Do not show each other your writings. You will have opportunities to provide peer feedback under 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/departments/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.

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*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://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](https://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](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://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](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.

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**Instructor Biography** (hyperlink) (<https://gould.usc.edu/faculty/lecturers/?id=76660>)

Lena Afary 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.

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. She currently works as the in-house counsel and property manager for a local commercial real estate shopping center.

Afary emigrated to the United States with her family as a child at the start of the Iranian Revolution. Her background as a member of a religious minority in Iran, inspired her to pursue social and gender justice issues, first as a documentary filmmaker and journalist, and later as an attorney in California. Throughout the years, she volunteered with different community service organizations, such as a battered women's shelter and the ACLU, and expanded her awareness of her community of origin through extensive travels in the Middle East, including Egypt, Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

After graduating from Lake Forest College with a degree in philosophy and women's studies, Afary worked for various local and national news agencies such as Reuters, NBC and PBS, where she focused on youth and gender issues and while completing her MFA in film, with an emphasis in documentary production. As an associate producer of the Emmy Award-winning reality television series American High, she and colleagues spent a year documenting life in a suburban American high school in Illinois, focusing on challenges that young, minority, disadvantaged and LGBTQ students faced.

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.

After moving to Los Angeles, she worked as a law clerk for the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office. She then 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.

Afary returned to her social justice work by externing with the Hon. Suzanne Bruguera of the Los Angeles Superior Court. She later became social services staff attorney at Pars Equality Center, a legal aid organization in Los Angeles dedicated to assisting low-income clients from Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Afghanistan and Turkey. Afary has been an active member of the State Bar of California since 2005.