

CHEAT SHEET

Essential Legal Writing

Pithy Style

Writing is a little like magic. You take ideas from your head—complex, fascinating, meaningful ideas—and you transfer those ideas into another person’s mind. Good writers can do this magic in ways that change how people see the world. Whatever you are writing: Summaries, emails to clients, litigation writing, or even transactional documents—consider these universal writing tips to level up your prose.

———— Big Style

1 The Skimming Reader

Consider how you convey major points to the skimming reader who reads only the intro, the headings, and the first sentence of each paragraph.

2 Section Context

Begin each section with a summary, or brochure, that lays out the key things to come and gets any fine print out of the way.

3 Issue Sound Off

Order your headings in a way that makes sense. More important before less important? Threshold first? General before specific?

4 Cut Your Big-Picture Darlings

Points, arguments, sections, or concepts that don’t further your goal should be cut. Consider whether any big points or sections can be snipped.

5 Weave Themes

You can always cobble together a theme. These help glue everything together for your reader. Don’t be afraid to have a couple, if helpful.

6 List to Win

Are there any places where you list items or points? If so, considering using bullet points or a numbered list.

7 Focus Sections

Sections should be fairly short. Use subheadings any time they would create more manageable, bite-sized sections for readers.

8**Heads You Win**

Craft headings that deliver the key content from each section. But also make sure your headings stay short, readable, and pithy.

9**Prism Sentences**

Begin paragraphs with a sentence that distills its persuasive pitch. If you could tell your reader only one thing from that paragraph, what would it be?

10**Macro Transitions**

Check every paragraph and section for flow. You can use transition words, echo words, or just obvious references as transitions.

11**Check Yourself**

Think through what question your reader will have after each paragraph—the next paragraph should answer that question.

12**Sentence Variety**

Short, medium, and a few long sentences (overall average 20 words or less) is preferable. Short, simple, and some variety is the sweet spot.

13**Change Up the Structure**

Vary your sentence structure, not just length. This means using punctuation and clauses to achieve readable variety.

14**End Paragraphs Strong**

The end of paragraphs, and sections, are where you can make your final, poignant points.

15**Focus Paragraphs**

Ask yourself what specific takeaway you want your readers to see in each paragraph. Then build the paragraph around that single takeaway.

16**Footnote Smartly**

Realize that most readers won't make it to the footnotes. That said, footnotes can be useful for things like buttressing a point.

17**Recaps and Summaries**

Regularly roadmap where you are and where you've been. Short summaries can also do wonders in helping readers remember your key points.

Small Style

1 The Content Words

Every extra word is a chance to lose your reader. Focus your sentences on content words that deliver unique content to your reader. Cut the fluff.

2 One-Idea Sentences

Are most of your sentences simple? Are there any complex ones you can break up with a period? Usually, one specific idea is plenty for a sentence.

3 Sentence Ends

Do the end of your sentences land on strong points? Try to end sentences, especially important ones, with concrete words you care about—not fluff.

4 Subordinate Sentences

If you need multiple ideas in a sentence, use logical connectors like **because**, **even so**, **before**, and **after** that show your reader the relationship.

5 Short Words

One easy way to make your sentences more readable is to limit the number of multi-syllable words you use in each. Look for clumps of syllables.

6 Actively Passive

Use passive voice only with a reason: like when you want to deemphasize an actor or focus on an event more than the subject.

7 Noun Traffic Jam

Check for nouns clumped together in abstract noun phrases. These are hard for readers to visualize. So break them up.

8 Quote Purposely

Use quotes only with a purpose, lead readers into them, and maintain your own sentence structure and voice as much as you can.

9 Short Sentence Punch

Consider using an occasional short sentence to break up paragraph flow and highlight a key, concluding point.

10 **Block with Care**

Most readers hate indiscriminate block quoting. If you truly feel like you need one, summarize it first so readers can skip it if they prefer to.

11 **Welcoming Sentences**

Use shorter and more familiar words to welcome readers into each sentence. The shorter, simpler, and more familiar, the better.

12 **Smart Subjects**

Avoid many introductory phrases that push your subject to the middle of the sentence. Start a good chunk of sentences with your subject.

13 **Parallel Parking**

Keep related items in your sentence (or across sentences) in the same structure. Same verb form, modifier form, and so on.

14 **Family Gaps**

Keep related words together and cut the gaps. So keep subjects, verbs, and objects close together; keep modifying words near what they modify.

15 **Legalese**

Always check for those lawyer-specific words that are redundant or clunky and can be replaced by your own flowing prose.

16 **Red-Flagging**

Check for the big red flags that signal wordiness, like "of," "is it," "the fact that," and so on. Use the Write.law list or make your own.

17 **Cut Characterizations**

Avoid telling readers your subjective opinion about facts, instead show them. Telling a decision-maker that there was "extensive delay" is as unpersuasive as telling them the injuries were "horrible." Use details.

18 **Cut Directives**

Readers like being guided to their conclusions, not pushed. No need to tell readers to "look to" X or "consider" Y. Just tell a story that wins them over.

19 **Verbs That Burst**

Cut state-of-being verbs like "is" and nominalizations like "determined." Concrete, specific, evocative verbs will create visual images (scrutinize, dissect, capture) that will stick with readers and engage them.

20 **Don't Be Tense**

Prefer the singular, positive, and present tense when possible. These tenses are simple and consistent for readers.

