

MS CAMMY MAN (1): WHAT MAKES GOOD LEGAL WRITING?

What makes good legal writing in English?

I think what makes good legal writing in English is that we have to first identify the audience, so that when we write, we know what we should focus on, so when we write it, we would write it in a very concise and succinct manner, so that the people reading it can get immediately what we would like to present. For example, when we write an email to clients, the clients may just want to know the answer to the question or the solution for them, but when we write to other legal advisors of the other clients, we may be able to use some legal jargon to present our ideas clearly, but that may not be possible to clients.

How does legal writing in an academic setting differ from that in a professional setting?

For academic writing, I think it's different from professional writing in the work context, in the sense that when we present ideas, there is more room for us to look for other scholars' opinions and there is more space for us to discuss the other opinions from the other contexts. But in the work context, we may only have limited time and also limited space for us to write those opinions out. We have to be direct in the work context.

Usually in the academic setting, most writings we write would be the assignments for our assessment purposes. The best thing about those assignments is to give us some practice as to what we can write and how we should write it properly to the right audience. For example, when we write an assignment based on an essay type question, we usually follow the format as to the Issues, Rules, Application, and Conclusion. Following this format, we can give the audience a proper structure, so that they can follow our ideas more logically.

What kinds of texts do you need to write as a trainee solicitor and what are the strategies that you use to make a good text?

Most of the writings we have to write every day and the most frequent ones would be the emails, either to clients, to our supervisors, or to the other legal advisors of the other parties. One thing

that we have to remember when we write emails would be to try to keep them short, and try to keep the reasoning short as well, but at the same time, we have to present the ideas clearly, so that when our clients or the other parties read them, they know what our standpoint would be, rather than just telling them the reasoning behind it. So, we have to take a stance when we write emails or other advice.

So, in this setting, the content would be very important, but at the same time, the structure of the email or the writing would be very important too, because it guides the audience to read it as to content, so that they can keep it step by step. And more importantly, in a professional setting, the details would be very important as well. For example, there should be no typos, this kind of thing.

How do you keep content concise?

The first thing would be I have to identify what is the focus of the paragraph or even the whole article, so that I would differentiate what are the principles that are most important that I must include in a passage, and also what are those examples that are relevant, so I have to strike a balance between presenting the theories and also the examples in supporting the theories. The second way would be to try to keep some expressions short. For example, for law students, we usually use some legal jargon or there are words that we can keep them short. For example, we would say 'subsequent to' rather than 'after' or 'in order to' rather than 'to'. These kinds of expressions, sometimes we are not mindful to keep them short, but when you have to cut words to meet the word limit, we will be more careful about that.