

U. C. Hastings' Legal Writing Resource Center

**Quick Tips for Concise & Effective Legal
Writing**

Eliminate Meaningless Introductions

- Get to your point quickly
 - Legal readers are busy & impatient
 - Do not waste their time!
- Keep any introductions short & obvious
 - Transitions are useful if they clearly communicate that you are transitioning to a new idea
 - See the following examples of simple transitions

Examples of Short, Clear Transitions to Indicate New Ideas

- **For supporting ideas:** *also, additionally, furthermore, moreover*, or number them
- **For an example or illustration:** *for example, for instance, to illustrate, specifically, in particular*
- **For similar ideas:** *similarly or likewise*
- **For opposing or contradictory ideas:** *opposing or contradictory ideas, use in contrast, on the other hand, still, even though, nevertheless, however, but*

Examples of Short, Clear Transitions to Indicate New Ideas

- **For exceptions:** *despite this, on the other hand, although, however, but*
- **For concessions:** *although, even though, though*
- **For a result or conclusion:** *therefore, thus, accordingly, consequently, as a result*

Eliminate Unnecessary Words

Shorten phrases, as in these examples:

- **Often, as with transitions, one word will do:**
 - **From:** *did not remember*; **To:** *forgot*
- **Other times, simply remove unneeded words:**
 - **From:** *After it makes a decision regarding the case, the court will issue a written ruling.*
 - **To:** *The court will issue its decision in writing.*
- **Remove passive voice:**
 - **From:** *The unanimous decision of the court was written by Justice Scalia.*
 - **To:** *Justice Scalia wrote the court's unanimous decision.*

Avoid Legalese & Legalisms

Avoid words and terms that waste words & confuse readers

- **Legalese:** These include:
 - **Latin & French terms** such as *ab initio* or *chose in action*
 - **Archaic English words** such as *heretofore*, *hereinbelow*, or *said* in place of *the*
- **Legalisms:** There are two general categories:
 - **Speaking in Triplicate:** e.g., *give*, *devise and bequeath*
 - **Meaningless Phrases:** e.g., *the case at bar*, *the instant case* (say *this case* or [your client's name]'s *case*)

Use Names, Not Titles

Names Are Easier to Remember Than Titles

- **Use the Parties' Names, Not Their Roles in the Case:** e.g., use *Smith* or *National Savings & Loan* rather than *Petitioner*
- **Simplify Names After Their First Mention:**
 - **For People:** Give first and last name, and any important title when introduced; afterwards just use last name unless the person is a minor or more than one person has the same last name
 - **Institutions:** Give full name when introduced but follow with a short identifying term in parentheses to use in all future references to it: *National Savings & Loan (National)*. Remember to only use that term in future references.

Avoid Terms that May Annoy or Offend

- ***Clearly or Obviously***: If something is truly clear or obvious, there is no reason for you to say it is. If it is not truly clear or obvious, your saying so will appear either deceitful or careless.
- ***“The Court Must . . .”***: Never tell a court it must do something. You can only *ask* it to do it.
 - It’s true that *shall* in a statute is supposed to mean *must*, but only inexperienced lawyers try to tell that to courts.

Use Adverbs & Adjectives Sparingly

- **Generally Avoid Them:** Often they add nothing to the meaning, and excessive use of them sounds manipulative.
- **But Use Necessary Ones:** Use adverbs and adjectives that are part of the elements of an action, such as *intentionally* or *negligently*.
- **If Using Them, Avoid Demeaning Connotations:** The purpose of adverbs and adjectives is to add connotations to the actions or things described. Be sure not to provide demeaning connotations.

Stick to the CRAC Structure

Conclusion, Rule, Analysis & Application, Conclusion

- **The CRAC Structure:** Briefly state your Conclusion, then the Rule that Supports it; analyze the law and apply it to your problem; then end by restating the conclusion.
- **Be Sure Everything Is in Its Proper Place in the Structure:** Edit to ensure that every sentence is in its proper place in the structure.
- **Remove Anything that Does Not Fit Within the Structure:** Any sentence that cannot find a proper place in the structure should be deleted.