21 **Acronym Headaches**

Readers hate unfamiliar acronyms. Use simple and descriptive names for parties or entities. Unless it's something like FBI that is common usage.

22 **Cut Descriptors**

Employ adjectives and adverbs only when they contribute new information to a sentence; get your nouns and verbs to do most of your descriptive work.

23 **Awkward Repeats**

Avoid using the same non-nouns in nearby sentences or paragraphs. When you echo words without purpose, it often distracts readers.

24 **Naming Day**

Can you give any statutes or other complex concepts a name to be easier on your reader? This goes for legal concepts, facts, or anything else.

25 **Transitioning to Success**

Use short and varied transitions from sentence to sentence. Echo words connect sentences well, as do logical connectors like "even if."

26 **Word Diversity**

Avoid repeating the same lead-in words, like "the party claims" again and again. Add some spice by changing sentence forms and word choice.

27 **Dialogue**

Dialoguing directly with your reader can be a powerful way to engage and connect. Consider using hypotheticals, commands like "imagine" and "take," and other tools for drumming up a conversation with readers.

28 **Punctuation Power**

Use punctuation to emphasize, contrast, and sort ideas. Em dashes highlight, colons explain, parentheses deemphasize, and semicolons connect.

29 **Rhetorical Flourishes**

Use advanced style moves to engage readers and help your best points, facts, and law stand out from the background. Figurative language, echo words, example clusters, and more will help you pack a punch.

Punctuation

1 The Art of Punctuation

Use punctuation to control rhythm and add variety in every piece of writing. Do this by varying your punctuation and following most of the rules, most of the time.

2 Apostrophes

The possessive of a singular noun is formed by adding an apostrophe and s. A plural noun takes an apostrophe when the noun ends in s, and both an apostrophe and s when it ends in a letter other than s. Like: Texas's court system. Collective nouns are treated singularly. Like: team, family, and board. Use a single apostrophe when two subjects both share the same trait: Susie and Joe's religion (if they are both the same); Susie's and Joe's religions (if they have different ones). Use

Semicolons

3 These separate two independent clauses or list items when the items have commas within them. Use semicolons to contrast or compare the ideas in each clause.

4 Em Dashes

These powerfully emphasize whatever you put between or after them. So use this mark with care when you want to highlight a point. Use them to set off an interjecting phrase or clause or to set off a point at the end of a sentence.

5 Colons

These separate a first point from a second point: When the second point explains or clarifies the first.

6 Commas

Know what these do so you can avoid misplacing them. Commas separate two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction like "and," they separate list items and dates, and they are used to set off intro phrases, interjecting phrases, and, sometimes, a phrase at the end of a sentence.

7 Parenthesis

These deemphasize whatever you put in them. So use them to add asides and color, but not when you want your reader to pay close attention.

Design

1 White Space

Check for visual appeal on each page. Can you break up sections or pages to make your headings and sections stand out more strikingly?

2 Orphans

Avoid orphaned headings: Headings at the bottom of the page with no text below it.

3 Line Spacing

Check court rules of course, but unless you are hand-editing, most authorities suggest about 1.5 spacing.

4 The One-Space-Two-Space Question

Double-spacing after periods comes from outdated typewriter conventions. Modern fonts are designed for single spaces after periods.

5 Heading Numbers

Many are loving the modern approach to heading numbers that actually use numbers (1.1, 1.2, and so on). Whatever you choose, be consistent.

6 Lists, Bullets, and Subheadings

Numbered lists, bullets, and subheadings are all helpful to readers. Use them to make your writing more visual.

7 Emphasis

Many lawyers overemphasize, filling their documents with underlined words, sentences, and even paragraphs. Save the emphasis for the special times you need it. And stick to bold or italics—not underline.

8 Typeface

Consider upping your typeface game: you can download custom fonts and install them in a snap. Prefer clean fonts made for digital reading.

9 Visuals

Don't forget the power of visuals: Would a graph, chart, index, glossary, or any other visual help your reader? You don't always need a visual, but when you're conveying lots of details, they can do wonders.

Introductions

1 First Impression

This is your first impression on your reader; you will be judged by how you meet them. Style is crucial. Show off your writing chops.

2 Welcome to My Pitch

It often helps to start intros with an aerial sentence orienting the reader to what this case or matter is about. Readers are busy; get them up to speed.

3 Prime Time

Consider how you can prime your reader with a theme or policy point that will get them in a helpful emotional place as they dig in to your document.

4 Roadmap

Give readers a high-level guide through the rest of your document. With this framework in place, they will breeze through each section.

5 End with a Bang

Don't fizzle at the end of your introduction. Leave readers with a powerful final image or point that sticks with them as they delve deeper into the document.

Building Your Story

1 **Movie Trailers**

Do you start with a movie-trailer paragraph that lays out the bones of the story? A quick and pithy summary of the story does wonders to prime.

2 **Fill In Gaps**

Plug any major plot holes that will leave readers scratching their heads. Plot holes distract us all. Why was your client even there that night?

3 **Specific Facts for Specific Purposes**

Include specific facts (like dates, amounts, times, and names) only when there's a purpose. Otherwise, you're just distracting readers with details.

4 **Fact-First Sentences**

Consider using the first sentence in a fact paragraph to sum up its main takeaway for your reader.

5 **Fact Headings**

Use headings to set up scenes and create useful categories so that readers can consume all the facts easier.

