

**Putting it All Together: Constructing Your Course**  
**Part I**  
**Patricia A. Broussard**  
**Florida A & M University College of Law**

**I. Understanding what it means to teach writing and the attendant skills:**

**A. Writing is the cornerstone of a good legal education.**

- If you cannot think clearly, you cannot write clearly.
- All of the skills taught in legal writing are transferable and necessary for success in other law school courses.

**B. Legal Writing is time-consuming and labor-intensive.**

- Class preparation will be on-going through the semester.
- Revising your class preparation will also be on-going.
- Grading/critiquing an assignment can take between 35 and 40 hours a week.
- Student conferences, which are also extremely time consuming, are vital to teaching legal writing.

**C. Other Duties, not assigned.**

- Writing letters of recommendations for students.
- Reviewing writing samples for students.
- Preparing students for moot court competitions.
- Assisting student organizations and journals by providing workshops on various writing topics.

**D. Students will find legal writing much more difficult than you anticipated.**

- Realize that you are speaking a foreign language for the first few weeks.
- Students soon discover that the ability to “out argue” grandma at Thanksgiving does not a lawyer make.
- Initially, students have difficulty seeing the correlation between thinking, researching, good writing and becoming a good lawyer.

### **E. Legal writing requires frequent and precise feedback.**

- The course provides the rare opportunity for students to receive comprehensive feedback of their reasoning, writing, and research skills.
- Teaching legal writing is far more fulfilling than you could have imagined.
- Have clear standards and expectations.
- Students are needy.
- Students need constant reassurance.
- Students will take advantage of your office hours and any other hours when you are breathing.

## **II. You Must Understand the Big Picture of Teaching Legal Writing**

### **A. Be clear about the purpose of the course.**

- The same rules about clear thinking that apply to students, also apply to the professor.
- Ask yourself: “why am I here?”
- Define for yourself what it means to teach students to become good legal writers.
- Be willing to see yourself in a role larger than the one encompassed by the word teacher.

### **B. Before you start to put together your course, take some time to be reflective about it and make a list of those things you must teach.**

#### **First - View the Course from a Student Perspective**

- Remember that Legal Writing is a foreign language.
- The theory of multiple learning styles is not a myth.
- Emphasize that “bad” writing does not make a student a bad student.
- The ethics of legal writing:
  - This speaks for itself, but is often overlooked and under-rated.

- Professionalism:
  - Good writing must be presented in a timely and professional manner.
- You need to teach specific skills that achieve the goals that are generated by the school's course description, the legal writing department's mandate, and by your answer to the question of why you are here. Here are just a few of the skills:
  - Time management
  - Problem solving
  - Factual analysis and reasoning
  - General principles of legal analysis and reasoning
    1. Utilizing the case book method
    2. Case briefing
    3. Issue spotting
    4. Identification of determinative facts
  - Organization
    1. Large scale
    2. Small scale
  - Interpreting statutes
  - Research
  - Traditional
  - Electronic
  - Style and formalities
  - Citation forms
  - Predictive writing
  - Persuasive writing
  - Oral advocacy

### **C. Familiarize yourself with the best vehicles to teach these skills.**

- Lectures
- Discussions
- Guest speakers
- Peer assignments and discussions
- Field trips
- Assignments
  - i. Memoranda
  - ii. Client letters
  - iii. Negotiation agreements
  - iv. Motions
  - v. Motion briefs
  - vi. Appellate briefs
  - vii. Oral arguments

### **III. How to Put it All Together:**

#### **A. New writing professors are also new students.**

- Give yourself adequate time for preparation.
- Master the materials.
- Learn the language of legal writing.
- Dissect the Text(s)
- Practice giving your lecture.
- Try one of the exercises that you have designed for your students.
- Critique yourself after every class.
- Remain flexible; be willing to change that which doesn't work for you and conversely, learn to embellish the lessons that work.

- Developing a teaching “persona.”
- Develop a plan for grading papers
- Remember that notwithstanding your newness, you are still the smartest person in the room.