

**Professional Writing Strategies
Spring 2022
Syllabus**

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Introductory Note: With an online course it is very important that you read every document and e-mail closely, beginning with this syllabus, to ensure that you understand all of the course assignments, procedures, and due dates. Additionally, from time to time there may be changes, reminders, and additional content sent to organize and supplement the course. You are responsible for knowing all such information.

I. Texts and Materials

Richard C. Wydick and Amy E. Sloan, *Plain English for Lawyers*, Carolina Press 6th edition 2019, ISBN: 9781531006990. ("Sloan")

Alexa Z. Chew and Katie Rose Guest Pryal, *The Complete Bar Writer*, Carolina Press 2020, ISBN 978-1-5310-1787-3, EISBN 978-1-5310-1788-0 ("Chew").

** Please note that this book comes with a subscription to Core Knowledge for Lawyers (www.coreknowledgeforlawyers.com). **See below**, section V(C)(iv), for further details.

II. Course Overview and Learning Goals

As defined by the National Conference of Bar Examiners:

The Multistate Performance Test is designed to test an examinee's ability to use fundamental lawyering skills in a realistic situation and complete a task that a beginning lawyer should be able to accomplish. The MPT is not a test of substantive knowledge. Rather, it is designed to evaluate six fundamental skills lawyers are expected to demonstrate regardless of the area of law in which the skills are applied.

The learning objectives of this course are to:

- (A) prepare the student to successfully answer the various types of MPT questions commonly found on the bar exam; and
- (B) further develop and refine the professional writing, editing, and drafting skills necessary for success on the MPT and within the profession.

Students will be able to accomplish the following tasks, as set forth by the National Conference of Bar Examiners:

- (1) sort detailed factual materials and separate relevant from irrelevant facts;
- (2) analyze statutory, case, and administrative materials for applicable principles

- of law;
- (3) apply the relevant law to the relevant facts in a manner likely to resolve a client's problem;
 - (4) identify and resolve ethical dilemmas, when present;
 - (5) communicate effectively in writing; and
 - (6) complete a lawyering task within time constraints.

III. Course Structure and Technology

This course is taught fully online. With the exception of readings from the assigned texts, all aspects of this course, including additional readings, assignments, and videos, will be available online.

A. Course Website

The course website is hosted by the University's Blackboard course management system. To access the course website:

1. Log into access UH: <https://accessuh.uh.edu> .
2. Under University Services, click on Blackboard Learn 9.
3. Under courses select (forthcoming).
4. The website will be available approximately 1 to 2 weeks prior to the official start of the course. You will be automatically enrolled in the course.

Blackboard support is available 8-8 (M-F):

1. Phone: 713-743-1411
2. Live chat: <http://www.uh.edu/infotech/livechat>
3. Email: support@uh.edu
4. In person: 58 MD Anderson Library

NOTE: There is an introductory video assigned for the first unit. Some information in the video may be duplicative of the information below, but some will not. You are responsible for information both in this document and in the introductory video.

B. Course E-Mail

I will regularly send e-mails and you must ensure that you regularly check your email. The course Blackboard site will, I believe, require your UH email, although you may forward that email to a personal email. I am not able to change the e-mail associated with your account.

IV. “Attendance” and Penalties for Late Assignments

In an online course there is, obviously, no physical “attendance.” However, you are required to keep up with the assignment schedules as set forth in the weekly checklists. Falling behind schedule may result in your **forced withdrawal** from the course. All units must be completed, and the standards met for credit, to receive credit for the course and to be cleared to take the final exam. Failure to do so will result in an incomplete. You are also required to watch all course videos and you will be asked to affirm that you have done so.

It is important to keep up with the weekly readings, assessments. It will be important to work on course activities consistently and not put them aside until the due date as there will be group assignments and activities which will require participation throughout the week.

Penalties for Late Course Assignments

Assignments for each weekly unit are due by 11 PM on Tuesday. Meeting deadlines is critical for the operation of this course and success on both the bar exam and as a practicing attorney. This course is designed around receiving and providing feedback, through the peer review process as well as self-reflection and from the professor. For example, not completing a practice MPT in one week affects the course operation, both for you and the rest of the class. As such, the weekly deadlines are **strictly enforced**, with rare exceptions, and will not be granted for work, family, or school commitments. This is particularly the case for the timed practice MPTs, which must be completed by the deadline because of the follow-up peer review exercise.

