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TTH 2:30p-4:00p Rm: 260

Lawyering Skills and Strategies

Fall 2026 | Professor Archer

About Me. Welcome to Lawyering Skills and Strategies. As a first-generation and second-career lawyer, I understand that law school can sometimes feel like a world with its own language, customs, and unwritten rules. My goal is to provide a supportive learning environment in which you will develop the analytical, research, writing, communication, and other professional skills that form the foundation of a successful law school experience and an effective legal practice.

Before joining the faculty at the University of Houston Law Center, I spent more than fifteen years serving as a career law clerk to the Honorable Gray H. Miller of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas. During that time, I analyzed a wide range of civil and criminal legal issues, drafted hundreds of judicial opinions, and advised the judge at every stage of litigation, including when dispositive motions were filed, when parties needed the court's assistance with discovery disputes, and during jury and bench trials. I also have four years of experience working on complex commercial litigation matters at Houston law firms.

Before becoming a lawyer, I worked for the Federal Aviation Administration as an air traffic controller. That experience taught me the importance of clear communication, careful analysis, and sound judgment—skills that are essential to both legal practice and legal education.

Outside the classroom, I enjoy mentoring law students and young lawyers and being engaged with the legal community. I am the host of the Houston Bar Association's *Behind the Lines: The Houston Lawyer Podcast*, which allows me to share discussions with lawyers and judges about emerging legal trends as well as the profession and the people who shape it. I am also on the Editorial Boards of *The Houston Lawyer*, the *Texas Bar Journal*, and the *Federal Lawyer*.

I look forward to helping you develop the skills and confidence needed to succeed in law school and the profession.

Course Objectives. In this course, you will learn how lawyers find, analyze, communicate, and apply the law to solve their client's problems. These skills will serve you throughout law school, on the bar exam, and in practice. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- (1) Understand and evaluate legal authority, including its hierarchy, precedential value, and role in legal analysis.
- (2) Identify legal issues, conduct efficient legal research, and synthesize legal rules from multiple sources.
- (3) Apply legal rules and precedent to analyze and resolve client problems.
- (4) Communicate legal analysis through clear, concise, well-organized professional writing.
- (5) Use legal citation, grammar, style, and other conventions of professional legal communication effectively.
- (6) Exercise sound professional judgment by recognizing the relationship among substantive law, procedure, ethics, and client representation.
- (7) Use artificial intelligence and other legal technologies responsibly and effectively as tools to enhance—rather than replace—critical reading, analytical reasoning, and professional decision-making.

Textbooks. The texts for this class include:

- (1) **Required:** David S. Romantz & Kathleen Elliott Vinson, *Legal Analysis: The Fundamental Skill* (4th ed. 2025).¹
- (2) **Required:** *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation* (22d ed. 2025).²
- (3) **Strongly Recommended:** *Texas Law Review Manual on Usage and Style*, available for purchase at <https://law.utexas.edu/publications/books/manual-on-usage-and-style-mous/>.
- (4) **Strongly Recommended:** Dionne E. Anthon, *The Bluebook Uncovered: A Practical Guide to Mastering Legal Citation (Twenty-Second Edition of The Bluebook)*. This free eBook is available online by clicking [here](#).

I also plan to occasionally provide supplemental materials free of charge on Canvas, our course management system.

Office Hours | Communication. Contact me as needed in person, via email (amarcher@central.uh.edu), or via text to (281) 454-3832 (google voice #). I will also hold office hours weekly on a day to be determined (room 343M).

Tutor. Tifani Watson is the tutor for LSS sections A1 and C3. She will be an invaluable resource to you as you navigate this semester. I will provide more information about the types of assistance Tifani can provide as the semester progresses. You can reach Tifani at tdwatson@cougarnet.uh.edu.

Assessment. The graded and non-graded assignments you complete throughout the semester will help you develop the analytical, research, writing, communication, and other professional skills lawyers use in practice. Most assignments consist of tasks that are commonly performed by entry-level attorneys, and these assignments should help build competence and confidence in applying legal doctrine to real-world problems. In evaluating your work, I will assess not only your legal analysis, but also your use of authority, organization, citation, grammar, and legal style.

The non-graded assignments are designed with increasing complexity and build on each other. By the end of this semester, you will use the foundational skills you have honed through these assignments to thoroughly research legal issues and clearly communicate your findings in a polished legal memorandum that will showcase your research, citation, writing, and communication skills. This memorandum may serve as a writing sample for future employers.

