



Teaching Legal Writing: Best Practices and Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Legal writing remains a cornerstone of effective legal practice, yet its instruction often occupies a secondary role in law school curricula. This paper examines the critical importance of teaching legal writing, exploring best practices and contemporary approaches that respond to evolving demands in the legal profession. Drawing from a multidimensional framework, the discussion emphasizes the integration of legal writing into broader legal education, the necessity of drafting and editing instruction, the role of feedback, ethical considerations, and the unique challenges faced by legal writing faculty. Innovative curriculum structures and reflective learning techniques are proposed to equip students with essential writing competencies. The analysis calls for a cultural shift in legal education—one that embraces writing not merely as a skill to be assessed, but as a mode of legal reasoning and professional identity formation. By highlighting teaching strategies and structural reforms, the paper advocates for a more inclusive, practice-oriented legal writing pedagogy that bridges the gap between legal academia and the profession.

Keywords: Legal Writing, Legal Education, Law School Curriculum, Drafting, Pedagogy, Legal Ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Legal writing is an essential skill that law schools must teach. While legal research can be included in the curriculum, writing skills necessary for producing legal opinions and documents require specific instruction and practice. Writing in styles such as counsel opinions, court orders, and legal memoranda is as crucial for lawyers as case briefing or statutory analysis. However, law school exams often do not encourage these skills. Therefore, assignments mimicking professional writing tasks should be implemented broadly. Law schools can offer informal writing exercises through ungraded assignments, seminars, or limited-enrollment courses. However, effectively communicating legal analysis is complex and benefits from structured instruction, particularly for students preferring trial and error. Opportunities for enhancing written communication of legal concepts exist in all courses, not just those focused on writing. Faculty aiming to improve writing programs should enhance existing writing experiences in seminars, clinics, and practice skills courses. Curricula should integrate writing and instruction into all courses and promote a rationale for these practices. This includes providing writing-to-learn tools, activities, and assignments. Alternatively, a specific writing theory could be incorporated into classes to enhance communication and analysis. Students with developed research skills can collaborate on assignments that focus on writing and citation. Integrating legal writing approaches into existing classes can also be beneficial, particularly in skills courses addressing specific content areas like file analysis or statutory interpretation. There are numerous strategies to enhance law students' writing skills when conveying legal analysis [1, 2].

The Importance of Legal Writing Skills

Good writing is extremely important in most occupations, but is especially so in law. Writing is a fundamental work product of lawyers. For lawyers engaged in litigation and other adversarial contexts, writing forms the basis for most communication with the court and opposing counsel. For transactional lawyers, contracts and other documents embody their work product. Lawyers must write not only to persuade, but also to elucidate, reason, and memorialize. Writing ability is essential to success as a lawyer and, in many instances, to securing a job at a law firm in the first place. Law firms expect clerks (and later associates) to write short memoranda shortly after starting work. Most law schools employ teaching

assistants to grade examinations, but law review articles are typically read by full-time faculty. Writing assignments in large classes, such as contracts and torts, are few and often consist of one blue booked exam in which the professor reads a portion of the answers. Writing skills are only assessed in a few upper-level courses, such as Legal Writing II at the University of Michigan Law School. In sum, legal writing typically occupies a smaller role in the curriculum of most law schools than it does in the practice of most large law firms. Even participants in the legal writing community agree that legal writing instruction is inadequate. One participant noted that legal writing teachers believed, 'we simply must do better than we have been doing. Far better.' The demand for well-written legal documents is insatiable. 'I have always said that there is a tremendous need for good writers,' asserted the Chief Judge of one of the largest trial courts in the world. 'With judges' chambers overflowing with product, the same amount each year, but with few improvements in quality, there has never been a greater need for good, focused, competent writing. Writing that clearly articulates what happened, what the issues are, what the law says, and how that law is applied to the facts presented to result in a decision is rare, but how it should be done is the component of good quality legal writing [3, 4].