6 **Use Details to Build Images**

Use choice details to build images for readers; avoid characterizing or telling readers what the facts mean.

7 **Pace Perfect**

Slow down and set up key events in detail. Quickly speed through less helpful events. Control the pacing so that readers focus on the facts that you care about most.

8 **Engage the Senses**

Use vivid verbs, choice nouns, and imagery to engage your readers and sweep them into the story.

9 **Classic Storytelling**

Introduce your characters smartly, direct readers through events, and generally play the director to keep the story cohesive and compelling.

CHEAT SHEET

Transitions

1

PROVIDING AN EXAMPLE

- As an example
- As in
- By way of example
- First, second, third, etc
- For example
- For instance
- For one thing
- Imagine
- Including
- In that regard
- Like
- Say
- Such as
- Suppose
- Take
- To illustrate

3

REDIRECTING

- At any rate
- (Even) more to the point
- In all events
- In any event
- For all that
- Of course
- On the other hand
- Otherwise
- Still
- That said
- Though some might argue
- To be sure
- True enough

2

CONCEDING OR ASSUMING A POINT

- All of that may be true, but
- All the same
- Although
- At least
- At the same time
- Even assuming
- Even if
- Even so
- Even still
- Even though
- Even under

4

TO EMPHASIZE OR EXPAND

- Above all
- All the more because
- In fact
- In other words
- All the more reason
- All the more X because y
- By extension
- Especially
- Even more (so)
- If anything
- In effect
- In particular
- Indeed
- Not only X, but (also) Y
- Particularly
- Put another way
- Put differently
- Simply put

5

TO CONCLUDE

- Accordingly
- All in all
- Consequently
- Hence
- In brief
- In conclusion
- In short
- In sum
- In summary
- In the end
- Then
- Therefore
- Thus
- To summarize

7

TO SHOW CAUSE AND EFFECT

- And so
- And therefore
- And thus
- As a result
- Because
- For
- For that reason
- In consequence

6

TO EXTRACT THE ESSENCE

- At bottom
- At its core
- At its root
- In effect
- In essence
- In the end
- The bottom line is that

8

TO DRAW AN ANALOGY OR COMPARISON

- As in X, Y
- As with X, Y
- By analogy
- By extension
- Here
- In each case
- In like manner
- In the same way
- Just as X, so Y
- Like X, Y
- Likewise
- Similarly
- So too here
- So too with

9

TO DRAW A CONTRAST

- At the same time
- But
- By contrast
- Despite
- For all that
- However
- In contrast
- In the meantime
- On that basis
- So
- That is why
- To that end
- To this end
- With that in mind
- Instead
- Nevertheless
- Not
- Rather
- Unlike (in)
- Yet

CHEAT SHEET



Writing Style Foundations

Legal Writing Conventions

The plain language movement is about using simpler words and sentences, cutting the legalese and the over rot, tossing out traditional writing formalities to some extent.

Let's talk about the most common conventions of a modern approach to legal writing.

First, replace long, or redundant, or obtuse phrases with simpler words. Long, formal words and dense sentences cause confusion for readers. Not only shorter sentences and words are helpful, but shorter paragraphs are too. They are going to help readers keep each major point distinct, and it means fewer complex ideas for the reader to navigate at a time.

-  “Hereinafter, such matters aforementioned shall be restricted.”
-  “The matters are no longer allowed.”

Likewise, instead of listing facts and drab details in your writing, whether a brief or letter, consider a more story-like structure that centers on parties, events, and witnesses that people can envision.

It's okay to start a sentence with a short conjunction like “and” or “but.” The same goes for “because.” Some of the most famous and effective legal writers do it constantly to transition more effectively. It's much quicker and easier for readers than using those long, boring furthermores.

In general, yes, you want to avoid splitting infinitives but do so if it's going to be clear for your readers. Although there are still holdouts in the legal field, most experts agree it's best to use just one space after a period. The two-space convention is a holdover from back before we had modern word processors. And there's no need to follow a written-out number with a digit in parentheses.

-  “I bought three (3) cookies today.”

You can end sentences with prepositions if it's part of an expression or clearer for readers, although most writers still avoid it generally.

And finally, the contractions debate. Legal writers are beginning to use more contractions, but many folks still frown on that. So don't be surprised if you start seeing the occasional contraction penned by great legal writers, but also, make sure to follow your team's conventions and preferences.

Mastering Active Voice

One of the simple ways to improve your writing is to prefer the active voice and only use the passive in rare situations where it's helpful. The active voice is more concise and easier to read.

In the passive voice, something acts on the subject; in the active voice, the subject does the acting. In the active voice, the subject usually goes before the verb.

Sometimes it can be hard to spot passive sentences. One simple tool is to look for the word "by," which often signals the passive voice. Another simple trick is to add a "by" phrase after the verb—if the sentence is grammatical with the by phrase, it's probably written in the passive voice.

"The ball was dropped by the judge."

"The dog was sued by the Plaintiff."

"Dogs are loved by people."

Here are those sentences re-written in the active voice.

"The judge dropped the ball."

"The Plaintiff sued the dog."

"People love cats."

Sometimes it's good to use the passive voice tactically. For example, to:

Focus on the recipient of the action.

Sometimes you want to focus on the person who receives the action, rather than the actor. In the below example, we don't care *who* released the plaintiff; we just want to focus on what happened to her.

"The plaintiff was later released from custody and taken by her family to a hospital, where she was treated for several emotional ailments. City of Canton v. Harris, 489 U.S. 378, 380 (1989)."