V. Course Structure and Assignments

The course is divided into 14 weekly units. Within each unit, which will be organized through a weekly checklist, there will be several items, including:

A. Videos: These are videos which provide an introduction to, and overview of, the materials in skills you will be practicing in the unit. Some videos also include questions which must be answered during the video.

B. Readings: These are the required textbook chapters, cases, statutes, and articles.

C. Assessments and Activities:

- i. **Practice MPTs.** Throughout the course you will take numerous practice MPTs. While a couple will be untimed, most will be 90-minute, timed exercises.

- ii. **Peer review exercises.** On three occasions throughout the course you are going to be required to provide an assessment of a classmate's practice MPT. This process is anonymous and based upon a provided rubric. You will also be asked to assess your own MPTs.
- iii. **Writing and skills exercises.** Throughout the course you will be asked to complete exercises designed to practice the organizational and writing skills necessary to successfully complete the MPT questions. Additionally, you will be asked to complete writing exercises designed to review and enhance your professional writing skills.
- iv. **Questions on Core Knowledge for Lawyers**
As part of your book purchase of The Complete Bar Writer, you are provided a subscription to www.coreknowledgeforlawyers.com (should be on a card inside your copy of the book). Once you log into the website, you will "activate" your subscription. When you activate your subscription, enter the unique Class Code that corresponds to this course. Here is the code:

122-209-8535

VI. Calculating Grades

Each exercise, assignment, and exam is assigned a point total. At the conclusion of the semester I will tabulate all of the points and determine final grades.

Points Awarded on the Reasonable Effort Standard (standard discussed below)

Timed MPT questions (3 question, 5 pts each)	15
Peer review (3 question, 5 pts each)	15
Writing Skills and other Exercises (1pt. each)	25 (<u>approximate</u> number)
Participation and Effort	10

Graded Points

Other MPT-type exam question	25
Final Exam	75

Point totals may be adjusted throughout the semester.

Exam/ Graded Points

There will be a scheduled final exam. The exam will be online, but it will take place at the posted time scheduled by the Dean's office. Since the exam will consist of two 90 minute MPT writing questions, one objective and one persuasive, with a break, the total exam time will be slightly more than the scheduled three hours. Additionally, in the final week of the semester there will be a graded MPT question on one of the "other" types of MPT questions.

Reasonable Effort Standard

The reasonable effort standard means a good faith attempt at completing a practice MPT question or another exercise that demonstrates both a significant effort and familiarity with the materials presented in the readings and videos. Further details are provided in the introductory video. These points are not based upon a curve and it is my hope that every class participant will receive all of the allotted points.

Grading Notes:

1. I reserve the right to raise a grade by one grade increment (ex: B to B+) for significant and consistent work that exceeds the normal expectation of the class, as determined in my sole discretion. This would entail outstanding work on exercises, peer review, and other course items.
2. I also reserve the right to lower a grade by one grade increment (ex: B to B-) for significant and consistent work that does not meet the normal expectation of the class. This reduction may be in addition to loss of participation and effort points, discussed below.

Participation and Effort Points

The points for participation and effort will be based upon:

1. Timely completion of all assignments and activities, including watching all course videos.
2. Thoroughness of responses to exercises and writing assignments.
3. Thoughtful feedback on Peer Review exercises

The participation points are not based upon a curve and it is my hope that every class participant will receive all of the allotted points.

VII. Additional Resources and University Required Language

Mode of Presentation (University required designation)

(AS) Asynchronous classes do not meet face-to-face, and they do not have a regularly scheduled meeting time. Most of the class materials are available online at any time. Some asynchronous online classes may include virtual class meetings, which will be arranged on a class-by-class basis by the instructor.

Chosen Names and Preferred Pronouns

I want to address each of you in a manner that corresponds to your identity. Although mistakes happen, chosen names and preferred pronouns—including non-binary ones such as they|them|their—must be respected in my classroom. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time if you want to make me aware of your chosen name or pronoun.

