

Communicating Credibility With Your Legal Writing

If they believe what you are saying,
they will buy what you are selling!

- Achieve business success with effective, efficient writing
- Enhance your image and your reputation as a lawyer
- Make yourself more valuable to your law firm with powerful writing
- Attract clients and build business with persuasive legal writing
- Get outstanding results and accomplish your goals

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Part I.

Introduction

Communicate credibility

Why read a book about legal writing—about communicating credibility? Why should you care about your writing? Lawyering is about words. The ability to write well is critical to your legal success. Your writing reflects you and your law firm.

Lawyers deal with problems. Skillful legal writing can help prevent, minimize, and resolve problems. A skillfully written document may save a client's business deal, avoid a lawsuit, win a lawsuit. The legal document itself may be the primary focus of a lawsuit, too. On the other hand, bad writing can be costly.

Want more reasons to hone your legal writing skills?

- Excellent written and oral communication skills are critical for lawyers.
- Your writing is often the first (and only) impression people get about you.
- Everything you write represents you—how professional you are, how well you think, how effectively you make decisions.
- Other people (not in your intended audience) see your writing and evaluate you, too.
- Decisions about promotion include consideration of how well you write.
- Effective writing—the ability to communicate clearly—enhances your image and reputation as an attorney.
- Good writing gets you published and promoted in academia, so you don't perish.
- Outstanding communicators are trusted, respected, successful—and rare.
- Successful writing communicates credibility and gets results—persuades readers to buy what you're selling, to take action, to accept your viewpoint.
- Skillful writing promotes you, your ideas, your services, and your law firm—sets you apart from your competition.
- Clear communications provide your staff with the need-to-know information and knowledge they need to perform their jobs.
- Effective communication connects with readers, evokes credibility, establishes a relationship, builds business, and boosts profits.

Your writing affects your reputation. Your primary personal asset for achieving success is how others think of you. Your writing showcases your ability to communicate, to think, to make decisions, to get results. Even if your ideas are brilliant, they won't do any good if nobody "gets" them, if they're not communicated clearly and persuasively.

What's "brand you" like? What's your niche—your specialness, unique expertise? How well do you communicate brand you? What do people think and say about you? When colleagues and clients hear your name, what do they think? Is your writing helping—or hindering—brand you?

Poor writing is costly

Ineffective writing harms your clients, harms your law firm, harms you. Fuzzy messages and fuzzy thinking are disastrous. If you write without clarity, you risk your credibility. Readers start to question if you know what you're talking about. Maybe, you're hiding something. Or, your thinking is faulty, you just can't write well. Poor writing—poor impression. Don't tarnish your reputation or damage your legal practice with poor writing.

A poorly written letter, a poorly crafted brief, a poorly presented speech—they all damage credibility. Even small errors can be jarring in communications from a person at your level of experience and expertise. Your reputation is at stake with every word you write. Use your writing to establish and enhance your credibility with everyone you encounter in your legal career.

Do you spend hours writing? Researching? Are you frustrated with lack of time to get your motions and correspondence written? Can't seem to get started? How many distractions can you think of to avoid writing? Do you schedule time each day for writing? How do you get yourself started writing? Is your office set up to enhance writing (no interruptions, writing tools handy, etc.)?

Rate your writing

Are you satisfied with how well you communicate? What effect does your legal writing have on your reputation in your field and your image in your law firm or company? Does your writing demonstrate your competence and knowledge? Is your credibility enhanced or harmed by your writing?

Do you accomplish your goals with your legal writing? What's the impact of your writing on others? Are you making a connection? Establishing rapport? Do you sound truthful? Do readers understand your message? Do they take action? Do you win legal arguments?

How believable are you? Does your writing convince readers they're making the right decision by listening to you, doing what you ask, buying your viewpoint? Does your target audience buy what you're selling—your services, your opinions, your recommendations?

What's your writing like? Take the Writing Self-Quiz to get you started.

Want a better way to write? Follow this guide *Communicating Credibility With Your Legal Writing* to lead you along the path to becoming an effective, successful legal writer. To monitor your progress, use the Quick Commentary in the Legal Writing section and seek feedback from your mentors.

Writing Self-Quiz

How much do you need this guide? Take this self-quiz. Compute your writing score.

- | | | |
|---|-----------|----------|
| (1) I have too much writing to do. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (2) I don't have enough time to write. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (3) I have trouble getting started writing. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (4) I don't bother planning my writing. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (5) Organizing thoughts is a problem. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (6) I'd like to write more persuasive briefs. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (7) Writing client letters is challenging. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (8) My memos are not well focused. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (9) I want my motions to get better results. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (10) I don't know how to rapid write. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (11) My writing is boring. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (12) I try to squeeze a lot on one page. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (13) Nobody has given me feedback. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (14) Nobody has praised my writing. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (15) I hate writing. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (16) I want to communicate credibility more. | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (17) I need help! | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| (A+) My writing is perfect. | Yes _____ | No _____ |

Your Score

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Yes to item (A+) | Stupendous Writer: I don't believe you. Writing is never perfect. |
| Yes to 1 to 3 items | Expert Writer: Read this guide at your leisure. |
| Yes to 4 to 6 items | Average Writer: Start reading this guide now to get help. |
| Yes to 7 to 9 items | Salvageable Writer: Read every word immediately, do what I say. |
| Yes to >9 items | Pathetic "Writer": Don't read—memorize every word! (Kidding!) |

By using the writing process and the methods you'll discover in this guide, you'll soon be on your way to better legal writing. Even if you score well on the quiz, you can improve your writing. Races are won or lost by a difference of fractions of a second. Similarly, small changes in your writing—tweaking it—can make large differences in the results you get. Nobody's writing is perfect. All of us can improve. But, the goal isn't perfection. It's effective legal writing—communicating credibility, successfully accomplishing your goals, getting the desired results. Let's get started!