Focus on an Action or Deemphasize the Actor

In some circumstances, you might want to deemphasize the actor. Like if you don't want the reader to focus on a bad act that was committed.

“When the lights went out, several punches were thrown.”

Unimportant Actor

Sometimes the actor is not important and would just be a distraction. In the below example, the person who chained the people up is not important.

“In Plato's cave, people were chained to a wall and forced to stare at a two-dimensional reality.”

Unknown Actor

Sometimes you don't know who the actor was.



“The Plaintiff was battered.”

To Transition Well

Sometimes passive voice can help more smoothly transition from other sentences or paragraphs.

“Attorneys can't seem to understand their clients' needs. But these needs should be given priority above all else.”

But switching from passive to active (or vice versa) in the same sentence can be jarring and confusing so be careful.

-  “Judges say they can't read each motion, but attorneys seem to be filing more papers.”
-  “Judges say they can't read each motion, but attorneys keep filing more papers.”

Redundancy, Wordiness, and Obvious Additions

Avoid redundant phrases, they just distract and create clutter.

“This agreement is null and void, your honor!”

“Null and void” means the same thing as just “void” so go with that.

- “But plaintiff can’t sue here because it was a free gift.”
- “But plaintiff can’t sue here because it was a gift.”

Watch out for these common redundancies and cut the clutter.

Next, get good at spotting wordy phrases that legal writers love using. They could be replaced by just a simple word or two.

- “The judge held with regards to standing that no showing was needed.”
- “The judge held on standing no showing was needed.”

Finally, avoid using extra words when the meaning is already obvious without them.

“Namely” and “specifically” are two legal writing favorites.

- “The court explained no showing was needed. Namely, no money must be alleged in the complaint.”
- “The court explained no showing was needed: No money must be alleged in the complaint.”

That “namely” is not adding anything for your reader.

Avoid these excess words that just come off as empty formalisms.

Typography

Choose these wisely:

- Font
- Line spacing
- Footnote arrangement
- Emphasis type
- Paragraph spacing
- Margins

Also check other aspects, like heading formatting, kerning, and smart quotes.

———— **Verb Tense**

Readers usually prefer the present, positive, and singular verb tenses and forms.

———— **Beware of Acronyms**

Long, unfamiliar acronyms are big distracters and make your story clunky.

———— **Subordination**

When you need two ideas together in a sentence, try to subordinate them—in other words, tell your reader the logical relationship between the ideas.

To subordinate ideas, use connectors like “because,” “when,” “resulting,” “causing,” “after,” and so on.

———— **Gendered Pronouns**

Rewrite sentences to avoid gendered language. That's usually the easiest way to deal with this thorny area.

Alternatively, consider using “they” as a singular. It's becoming increasingly popular.

———— **Writing Precisely**

Avoid using imprecise words: Words that don't make clear what they refer to or what idea they are trying to convey.

✓ Appears

✓ Indicate

✓ Concerning

✓ Seems

✓ Regarding

✓ Apparently

✓ Suggestive

———— **Common Clutter Words**

Some words would often signal that there's clutter hiding in your sentences ripe for the cutting. When you spot one of these telltale words or phrases, you'll usually be better off trying to rebuild your sentences.

You'll usually find a better sentence structure or word choice that'll get your point across smoother.

“or”

Our first clutter culprit is the word “or” which in legal writing especially often signals that you have a redundant phrase or clause.

“Terminate the employment relationship at any time for any cause or reason.”



We don't need “cause or reason” to mean the same thing.

“If you have questions or need further clarification please let me know.”

Those “or’s” will often signal redundancy and you can usually just cut one of the options.



“It”

“It” is often excessive, especially when it's at the start of the sentence.



-  “It was not until after the trial that I learned who it was that had made the statement.”
-  “I did not learn until after the trial who made the statement.”

Prepositions

Prepositions are a big sign of clutter, especially the word “of”

-  “In this discussion of the issue, Disney recognized...”
-  “Disney did not recognize...”

You can't always remove that “of” but about eight or nine times out of ten, you're going to find a better and more direct way to say what you're trying to say without the “of” Finally, “there” is another clutter word.

-  “There are problems with the lease.”
-  “The lease has problems.”

Choosing Smart Subjects

Start at least a third to half your sentences with your subject within the first several words.

Rarely (if ever) put your subject more than five or six words after the start of your sentence.

Legalese, Latin, and Cliches

For hundreds of years we've developed tons of legal-sounding terms that are no longer helpful. Avoid these legal terms or latin, unless they are helpful terms of art for some reason, which is pretty darn rare. And the same goes for overused cliches, trait language, and vague phrases. Cut them and just use your own specific direct language.

When we talk about legalese, we're talking about those overly formal legal words that we see all the time in legal writing like:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| ✓ Above captioned | ✓ Hereof |
| ✓ Aforementioned | ✓ Hereto |
| ✓ Comes now | ✓ Thereby |
| ✓ Forthwith | ✓ To wit |
| ✓ Herein | ✓ Whereas |

There's literally no reason for this legalese and readers don't enjoy it.

Another holdover are Latin terms like:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| ✓ Ab initio | ✓ Inter alia |
| ✓ Arguendo | ✓ Sub judice |
| ✓ A priori | ✓ Supra |
| ✓ Caveat | ✓ Per se |
| ✓ Infra | ✓ Vel non |

Every now and then, some term is used with particular legal significance to some sort of legal test, but otherwise, cut this Latin. It's not how we speak, it's not how we think, and it's not helpful to your readers.