Curriculum Development for Legal Writing Courses

Instruction in legal writing typically occurs through separate courses rather than being integrated into existing ones. A standalone course may cover core concepts, but expecting students to excel solely from textbooks is unrealistic. Legal writing, akin to legal research, requires practice through readings and exercises. Students must learn legal vocabulary, grammar, and style before tackling assignments. Anticipation is necessary, particularly when critical thinking outweighs writing, such as in issue regulation and motivational strategies. The proposed 13-week structure includes 14 units, each featuring titles and content that includes teacher readings, exercises, and student tasks. Suggested reading problems should come from the unit, allowing for flexible discussions. At the start of class, six challenging problems can help students enhance their knowledge through closed-book written formats. A comprehensive exam will assess their writing accuracy and understanding. Time management is essential, with an 18-hour arrangement crucial for timely completions and proficiency evaluations. The innovative "thinking-storming-write" approach improves cognition and processes. Unlike discovery writing, which often leads to vague knowledge, this method fosters anticipation of decisions before writing. Narrowing topics can lead to more efficient writing with fewer resources. Structurally, this approach clarifies legal logic and enhances discussions on writing. It ensures vocabulary, grammar, and stylistic precision, ultimately redefining success to focus on effort rather than just results [5, 6].

Teaching Methods and Approaches

Teaching is generally thought to be the most challenging aspect of the professorate for several reasons. A few examples of the most significant difficulties will follow. Law professors typically come to the faculty with no education in how to teach or any formal recognition of the importance of such background. Even those professors at any stage of their careers who have graduate degrees in education or who have other formal training as teachers find teaching law and teaching in law schools markedly different from any prior experience. Teaching legal writing as part of a first-year legal skills curriculum is particularly challenging because of the particular steps in the writing process, the need for individual student attention to multiple drafts, and the pressing need for students to produce a quality writing sample in a short time frame. Because of the myriad demands on and challenges facing first-year legal writing professors, some suggestions for dealing with those constraints are offered. There is extraordinary pressure on writing professors to prepare for and conduct the first classes, evaluate multiple drafts, and be present and available for student consultations while simultaneously preparing exam questions, conducting classes on examination writing, and grading the exams. In addition, faculty who teach upper-level writing programs face the same pressures of being new to a program or a school, possibly in new subject areas, while still being pressured to propose new courses. Because professors are regularly inundated with important deadlines that cannot be ignored, the daily routine can become overwhelming. While there may be some temporary relief from that pressure at the end of a semester, it will only be a matter of weeks before the demands repeat themselves. To avoid the seemingly endless cycle of grading and preparing for the next set of classes, legal writing professors must tend to their physical, mental, and spiritual needs. Whatever the method of coping, it is essential to confront and deal with the stresses of teaching, writing, and everything else that accompanies professorship and life [7, 8].

Drafting Legal Documents

Legal writing covers the drafting and analysis of legal documents. The drafting of legal documents mills the lawyer's professional writing "task" into trams of document genre or type. This subdivision ensures students acquire relevant skills, exposure, and understanding in key areas of legal writing. While

contracting, pleading, and writing scholarly legal analysis are distinguished by the different purposes they serve, seriously exaggerating this difference invites the danger of writing complaints that criticize their opposing party or cite without quotation an unedited passage of a judicial statement. These dangers arise from considering legal document drafting in isolation from other forms of legal writing. Drafting must mould legal content to fit a document type while satisfying the communicative needs of a specific audience. This document type is built from smaller constituent subtypes, each with its own wordings, formatting conventions, and communicative aims. At one level, drafting skill involves the ability to identify and execute the required clauses within known subtasks. At another level, complex documents have constituent types that must be assembled in a certain way and cooperate with reasoning and research tasks. Each level requires a different kind of expertise, which explains the widespread use of paralegals to assist lawyers. Drafting is, of course, only one part of legal writing, albeit the most challenging one. Unless carefully instructed, law students receive little direction on drafting, even though it occupies their entire working days after their graduation. Document drafting has aspects of complexity, difficulty, and precision not found in other forms of writing. When drafting is neglected, lawyers tend to accept the drafting solutions of others. Poor models abound; many commercial form books are so deficient in legal ideas and reading that practitioners should be embarrassed to use them. Primers about business drafting usually preach no abbreviations, no foreign phrases, no capital letters, sentences of 20 words or less, a maximum of five sentences per paragraph, and the active voice. Most civil law judges will take an unattached equation seriously with no abbreviation, no foreign phrase, as their problems are not posed in English full stop [9, 10].