The graded assignments will consist of the following:

Assignment	Percentage
Midterm	25%
Partner Conference	10%
Graded Memorandum	30%
Final Exam	30%
Professionalism	5%

¹ The e-book is acceptable if you prefer to read online.

² While many students and lawyers find the online version of the Blue Book extremely helpful, you need a print copy for class.

- **Midterm (25%).** The midterm is designed to assess your progress on the legal citation, research, and analysis skills that are covered in the first half of the semester.
- **Partner Conference (10%).** The Partner Conference goes hand-in-hand with the Graded Memorandum. You will orally present your preliminary research findings to the law firm “partner” who assigned the memorandum. You will receive full credit for this assignment if you participate, prepare, and demonstrate that you have been conducting research and thinking through the issues.
- **Graded Memorandum (30%).** The graded memorandum will build on the Partner Conference assignment and allow you to showcase the research, writing, and analysis skills you have developed throughout the semester.
- **Final Examination (30%).** At the end of the semester, you will take a three-hour exam that will cover skills and concepts from the entire semester.
- **Professionalism (5%).** The professionalism component of this course is designed to encourage the habits expected of successful law students and practicing attorneys. It will therefore reflect the student’s commitment and dedication to excellence both with regard to assignments the student completes and classroom conduct. The following factors may impact your professionalism credit:
 - (1) **Non-Graded Assignments.** Assignments graded for completion must follow all instructions and demonstrate meaningful engagement with the assigned task. Your professionalism credit may be reduced if you submit work that is incomplete, if you fail to follow instructions, or if the work does not reflect genuine effort.
 - (2) **Participation.** Students are expected to participate professionally in classroom exercises and discussions, which includes taking the topics seriously and respecting your peers as they develop their communications skills and strategies. Your participation grade may be reduced if you fail to prepare for or participate professionally in class.
- **Anonymous Grading.** Eighty-five percent of your grade will be determined by entirely anonymous grading. The only components that are not anonymous are the Partner Conference and Professionalism components.

Late Assignments. Deadlines are extremely important in the legal profession. If a graded assignment is not turned in by the deadline, I will deduct 10% of your total points during each hour that your assignment is late, starting with the first hour. So, if your assignment is due at 10 am on a given day, I will deduct 10% if you submit it at 10:05 am on the due date, 20% if you submit it at 11:05 am, etc.

Curve and Grade Distribution. This course is subject to a mandatory grading curve. The average grade in each section must be between 3.2 and 3.4.

The course is also subject to the mandatory First Year Grade Distribution:

- A or A-: 5% to 30%
- B+ or B or B-: 50% to 90%
- C+ or below: 5% to 20%

Attendance. This class will meet in person at the following times and in the following rooms:

- **Section A1** is scheduled to meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30 – 4:00 p.m. in Room 260; and
- **Section C3** is scheduled to meet on Tuesdays from 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. and Thursdays from 10:30 – 12:00 p.m. in Room 200.

I will take attendance during each class session, conference, and small group meeting, and I reserve the right to count you as absent if you are not present ten minutes after the class or conference has begun. If you cannot attend a class meeting, it is your responsibility to contact me in advance (barring an emergency that prevents you from doing so). ***Under UHLC’s attendance policy, you may miss no more than 20% of scheduled class sessions during the semester.*** If you exceed this percentage, I will notify the Dean for Student Services, which could result in your dismissal from the class.

Class Administration. This class is designed to teach you the skills and strategies needed to be a successful lawyer.

Format. The style of this class will vary depending on the skills and strategies we are developing. It will include lectures, working individually, working as a group, and role-playing exercises. We also will periodically have guest speakers who will offer valuable insight.

Respect. Each student comes to law school with different life experiences and perspectives. It is essential that the classroom environment is imbued with respect for this diversity and that the students applaud and celebrate the efforts of their peers. This is a place to practice, grow, and build your professional identity. Leave any judgment at the door.

Preparation. Be prepared to discuss the material assigned for each class, whether it is related to a graded assignment or not. If we have a guest speaker, look up the speaker’s bio and be prepared to engage in the material. If you have assigned reading for a class, I will call on you at random. If you will not be prepared for class, email me before class to let me know.