Cutting the overused words doesn't end with the legal, cliches and trite phrases are just as unhelpful. Things like

- ✓ A diamond in the rough
- ✓ The bottom line
- ✓ Argument misses the mark
- ✓ Time will tell

None of these are clever or creative, and unless you can come up with some figurative language on your own that gets your point across, cut cliches like these.

A Footnote to Footnotes

Unless you're footnoting your citations (which can be powerful), use footnotes as asides and don't expect them to be read carefully. Use them to:

- ✓ Prove a point is well established without crowding prose.
- ✓ Further distinguish authorities.
- ✓ Counter objections that aren't worth your time.
- ✓ Buttress points.

CHEAT SHEET

Red Flag Words

Red Flag Words

Red-Flag Words	Examples
“-ing” words	-ing words signal excess descriptors, like “holding” vs. “held”
“-ly” words	You can usually cut -ly words like basically, essentially, merely, apparently, presently, effectively. (This also includes words like just and given.) “Basically, the defendant loses.” “The defendant loses.”
Afford an opportunity	Try: “allow,” “let”
Aforesaid, Aforementioned	Cut. Just cut.
As a means of	Try: “to”
As such	Try: “thus” or “therefore,” within the sentence: “As such, the claim is brought under Rule 14.” “The claim is thus brought under Rule 14.”
As to	Try: “on” or “about”
Assists	Try: “helps”
At this point in time	Try: “now”
By phrases	“By” phrases often signal weak passive voice. If so, rewrite them in the active voice.

Red-Flag Words	Examples
	<p>“The drugs were found by police.”</p> <p>“Police found the drugs.”</p>
Demonstrates	Try: “shows or proves”
Devoid	Try: “lacks”
Due to / Due to the fact that	Try: “because” or “from”
Due to the fact	Try: “because”
During the period	Try: “during”
Even assuming	Try: “even if”
Given that	Try: “because”
Has a requirement for	Try: “needs”
In accordance with	Try: “by,” “following,” “per,” “under”
In favor of	Try: “favor”
In order to	Try: “to”
In the event that	Try: “if”
In the near future	Try: “shortly,” “soon”

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Inasmuch as	Try: “because”
Inter alia	Try: “among other things”
It is	<p>Try replacing “it is” with the verb that follows.</p> <p>“It is interesting to note ...”</p> <p>“Note that ...”</p> <p>-----</p> <p>“It is important to remember that ...”</p> <p>“Remember that ...”</p>
Moreover, additionally, furthermore	Try: “also”
Namely / <i>i.e.</i>	Drop it
No later than June 1	Try: “by June 1”
Of (and other prepositions)	<p>An easy way to cut prepositions (especially “of”) is to look for opportunities to make something possessive. The car of your neighbor is really just your neighbor’s car.</p> <p>Not: “We will now hear arguments of counsel.”</p> <p>Instead: “We will now hear counsel’s arguments.”</p>
Prior to	Try: “before”
Provides guidance for	Try: “guides”

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Pursuant to	Try: “under,” “per”
Regarding / concerning / pertaining to	Try: “on,” “about,” or “with”
Relied upon	Try: “on”
Said, such	Try: “the” or “this”
Set forth	You can usually cut it and just say “above” (or even better, refer to something specific)
Specifically	<p>Drop it</p> <p>“Jory violated the rules. Specifically, he flouted Rule 23.”</p> <p>“Jory flouted Rule 23.”</p>
Subsequent to	Try: “after”
Terminate	Try: “end” or “fire”
The instant case	Try: “here” or cut it
There is/are	Replace with concrete verbs. And cut the “there” unless you are using it to shift emphasis to a different part of the sentence.
Things	<p>Replace “thing” with a specific noun, when possible.</p> <p>“The defendant ignored lots of things.”</p>

Red-Flag Words	Examples
	<p>“The defendant ignored the standing argument, and he ignores the Rule 12 argument, too.”</p>
<p>To the extent / in the event</p>	<p>Try: “if” or “even”</p>
<p>To wit, arguendo, hereinafter, therefrom, hereby, or other Latin words</p>	<p>Avoid altogether unless you have a good reason</p>
<p>Under the provisions of</p>	<p>Try: “under”</p>
<p>Until such time as</p>	<p>Try: “until”</p>
<p>Where</p>	<p>Try: “when” or “if”</p>
<p>With reference to</p>	<p>Try: “about”</p>
<p>With the exception of</p>	<p>Try: “except”</p>

More Red Flag Words

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Additional	More, added, other, extra another
Approximately	About, roughly, almost, around, close to, nearly, or so
A number of	Some
Access (as verb)	Get, reach
Accommodate	Fit, hold, adapt, house, adjust, help, grant, allow
Accommodation	Home, house, room, homes
Accompany	Go with, escort, attend, belong to
Accomplish	Do, achieve, perform, succeed, carry out
Accorded	Given
Accordingly	So
Accrue	Add, gain
Accurate	Correct, exact, right
Acquire	Get, buy, win, gain, earn pick up
Additionally	And, also