Research Skills for Legal Writers

The whole professional lives of litigators depend on their writing. Each step in a litigation, from the filing of the complaint to its ultimate disposition on appeal, entails the use of a variety of written documents, from simple letters to complex pleadings, motions, and appellate briefs. Each document requires the writer to understand better the purpose of the document than its audience. Also, much of the work performed by legal counsel outside of litigation or controversy revolves around the writing of documents, from simple business letters and form contracts to highly intricate corporate documents and memoranda on arcane legal issues. Each of these documents, too, has as a more or less explicit purpose a need for improved writing that the conveyer understands better than the conveyed. The teaching of legal writing at law schools has traditionally revolved around the introduction of these documents and their underlying skills, techniques, and considerations widely or implicitly understood by practitioners in all branches of writing. However, it is not enough merely to acquire these rules or these observations. Such repetitive teaching would only allow the mimicry of mechanical skills without an understanding of a craft whose effective acquisition requires the basic knowledge behind it. Hence, teaching legal writing suffers from loopholes that demand remedial measures. There exists a need to understand and teach these knowledge bases. These gaps in the literature inhibit effective legal writing. Nevertheless, the materials must be addressed when limits are reached. Simultaneously, it is hoped that the exposition might incite the learning of those legal writers who understand much better than the expositor/complainer. That is, the writing that follows is to constitute a rant to offspring already disposed to rant—that is, to write badly, blandly, or not at all [11, 12].

Editing and Revising Legal Writing

The task of encouraging students to view the first draft as one point in the writing process is easier said than done. Exercises that encourage students to reflect on their writing processes may help them find ways to make those processes more efficient. A useful exercise may be as simple as asking students to think about something they have written and then describe the process by which they wrote it. In any event, a mere admonition to write multiple drafts probably will provide insufficient guidance. Students who see the first draft as the end product may not even be able to proofread for grammatical errors. Accordingly, teachers should offer students methods by which they can begin to look at their work critically. A critique that identifies a writing problem may be insufficient. The teacher must also ask what caused this problem and what strategies will help fix it. A variety of techniques may help students learn to make conscious choices when revising their writing. Checklists help students develop an internal editorial voice. This checklist could easily be adapted for an exercise in reviewing a substantive memorandum. In addition to critiquing the writing, it might also be helpful for students to develop written statements or outlines of their thought processes. As a parting exercise, students could imagine their ideal clients and then write their closing arguments for those clients in a meeting or conversation. Such an exercise may emphasize the importance of substantive organization. Students may not share the teacher's faith in the indelible quality of the written word. Therefore, assignments that encourage them to

truly think through their arguments and reach reasoned conclusions on those arguments should be prioritized. Students would benefit from exposure to some prewriting exercises. Verbal brainstorming is mentioned: It might be helpful to have students first brainstorm solutions to a problem in an ad dating format that wraps up with a radio advertisement that would sell those solutions. Such a radio spot might contain a revivalist plea to 'do the right thing' or 'be on the winning side' [13, 14].