UH Sexual Misconduct Policy

The University is committed to maintaining and strengthening an educational, working and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from discrimination and sexual misconduct. If you have experienced an incident of discrimination or sexual misconduct, there is a confidential reporting process available to you. For more information, please refer to the University system's Anti-Discrimination Policy SAM 01.D.07 and Sexual Misconduct Policy SAM 01.D.08, available here: <http://www.uhsystem.edu/compliance-ethics/uhs-policies/sams/01-general-information/index.php> ;<http://www.uhsystem.edu/compliance-ethics/docs/sam/01/1d7.pdf> (antidiscrimination); <http://www.uhsystem.edu/compliance-ethics/docs/sam/01/1d8.pdf> (sexual misconduct). Please be aware that under the sexual misconduct policy, SAM 01.D.08, faculty are required to report to the University any information received regarding sexual misconduct as defined in the policy. Please note that the reporting obligations under the sexual misconduct policy reach to employees and students. ***Also, as a required reporting party, I am not a confidential resource.***

University Counseling Services

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to the demands of a professional program, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html

Accessibility and Accommodations

UHLC is committed to ensuring that all students enjoy equal access and full participation.

If you anticipate or experience barriers based on a disability (including any chronic or temporary medical or mental health condition), please seek appropriate guidance from the law school and University. If you require any support services at the Law Center, you may contact Ms. Samantha Ary, Academic Records Coordinator. Ms. Ary is located in room 44A TU-II in the Office of Student Services suite, and she can be reached at sary@central.uh.edu or 713-743-7466. Requests for accommodation that involve graded assignments **must be directed to Ms. Ary** and should be made as soon as possible to allow adequate time to document and to process the request.

If you observe religious or cultural holidays that will coincide with synchronous class sessions or conferences, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we may make arrangements.

Additionally, below is the applicable University-wide statement:

“The University of Houston System complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for students who have a disability. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, the Student Accessibility Center strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them. If you believe that you have a disability requiring an academic adjustments/auxiliary aid, please call the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center at (713) 743-5400 or email them at JDCenter@central.uh.edu.”

Recording of Class

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the [Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center](#). If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor’s recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor’s recordings are not authorized to be shared with *anyone* without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

Resources for Online Learning

The University of Houston is committed to student success, and provides information to optimize the online learning experience through our [Power-On](#) website. Please visit this website for a comprehensive set of resources, tools, and tips including: obtaining

access to the internet, AccessUH, and Blackboard; requesting a laptop through the Laptop Loaner Program; using your smartphone as a webcam; and downloading Microsoft Office 365 at no cost. For questions or assistance contact UHOnline@uh.edu.

COVID-19 Information

Students are encouraged to visit the University's [COVID-19](#) website for important information including diagnosis and symptom protocols, on-campus testing, and vaccine information. Please check the website throughout the semester for updates.

Vaccinations

Data suggests that vaccination remains the best intervention for reliable protection against COVID-19. Students are asked to familiarize themselves with pertinent [vaccine information](#) and to consult with their health care provider. The University strongly encourages all students, faculty and staff to be vaccinated.

Syllabus Changes

Due to the changing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus and may do so at any time. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through (*specify how students will be notified of changes*).

Week One

Due Date: All items below must be completed by 11 p.m. on Tuesday, January 25.

1. Course Introduction

- A. **Watch and Complete:** *Course Introduction* Video.
- B. **Read:** Course Syllabus
- C. **Read:** *Chew*, Preface and Ch.1
- D. **Complete:** Core Knowledge, Ch. 1

2. Introduction to the Bar Exam and the MPT

- A. **Watch:** *Introduction to the Bar Exam and the MPT*.
- B. **Read:** *Chew*, Ch.2
- C. **Complete:** Core Knowledge, Ch. 2

3. Writing Skills

- A. **Read:** *Sloan*, Chapters 1 and 2.
The exercises within chapter 2 are optional, but you may want to give them a try (suggested answers are in the back of your book).
- B. **Complete:** *Sloan*, Exercise, Ch. 2
*You may also want to download the supplement, which includes the exercises in a Word document. Note that the exercises **must be submitted to the course website** to receive credit for the exercise.*