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Address	Discuss
Addressees	You
Adequate (number of)	Enough, satisfactory, acceptable
Adjacent to	Next to
Adjust, adjustment	Change
Advantageous	Helpful
Adversely impact on	Hurt, set back
Advise	Tell, recommend
Afford	Give
Afford an opportunity	Allow, let
Aforementioned	That/these
Aircraft	Plane
Alter, alteration	Change
Alternative	Other
Ameliorate	Better, make better, improve

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Amidst	Amid
Amongst	Among
Analogous	Similar
Anticipate	Expect
Apparent	Clear, plain
Append	Attach, add
Appreciable	Many
Apprise	Tell, advise
Appropriate (as adj.)	Proper, right, fitting, suitable, apt, correct
Approximate	About
Arrive onboard	Arrive
As a means of	To
As prescribed by	In, under
As to	About, of, by, for, in
Ascertain	Check, be sure, find out, discover, learn

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Assist	Help, aid, back, relieve
Assistance	Help, aid, backing, support, relief
Attain	Reach, succeed, meet, gain, win, arrive at, grasp
Attempt (as verb)	Try, take on
Attired	Dressed, clothed
Augment	Increase, make larger
Basically	Delete or us mainly, most, mostly, chiefly, largely
Be advised	Delete
Benefit	Help
By means of	By, with
Capability	Ability
Category	Group
Caveat	Warning
Cease	End, stop, finish
Close proximity	Near

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Cognizant	Aware, knowing
Combined	Joint
Commence	Begin, start open
Commencement	Beginning, start
Communicate	Write, talk
Compensation	Pay, payment
Complete	Finish
Comply with	Follow
Component	Part, ingredient, item, unit
Comprise	Consist of, contain
Conceal	Hide, cloak, cover, disguise, mask, shelter, veil
Concept	Idea
Concerning	About, on, for, as for, in, of, over, with
Consequence	Result, effect, outcome, importance, note, weight
Consolidate	Combine, join, merge

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Constitute	Make up, be, compose, form, set up, frame
Construct	Build, make, erect, set up, compose, form, frame, model
Container	Bottle, jar, package
Contain	Has
Convene	Meet
Cooperate	Help
Currently	Now, today
Customary	Usual, ordinary, normal, routine, regular
Deem	Consider, think, treat as, believe, judge, view
Delete	Cut, drop
Demise	Death
Demonstrate	Show, prove, display, explain, teach march
Denote	Show, say, mark, note, mean, stand for
Depart	Leave, go
Designate	Appoint, set, name, label, choose, earmark, show

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Desire	Need, want, wish
Desist	Stop, suspend, end, give up
Detain	Hold
Determine	Figure out, learn, find out, fit, decide, settle, end, control, fix, discover
Diminutive	Small, tiny, little
Disclose	Show
Discontinue	Drop, stop
Disseminate	Send out, spread, scatter, give, issue, pass
Donate	Give, grant, present
Due to the fact that	Due to, since
Duplicate (as a verb)	Copy, double, repeal, multiply
During the period	During
E.g. (exempli gratia)	For example
Effect modifications	Make changes
Effectuate	Carry out, bring about, achieve, realize, cause

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Elect	Choose, pick
Eliminate	Cut, drop, end, get rid of, remove, erase, expel, cancel, cut out
Employ	Use
Enclosed please find	I have enclosed
Encounter (as a verb)	Meet, run into, face
Endeavor (as a verb)	Try, carry out
Enumerate	List, name, count, number
Equitable	Fair
Establish	Set up, prove, show
Et al. (et alibi, et alii)	And others, and elsewhere
Etc. (et cetera)	And others, and the like, and the rest
Evidenced	Showed
Evident	Clear
Evince	Show, reveal
Exhibit	Show

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Expedite	Hasten, speed up, hurry
Expeditious	Fast, quick
Expend	Spend, use, pay
Expenditure	Expense, cost, spending, outlay, charge, payment
Expertise	Ability
Expiration	End, close, finish, death
Facilitate	Help, ease, make easy, make easier, simplify, promote
Facility	Base, building, factory, laboratory, office, plant, warehouse (be specific or omit)
Factor	Part, fact, feature, condition, circumstances, reason, cause (be specific or omit)
Failed to	Didn't
Feasible	Possible, probable, likely, workable
Feedback	Comments, response, opinions
Females/males	Women/men
Finalize	Finish, end, complete, settle, wrap up

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Following (as a preposition)	After
For a period of	For
Forfeit	Give up, lose
Formulate	Devise, develop, form, make, work out, draw up, draft, frame, create, express, plan
Forward (as a verb)	Send
Frequently	Often
Function	Act, role, work
Fundamental	Basic
Furnish	Give, send, provide, supply, equip
Has a requirement for	Needs
Hence	So, from now, from here
Henceforth	From now on, from now
Hereafter; herein, herewith; heretofore	From now on or later for hereafter; here is (are), with this or in this for herein and herewith; up to now, earlier, before or until now for heretofore

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Hereby	Omit
Herein	In this, here
Hereinafter	Below
Hereto	Omit
Hereunder	Under this, below this
Herewith	Below, here
Hosted	Gave, entertained
However	But
I.e.	That is
Identical	Same
Identify	Find, name, show
Immediately	At once
Impact (as a verb)	Affect, influence, change
Implement	Carry out, achieve, do, follow, fulfill, make, produce, put in place, put into use, realize, set, set up, complete, impose (as a verb); tool (as noun)