Feedback Mechanisms in Legal Writing Education

This program is meant to be used in conjunction with the 1L memo package. By deploying it as a voluntary approach before the memo is due, the professors wish to help students process introductory feedback on their memos, using only the introductory comments from the professors on the first set of drafts. This would expose students to the feedback while not forcing them to engage too deeply with it. Eventually, the students would then process feedback they received on their work product, using the self-sustaining feedback thesaurus. The professors hope that this engine would serve as an essential tool to help students on their way to obtain a full-fledged understanding of and appreciation for feedback. As a parting note, the professors would like to express their great thankfulness for peer professors who shared their materials and their work with the rest of the community. Contributions directly quoted in the text were especially useful; some formatting changes were made for uniformity. Educational tools present a unique opportunity to provide students with advice that can help them hone their writing skills and better understand the feedback they receive on early drafts. Students engage in various learning communities that shape them as legal writers, thinkers, and professionals. Seeking to improve on previous legal writing concepts and knowledge is key to improving feedback literacy. Awareness of generational/generational "turning points" can shape students' feedback literacy over time, establishing goals for mentoring students. This can lead to tools to help students understand and apply feedback both as a process and outcome [15, 16].

Ethical Considerations in Legal Writing

Until the mid-1990s, there was little mention of the ethical responsibilities of a legal writer. Then, legal writing became a class within the law school curriculum. In today's context, "legal writing" encompasses: 1. research and analysis of a legal problem; 2. communication with a decision maker regarding the problem; and 3. execution of documents arising from the problem. A legal writing instructor may become involved in one, two, or all three aspects of the legal writing process. The attorney-writer inevitably ran into situations that may be perceived as questionable ethical considerations. The most basic ethical consideration of a legal writer is whether an ethical violation is occurring or about to occur. A legal writer cannot knowingly participate in the commission of a crime or fraud, or assist an attorney in the conduct of that attorney's representation of a client in criminal or fraudulent conduct. A legal writer must make reasonable efforts to ensure that all legal writing attorneys have established routine procedures designed to provide reasonable assurance that obligations of these attorneys concerning the conduct of legal writing are met. If a writer of a legal document learns that the drafting attorney intends to deceive the recipient of the document, the writer must take remedial action, or, if that fails, resign from employment. A legal writing attorney cannot knowingly make a false statement of material fact or law to a third person, nor can a legal writer use means that have no purpose other than to embarrass, delay, or burden a third person. If a legal document is likely to result in prejudice to a right of a client or a third person, the legal writer must refrain from publicizing it. Where an issue regarding the legal document is likely to arise before a tribunal, a legal writer cannot act as a lawyer in the matter. A writer is disqualified from any matter in which the writer was substantially involved in providing legal advice or in drafting, reviewing, or revising a document, and by that participation acquired knowledge relating to the matter. A legal writer may not contact a judge, juror, or other official in the course of official proceedings, unless authorized to do so by law [17, 18].

Challenges in Teaching Legal Writing

Teaching legal writing is not without its challenges. Some of the challenges raised in the past go hand-in-hand with the established practices in legal education. Nevertheless, there are new challenges that have arisen because of the impact of technology on how law students learn and how they produce legal writing. There are also questions about how legal writing faculty integrate their roles and teaching responsibilities in a way that allows them to teach legal writing best practices. In preparing their students, law schools are often torn because of tight curricular structure requirements, financial constraints, and educational priorities—more classes may have to occur at peak freshman hours in large lecture halls that pass down content knowledge, at the expense of legal writing classes. At the same time, where legal writing class sections are small, addressing the secret jurisdictional questions is equally important. Today's students possess greater content knowledge than their predecessors, but instructing

them on how to produce good legal writing can frustrate both teaching and learning. Given a legal writing brief, students may question the need for specific analytical steps in a memorandum, in which warranted conclusions do not address the matter presented. Answering that question requires knowledge, skills, and insights into the way lawyers think. The reality is that previously accepted legal writing pedagogy is now inadequate to teach law students the best practices in writing legal documents. The writing curriculum is a professional one, and like medicine, architecture, and many others, is so because it is not scholastic. Would-be doctors, architects, engineers, and accountants face the unthinkable: civil liability and/or licensure loss if they gamble with the health and safety of the public. A few disappointed clients or removed members of the bar may adversely affect one's bank account or reputation, but the practice of law remains largely self-governed and faith-based. An angle of concern is whether earlier work on writing courses, which was all but derailed with the rise of legal writing programs, ought to be reconsidered. Or the writing/drain/great need fabric instead be used to address how to retrain current faculty and develop a core faculty, provided the programs can acquire and sustain not only the kind of funding they presently lack but also, more troubling, the broader vision and institutional commitment required to evade present and looming threats [19, 20].

