

## PROFESSOR GERAINT HOWELLS (2): ADVICE ON LEGAL WRITING

### **What do you have to say about best practices in legal writing?**

One thing I try to do and don't always succeed, but I always recommend it as best practice, is to have a good plan of the essay. Try to work out what needs to be addressed and how deep you need to go into the analysis.

I think in terms of actual writing style, the shorter your sentences the better. In fact, the shorter your work normally the better. People normally like to think, and this applies right up to professors, that the more words they say the better they can say things.

I would say the other thing that I really prize is structure: having a good structure and having a structure which has a purpose, which is to answer the question.

Can you in a couple of sentences tell somebody what your answer was to your essay? If you can't do that, you probably haven't got a clear answer to your essay. You need to know what you want to say before you can say it.

### **What advice do you have for students about adopting a productive process?**

I think it's clear everyone's got their own style and I think students need to borrow ideas from other people. For some people, certain techniques work. My children, for example, at school learn to do mind maps. It works for them. But when I was young, we never heard of a mind map. We heard of plans. That works for me. But I think the most important things are to think about what the final product should look like. The final product should be having a clear message. It should be worth reading. It should have an argument that's backed up with evidence. It should be clearly written. It should be easy for the person to follow the structure. And so, try to think how you can build those things in. Try to show that you're on top of the subject, that you know the materials, that you know the arguments. Try to give the reader the confidence in your ability and that's where I think reading around the subject really shows. Students often think that, you know, reading the textbook's enough and they don't want to read the cases. In reality, they want to read the case headnote, or

they want to not read the journal articles. But the truth is, you see that when you've done that, your understanding becomes so much more deeper and clearer, and that then comes through in your writing.