Red-Flag Words	Examples
In a timely manner	On time, promptly
In addition	Also, besides, too
In all likelihood	Likely, probably
In an effort to	To
In lieu of	Instead of
In the amount of	For
In the event of	If
In the process of	Omit
In view of	Since
Inasmuch as	Since
Inception	Beginning, start, birth
Incombustible	Fireproof
Incumbent upon	Must
Indicate	Say, show, suggest, feel, hint, mention, point at, tell, mark, signal, point out, point to, read
Indication	Sign, signal, mark, hint, suggestion

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Individual, individuals	Person, people, man, men, woman, women, anyone, everyone, someone
Inform	Tell
Initial	First
Initiate	Begin, introduce, open, start, cause, launch, set up, introduce, admit
Input, output, throughput	Input: advice, clout, comments, effort, ideas, opinions, thoughts, views; output: work, product, byproduct, result; throughput: material
Inquire (about)	Ask
Instant case	Here, this case
Institute (as a verb)	Begin, start, set up, introduce, create, found
Inter alia	Among other things
Interface	Interact, meet, collaborate, work together, link, contact
Interpose no objection	Don't object
Is applicable to	Applies to
Is authorized to	May

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Is in consonance with	Agrees with, follows
Is responsible for	Omit or handles
It appears	Seems or omit
It is essential	Must, need to
It is requested	Please, we request, I request
Let me offer an explanation of the cause.	Let me explain why
Locality, location	Area, city, district, locale, place, point, site, spot, town, zone, neighborhood
Magnitude	Size, extent, importance, greatness
Maintain	Keep, support
Manner	Way
Materialize	Appear, develop, happen, occur, turn up, come about
Maximum	Most, largest, greatest
Methodology	Methods, principles, procedure
Minimize	Decrease

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Minimum	Least, smallest
Minuscule	Tiny
Mitigate	Moderate, ease, soften, relieve, reduce
Modify; modifications	Change, vary, adapt, adjust; changes, variations, adjustments
Monies, moneys	Funds, money, cash
Monitor	Check, watch
Moreover	Besides, also
Necessitate	Require, demand, exact, must, need, force, compel, make, call, call for
Necessity	Need
Nevertheless	Anyhow, but, even so, however, still, yet
Not later than 10 may	By 10 May, before 11 May
Notification	Notice, warning, advice, announcement
Notify	Let know, tell
Notwithstanding	Still

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Numerous	Many, countless, endless, several, untold (or be more specific)
Objective	Aim, goal
Obligated	Bound, compelled
Obligation	Debt, duty, bond, contract, tie, favor
Observe	See, watch, note, view, follow, keep, obey, remark
Obtain	Get, earn, gain, buy, exist, hold, stand
Obviate	Avoid
On a regular basis	Omit
Ongoing	Continuing, under way, active, constant, advancing, current, growing, endless, lasting
Operate	Use, work, run, perform, act, go, handle, manage, cause, keep
Operational	Active, live, running, working
Optimal, optimum	Best, ideal, model, greatest, most, peak
Option	Choice, way
Orientate	Orient

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Overall	Total, complete, general
Paradigm	Pattern, example, model
Parameter	Limit, boundary, guideline, extent, perimeter, properties, conditions, characteristics, feature
Per annum	Per year, a year, annually
Per your request	As you asked
Perform	Do
Permit	Let, allow
Pertaining to	About, of, on
Peruse	Read with care, review, study, examine, inspect
Place (as a verb)	Put
Portion	Part
Possess	Have, own, control, hold, take, take over
Possibility	Chance
Practicable	Practical
Preclude	Prevent

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Preplan, preplanning	Plan, planning
Present (as a verb)	Give, introduce, show
Presently	Soon, now
Preserve	Keep
Previous/ly	Earlier, before
Principal	Main, chief
Prior/to	Earlier, before
Prioritize	Arrange, list, order, rank, rate, set priorities
Proceed	Go, go ahead, continue, go on, move, run, walk, advance
Procure	Get, buy, gain, win, find, or omit
Proficiency	Skill
Promulgate	Issue, publish
Provide	Give, offer, say
Provided that	If
Provides guidance for	Guides

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Purchase	Buy
Purchase (as a verb)	Buy
Pursuant to	By, following, per, under
Pursuant to our conversation	As we discussed
Receive	Accept, get
Reflect	Say, show
Regarding	About, of, on, for, as for, in, over, to, toward, with
Relate (to)	Say, show, tell
Relative to	About, on
Relocate	Move
Remain	Stay
Remainder	Rest, remains, excess, surplus, balance
Remove	Take away, haul away
Remunerate	Pay

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Render	Make, give, deliver, hand over, present, send in, pay, show
Reoccur	Recur
Represents	Is
Reproduce	Copy
Request (as a verb)	Ask, seek, question
Require	Must, need
Requirement	Need
Reside	Live, stay, remain
Residences	Homes, houses, addresses
Retain	Keep, hold, save
Said, some, such	The, this, that
Same	It, them
Secure	Get
Select	Choose, pick
Selection	Choice

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Semiannually	Twice a year
Set forth	Set out, stated in, in
Shall	Will, must
Signage	Sign
Similar to	Like
Solely	Only
Solicit	Ask for, request
State	Say
Statement for professional services	Bill
State-of-the-art	Latest
Strategize	Plan
Subject	The, this, your
Submit	Give, send
Subsequent (to) (ly)	Later, after, afterward, next, since, then, following, resulting