Incorporating Technology in Legal Writing

The classroom has become more technologically sophisticated than it was a few years ago. Video streaming of classes is now possible; some schools allow students to attend classes remotely, while other schools use "smart classrooms" equipped with technology for enhanced teaching. Many law students already own laptops that they will use for various purposes. Some faculty now use the Internet for research or online site submissions. Introduction of technology into the law school curriculum can enhance education and better prepare students for practice. All of the technology mentioned is already being used with success at various law schools. A school must determine which technology meets its needs and how it will be financed. Most law schools can already control the presentation of technology in the classroom by using a laptop computer complete with projection equipment and a modem for Internet access. Faculty with an interest in or need for this capability should have access. Another popular use of this type of technology is for teaching credit hours. With the streaming video capability of the facility, schools can provide a live Internet feed of the first-year courses to the upper-division students for either viewing at their convenience or later archived viewing. Many schools already use a similar technology for non-legal courses for fee-based access to live broadcasts of classes. Consideration should be given to the ethics of remote viewing. Remote viewing does not seem appropriate for classes with a Socratic method approach. Presently, it seems that most of the use of this type of technology is at the initiative of individual faculty, not faculty as a group, and that caution is being exercised in the testing and selection of equipment providers and support staff. Pursuing this type of technology for viewing and archive purposes seems to be a good move for law schools to consider [21, 22].

Assessing Legal Writing Proficiency

Law schools have assessed their students' writing for many years. This paper discusses methods for assessing writing proficiency and offers suggestions on how to improve assessment methodologies, utilizing resources to which writing programs can refer to implement assessment methodologies, and advice about the varieties of assessment that writing programs may want to attempt. 262.3 Basic Principles of Assessing Writing Proficiency The following principles can take on weighty significance for assessment, given that law schools have little writing faculty to administer much of the writing assessments in use. The central animating principles for this paper are: (1) A law school degree is a privilege, an opportunity conferred by the law school and its faculty for students to receive guidance in their legal educational journey. For the law school to grant students this privilege, they must demonstrate a writing proficiency level that will allow them to benefit mostly from the educational journey (e.g., approximately 75th percentile or better for incoming JD students). (2) By meeting writing proficiency standards pre-admittance to law school, students ameliorate or supersede much of an academic institution's property interest in their academic success. It is incumbent upon individual law schools, then, to be prepared to show, via assessment, that accepted students have these skills. This has implications for law schools that market to build greater diversity among their accepted JD candidates. (3) The precise basis of governmental intervention into a law school's educational jurisdiction is moot. It is unreasonable to expect individual schools to operate assessment methodologies that could completely satisfy the varying measures of judicial review. What is reasonable is for law schools to develop a variety of methodologies to resolve educational goals without inviting governmental review. The band of measures in the safe harbor requires that (1) writing proficiency be assessed and (2) students be informed of their proficiency, in a timely and accessible fashion [23, 22].

