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Guthrie's Guide to Better Legal Writing, 2nd ed

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***Guthrie's Guide to Better Legal Writing*. By Neil Guthrie. 2nd ed. Toronto: Irwin Law, 2021. xviii, 281 p. Includes bibliographic references and index. ISBN 9781552215692 (softcover) \$60.00; ISBN 9781552216279 (EPUB) \$60.00; ISBN 9781552215708 (PDF) \$60.00.**

The second edition of *Guthrie's Guide to Better Legal Writing* is Neil Guthrie's revised anthology of email queries and blog posts.² The scope of the book is in its title: it offers practical tips and advice to legal writers. Guthrie's definition of "legal writing" addresses written communication between lawyers, law students, and the layperson, although legal drafting is addressed intermittently. The book is not intended to be a comprehensive review of grammar and punctuation. Instead, it has an approximate agenda that is enhanced by the author's personal narrative.

The author follows their own advice as outlined in the suggestions for choosing a writing topic (p. 2):

- *They write about something they practice and know.* Guthrie has taught legal research and writing at the Faculty of Law, University of Toronto; has helped develop the legal research and writing curriculum for the Law Practice Program at Ryerson University; and is director of professional development, research, and knowledge management at Aird & Berlis LLP.
- *They recycle old work.* This is the second edition of *Guthrie's Guide to Better Legal Writing*.
- *They ensure pieces can be published in more than one place, with minor adjustments.* Both editions of the book expand on a collection of emails that evolved into a continuing blog series on slaw.ca.
- *They get their writing in front of the right audience.* According to WorldCat, the second edition is already available in most academic law libraries across Canada.

There are minor edits made throughout the book to correct content and update examples and bibliographic references. The organization of the chapters has not changed from the first edition:

- Chapter One: Get Writing!
- Chapter Two: Words Used and Abused
- Chapter Three: Grammar and Punctuation
- Chapter Four: Your Queries Answered

Notable additions include a section addressing terminology specific to equity-seeking groups; new miscellaneous things that annoy the author; new queries sent in by readers of the author's blog, including some timely linguistic issues related to COVID-19; and an updated recommended resources list.

The book is designed to be a practical reference tool used during the writing process. The detailed table of contents and index make it easy to quickly locate relevant information. There are two tables that are useful to those who frequently communicate using the English language. The first has examples of misused phrases and how to simplify them (e.g., "with the exception of" can usually be shortened to "except"). The second explains the correct meaning and proper application of commonly misused words (e.g., adverse, avert, advert, averse). These tables address vernacular deficiencies that have infiltrated the way we speak and write.

The tone of this book might be interpreted as curmudgeonly due to the many cheeky rants about personal preferences. (*Cheeky* and *curmudgeonly* are an homage to the author's obvious affinity for British English.) For instance, writing samples are followed with such phrases as "Wrong, so wrong," or "Oh Lord, no!" Some readers may feel as though they are being scolded. However, the author's intention is to improve plain language written communication, and the rants and exclamations are like a splash of water on the reader's face as they sift through dry content. It is a welcome shift from more formal publications on the topic. The author makes simplifying writing entertaining through snappy stories and sentiments, such as shopping for lightbulbs in mid-1970s Bulgaria and multiple mentions of drinking Negrónis. Reading about the minutiae of legal writing can be tedious and time consuming, but if you appreciate sardonic humour, Guthrie's tone makes the topic enjoyable.

There are many formal books and online resources that cover the topic of legal writing. Guthrie's niche is that this guide resembles a "choose your own adventure" book. It is highly practical but does not need to be read sequentially. It reads like a long-form FAQ, likely because its content was inspired by emails asking distinctive legal writing questions about terminology, grammar, and punctuation. Acknowledging that readers may be seeking information outside the scope of the guide, Guthrie includes a list of legal writing sources as a final personal recommendation.

The value of this book reaches beyond the discipline of law. Students from all academic disciplines could benefit from the lessons on how to simplify their writing. It would be an asset to the bookshelves (or digital collections—it is available as a PDF!) of legal professionals of all ages as a friendly reminder to reconsider their "turgid, pedantic, Latin-filled, jargon-ridden, misspelt, ungrammatical, and inelegant writing" (p. xiii). I would recommend *Guthrie's Guide to Better Legal Writing* to anyone who wants to improve their plain language writing while having a laugh at the same time.

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² See Nicholas Jobidon, Book Review of *Guthrie's Guide to Better Legal Writing*, 1st ed by Neil Guthrie, (2018) 43:3 Can L Libr Rev 27.