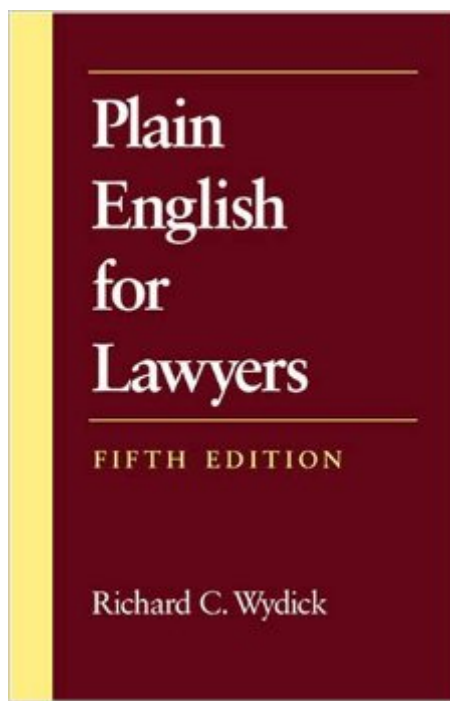


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# Plain English For Lawyers



## Synopsis

Wydick's Plain English for Lawyers--now in its fifth edition--has been a favorite of law students, legal writing teachers, lawyers, and judges for over 25 years. In January 2005, the Legal Writing Institute gave Wydick its Golden Pen Award for having written Plain English for Lawyers. The Legal Writing Institute is a non-profit organization that provides a forum for discussion and scholarship about legal writing, analysis, and research. The Institute has over 1,300 members representing all of the ABA-accredited law schools in the United States. Its membership also includes law teachers from other nations, English teachers, and practicing lawyers. The LWI award states: 'Plain English for Lawyers . . . has become a classic. Perhaps no single work has done more to improve the writing of lawyers and law students and to promote the modern trend toward a clear, plain style of legal writing.' In 2003 Wydick retired after 32 years on the law faculty of the University of California, Davis. But he still teaches his favorite course -- a seminar in advanced legal writing for third-year law students. For the past eight summers he has also lectured at the International Legislative Drafting Institute presented in New Orleans by the Public Law Center, a joint venture of Tulane and Loyola law schools. There the audience consists of lawyers and non-lawyers from abroad who earn their living drafting legislation in many different languages. 'Teaching at the Institute,' Wydick says, 'is a precious opportunity to learn how much we English-users have in common with people who write laws in other languages.' How does the fifth edition of Plain English for Lawyers differ from its predecessors? It remains (in size only!) a little book, small enough and palatable enough not to intimidate over-loaded law students. 'Most of the text remains the same,' Wydick says, 'but in the past seven years I've learned some new things about writing in English, and I want to share that with the readers.' In addition, the exercises at the end of the chapters are different (a welcome change for long-time teachers who are tired of the old ones). Finally, the teacher's manual includes additional exercises that teachers can give to students who want or need extra practice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I'm a lawyer who is considered a wordsmith by colleagues and judges. This is one of the most important books I've ever encountered. I was exposed to it in my first law school year's writing class, and its lessons have remained with me since. Banish the passive voice! (unless deliberately and thoughtfully chosen and used). This is not merely a key to fluidity in writing, but in a sense a moral imperative. Actions are attributable to actors - they don't simply occur. If you're asserting an action took place, you and your reader should know who or what you claim set it in motion. This necessitates intellectual rigor and clarity. Also, I remember and have employed for twenty-five years Wydick's apt metaphor that good legal writing is like fine cabinetmaking: the skill of the craftsman is shown by the crafted joints not requiring glue, just as the quality of a piece of prose is shown by its lack of reliance on "glue words" (read the book). I've used the lessons of Wydick's brief book as a lawyer, writer and writing teacher. I've given it to colleagues, non-lawyers and young relatives. Their writing uniformly improved.

I've often been complimented on my writing. However, my writing has previously been the areas of creative or business writing. Legal writing is a whole different beast. While I have still received compliments on my writing in law school, this book has definitely helped me refine my writing significantly. After reading this book (well, portions of it, as I have not read the whole thing yet) many of the pitfalls in my own writing became blatantly obvious. Styles that work well when writing creatively can hinder legal writing. This book definitely helps.

My first year legal writing professor required this book for all of her students and I am glad that she did. This book has been utilized nearly as much as my Bluebook when I write papers. While it contains many of the same recommendations that you will find in Strunk & White's Elements of Style (such as when to use affect vs. effect, avoiding passive voice, etc.), what sets this book apart is that it contains numerous exercises that you can use while proofreading your paper that will help improve your writing and earn that all important A. I used this book in my writing course during my first year and earned the highest grade in my section. If you heed the book's advice and utilize its

exercises you will surely be at or near the top of your class because many students will not take the time to do this. If you are a law student, this book is a must have. Next to the Bluebook, it is the reference you will turn to more than any other book you own. That said, I would not recommend buying this book before starting law school or doing some legal writing. It is not meant to be a law school prep book (like Law School Confidential). The exercises may translate towards other forms of persuasive writing, but don't feel like you "must" buy this book if you aren't in law school.

This is a gem of a short book for anyone who wants to get some quick and clear pointers on how to improve their writing. Although the title mentions lawyers, the book is good for anyone who makes the mistakes listed in the book - use of the passive voice, nominalizations, "shotgunning", etc. Each section is short and provides a few examples to apply the lesson taught. Suggested answers are included at the end as well as additional problems. You can read this book quickly and get right to work with some powerful tools.

I'm about to start law school and this book was "strongly encouraged" reading prior to starting school so I went ahead thinking it was going to give me some amazing insight into how to write like a lawyer. I found that everything in here is just common sense. Don't use big words that no one knows. Use short sentences that are straight-forward and to the point. Write in the active voice. I've been writing this way my entire life. If you don't already write this way then maybe you should read this but otherwise you can skip it.

This is a must-have for lawyer, paralegals, and any serious writer. Legal writing follows different rules than other types of writing - the use of latin for instance - and to lawyers it is actually easier to understand legal writing because we become used to it. The problem arises when we try to explain a simple situation that we may prefer to explain in legal terminology, but is easily understood without it. This is a must-have for anyone in the legal profession.

I don't agree with every stylistic choice Mr. Wydick makes (the Oxford comma must GO), but this is a well laid out, nicely written short book that covers all the bases. The exercises are interesting and illuminating. On the whole, a must-read if you are in this line of work.

Informative, easy read that makes sense. I hope all law schools would use or at least recommend this to students. I hope all others in the law profession will read and use this books lessons. Simple,

straight forward writing is the best practice. Old fashioned ideas about layering legal writing with heavy wordage is starting to become more enlightened. There should be no need to "hide" behind the traditional "Blah...Blah...Blah". In this helpful book - research and writing as it should be practiced.

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