Case Studies in Legal Writing Education

The advanced writing and research course taken by law students in their second year serves as the centerpiece of upper-level writing instruction. This course addresses the need for ongoing writing education, as students must produce various documents post-first year. Educators recognized multiple purposes for advanced courses, including meeting professional needs, addressing individual and organizational writing challenges, and enhancing performance on second and third-year assignments. New faculty viewed these courses as a way to empower students in their writing, while veterans aimed to provide multiple opportunities for improvement, fostering a deeper understanding of writing processes for better results. Students commonly produced memos, briefs, policy documents, and pleading instructions in advanced courses. Faculty emphasized documentation preparation and unique features of each medium. In memos, importance was placed on sections such as narrative, background, purpose, and standard operating procedures, along with closing notes and creativity. Coursework included focusing on job justification and refutation instead of solely formatting pleadings and motions. Verbal effectiveness was highlighted through creative communication methods, with mock negotiations, practice briefs, and simulated legal letters enriching students' writing and oral skills. In one school's simulation course, students debated after individually outlining arguments, integrating collective writing into trial scenarios. Emphasizing both verbal and non-verbal communication was essential to enhance the lawyering process and jury interpretation, as they found that non-verbal cues were often insufficient. Some faculty incorporated writing simulations into other upper-level skills courses, while academic classes typically offered writing instruction for one to two weeks separately [24, 25].

Future Trends in Legal Writing Instruction

Law schools have assumed great responsibility over the last decades. They have transitioned from providing a legal education to providing training on several practical skills and adopting interdisciplinary approaches to litigation. Many, especially in the United States, have taken important steps forward in the area of training litigation skills. This is often portrayed as a revolution. But revolutions have a bad habit of producing widespread chaos, resulting in training that is misguided or worse. Legal writing should remain solidly grounded in traditional training. It is important to balance the need for innovation with the need for stability within an educational environment. Theoretically, legal writing is a discipline of extreme importance at law schools. Practically, it is often a neglected one. Law professors spend hours unpersuasively explaining simple black letter law, while they publish tomes on theory, hearing nothing of its application. Legal writing professors, on the other hand, have become obsessed with both the practical side of writing and research. Their conferences feature nothing more than innovative and advanced courses. The danger is that their teaching, unlike the rest of the school, fails to be borne on the beds of sound theory. Legal writing teachers will veer towards minor and trivial courses, such as how to quote case law or how to use graphics and graphics layout, while the theoretical backbone disappears completely. Within the students' mindset, legal writing remains a minor discipline, flanked by research on the one hand and reading of often over-complicated theorists on the other hand. This is a reputation that all at a law school should resist. General denies all he can about his invasion of the island. His three-year campaign is extremely detailed. However, at its conclusion, El Gran General is detected. The evidence against him is too incriminating and odd, and the only explanation is too ludicrous. It implies that the island had a better chance of fidelity than Dutch sailors had of cleanliness. So, El Gran General has to deny that he was at all involved in the execution of the campaign? In other words, it's not the planning, the ordering, or the infliction that El Gran General cannot deny. It is the plausibility of an explanation of these actions on the part of a fifty-year-old General. El Gran General denies a key part of the reasoning of the story here. He has to buy into the acceptance of the evidence thus far, its plausibility, while still maintaining his chastity elsewhere [26, 27].

CONCLUSION

Legal writing is not just a technical skill—it is the foundation of legal communication, advocacy, and professional success. Despite its significance, legal writing instruction has long been marginalized within law school curricula. This paper highlights the multifaceted nature of legal writing education and the urgent need for reform. From curriculum integration and feedback mechanisms to ethical instruction and drafting proficiency, legal writing must be taught with intentionality and depth. Law faculties must invest in pedagogical training, smaller writing-intensive classes, and experiential learning opportunities that mirror real-world legal tasks. Moreover, embracing a more holistic approach that includes revision strategies, research competence, and ethical judgment will better prepare students for the realities of legal practice. In a legal landscape increasingly driven by clarity, logic, and accountability, law schools must ensure that writing instruction is not ancillary but central to legal education. A renewed commitment to

legal writing pedagogy is essential—not only for student success but for the integrity and effectiveness of the legal profession as a whole.

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Page | 29

CITE AS: Mutoni Uwase N. (2025). Teaching Legal Writing: Best Practices and Approaches. RESEARCH INVENTION JOURNAL OF LAW, COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGES 5(1):22-29. <https://doi.org/10.59298/RIJLCL/2025/512229>