Laptop Policy. We will be working on some assignments together in class, so bring your laptop to each class. However, I expect you to take your legal education, including the time you spend learning lawyering skills and strategies, seriously. Thus, using your laptop (or phone) to shop, plan your wedding, post on social media, etc. during class is strictly prohibited.

Using Generative Artificial Intelligence. Generative artificial intelligence (“AI”) is an increasingly common tool in legal practice. In this course, you will learn to use AI thoughtfully, critically, and responsibly as a professional tool. While AI will accentuate your practice as a lawyer, it is not a substitute for legal analysis, judgment, or careful reading, and those are the skills you are trying to learn this year.

Because developing strong legal skills requires independent practice, the permissible use of AI will vary by assignment. Some assignments may prohibit AI entirely, while others may permit or require its use for specified purposes.

Unless I expressly authorize its use in writing, you may not use AI to complete course assignments this semester. We are focused on teaching you the skills you will need to be able to responsibly use AI in legal practice this semester. When AI use is permitted (in writing), you remain fully responsible for the accuracy, quality, and integrity of all work submitted in your name.

Honor Code. The UHLC Honor Code applies to this course. You are responsible for knowing all Honor Code provisions and for complying with the Honor Code. Please inquire if you have any questions regarding how the Honor Code's provisions apply to this course. Your continuing enrollment in this course is deemed to be a pledge by you to comply with the Honor Code and to comply with the instructions in the course syllabus. For more information on the Honor Code, please consult the [code](#) itself.

Syllabus Updates. This syllabus **will be modified** as needed during the semester. Any changes will be announced in writing via email and Canvas.

The Fine Print.

Academic Adjustments | Auxiliary Aids. The University of Houston is committed to providing an academic environment and educational programs that are accessible for its students. Any student with a disability who is experiencing barriers to learning, assessment, or participation is encouraged to contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center to learn more about academic accommodations and support that may be available to them. Students seeking academic accommodations will need to register with the Dart Center as soon as possible to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations. Please contact the Dart Center by visiting [this website](#), calling (713) 743-5400, or emailing jdcenter@Central.uh.edu.

We ask also that you contact Samantha Ary, Academic Records Coordinator at the Law Center. Ms. Ary's office is in the Office of Student Services suite. She can be reached by [email](#) or at (713) 743-7466. Requests for accommodation that involve graded assignments should be directed to Ms. Ary as soon as possible to allow adequate time to process the request. She can assist you as you navigate the Dart Center process.

Class Recordings. I will record classes and post links to these recordings on the class web course as soon as they are available. You may use these recordings for your own studying and notetaking purposes, but please do not share them with anyone. University policy mandates that an 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

Food Insecurity. The Cougar Cupboard is available to all enrolled students who may need access to resources to support academic and personal success. Through our Cougar Cupboard, all students can get up to 30 pounds of FREE groceries a week. For more information, click [here](#).

Mental Health and Wellness Resources. The University of Houston has a number of resources to support students' mental health and overall wellness. The Student Health Center offers a Psychiatry Clinic for enrolled UH students. Call 713-743-5149 during clinic hours, Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., to schedule an appointment.

The A.D. Bruce Religion Center offers spiritual support and a variety of programs centered on well-being.

The Center for Student Advocacy and Community (CSAC) is where you can go if you need help but don't know where to start. CSAC is a "home away from home" and serves as a resource hub to help you get the resources needed to support academic and personal success. CSAC runs the Cougar Cupboard. Additionally, CSAC provides 1:1 appointments to get you connected to on- and off-campus resources related to essential needs, safety and advocacy, and more.

The Cougar Closet is a registered student organization advised by CSAC and offers free clothes to students so that all Coogs can feel good in their fit.

CSAC also hosts a series of cultural and community-based events that foster social connection and help the Cougar community come closer together. Visit the [CSAC homepage](#) or follow CSAC on Instagram: [@uh_CSAC](#) and [@uhcupbrd](#).

Need Support Now? - If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call CAPS crisis support 24/7 at 713-743-5454, or the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988, or chat 988lifeline.org.

The Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program (TLAP) also supports law students who are dealing with stress, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and other mental health problems. You can reach TLAP at any time at 1-800-343-8527. TLAP's website includes a page with links to resources about mental health that are of interest to law students: <https://www.tlaphelps.org/law-students>[Links to an external site.](#). Check it out.

Title IX/Sexual Misconduct. Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, I am a "responsible employee" for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which I become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources here on [the Title IX website](#).