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Substantial	Large, much
Substantiate	Back up, confirm, prove, support, verify
Successfully complete	Complete, pass
Sufficient	Enough
Summon	Send for, call, call up, call on
Supplement	Add to
Take action to	Omit
Terminate	End, stop, cancel, finish, fire, halt, close, wind up, limit
Terminate	End, stop
The month of	Omit
The undersigned	I
Thereafter	Later
Therefore	So, then, thus
Therein	In it, in them, inside
Thereof	Of, from, because of that

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Thereto	About, to that, it
Thus	So
Time period	Choose either one
Timely	Prompt
Transmit	Send, broadcast, relay, transfer, pass on, bear, carry
Transpire	Happen, occur, take place, leak out
Ultimate	Last, final, crowning, perfect, supreme, eventual
Under the provisions of	Under
Until such time as	Until
Upon	On
Use up	Use
Utilize, utilization	Use
Validate	Confirm
Viable	Practical, workable
Vice	Versus

Red-Flag Words	Examples
Virtually	Almost
Vis-a-vis	About, compared with, opposite
Warrant	Call for, permit
Whereas	Because
Whether	If
Whilst	While
With the exception of	Except for
Witnessed	Saw

CHEAT SHEET

Strong Verb Ideas

A

- Absorb
- Accelerate
- Activate
- Adapt
- Advance
- Advise
- Afflict
- Aide
- Alter
- Amend
- Amplify
- Attack

B

- Balloon
- Bash
- Batter
- Beam
- Beat
- Besiege
- Bind
- Blab
- Blast
- Bleed
- Bless
- Blink
- Block
- Bludgeon
- Bolt
- Boost
- Brandish
- Brief
- Broadcast
- Brood
- Build

- Burn
- Burst
- Bus
- Bust

C

- Capture
- Catch
- Chap
- Charge
- Chase
- Chip
- Chisel
- Clamor
- Clarify
- Climb
- Clone
- Clutch
- Coin
- Collide
- Command
- Commune
- Condemn
- Constrict
- Covet
- Cower
- Crackle
- Crash
- Crave
- Crush
- Cut against

D

- Dangle
- Dash
- Defend

- Demolish
- Denounce
- Depart
- Depict
- Deposit
- Detect
- Deviate
- Devour
- Dilute
- Direct
- Discern
- Discover
- Dismantle
- Displace
- Distill
- Dodge
- Download
- Drag
- Drain
- Drip
- Drop
- Duck
- Dupe

E

- Eavesdrop
- Echo
- Eclipse
- Elate
- Emerge
- Engineer
- Engulf
- Enhance
- Enlarge
- Ensnare
- Envelop
- Erase
- Erode

- Escort
- Etch
- Evoke
- Evolve
- Expand
- Explode
- Explore
- Expose
- Extend
- Extract
- Eyeball

F

- Falter
- Feign
- Fight
- Fish
- Flick
- Flinch
- Flout
- Fly
- Frown
- Fuse

G

- Garble
- Gaze
- Glare
- Gleam
- Glisten
- Glitter
- Gobble
- Govern
- Grasp
- Gravitate
- Grind

- Grip
- Groan
- Grope
- Group
- Growl
- Guide
- Gush

H

- Hack
- Hail
- Haul
- Heed
- Heighten
- Highlight
- Hinge
- Hobble
- Hoodwink
- Hover
- Hurry

I

- Ignite
- Illuminate
- Impart
- Inlay
- Inspect
- Instruct
- Intensify
- Intertwine

J

- Jostle
- Journey

L

- Lash
- Launch
- Lead
- Leap
- Locate
- Loom
- Lurch
- Lurk

M

- Magnify
- Mar
- Mark
- Marry
- Mask
- Meander
- Mimic
- Mince
- Mint
- Mix
- Moan
- Mock
- Model
- Modify
- Morph
- Multiply
- Muse
- Mushroom
- Mutter
- Muzzle
- Mystify

N

- Notice
- Notify

O

- Obtain
- Ooze
- Oppress
- Order

P

- Paint
- Pair
- Park
- Peck
- Peek
- Peer
- Perceive
- Perch
- Perpetuate
- Pester
- Picture
- Pilot
- Pinpoint
- Place
- Plant
- Plop
- Pluck
- Plunge
- Pocket
- Poison
- Ponder
- Pop
- Pore

- Position
- Power
- Prance
- Prickle
- Probe
- Project
- Promote
- Prune
- Pry

R

- Rage
- Realize
- Rebel
- Recite
- Recoil
- Refashion
- Refine
- Reflect
- Reinforce
- Render
- Report
- Retreat
- Reveal
- Reverberate
- Revitalize
- Revolutionize
- Revolve
- Rid
- Rip
- Rise
- Ruin
- Rush

S

- Saunter
- Savor
- Scamper
- Scan
- Scatter
- Scorch
- Scour
- Scrape
- Scrawl
- Seize
- Serve
- Sever
- Shape
- Shatter
- Shepherd
- Shimmer
- Shine
- Shock
- Shoehorn
- Short-circuit
- Shove
- Shrivel
- Shudder
- Sink
- Sizzle
- Skate
- Skip
- Skirt
- Skulk
- Slash
- Slide
- Slink
- Slip
- Slump
- Slurp
- Smack of
- Smash

- Smear
- Smite
- Snag
- Snarl
- Sneak
- Snowball
- Soar
- Spam
- Sparkle
- Split
- Spoil
- Sport
- Spread
- Spring
- Sprinkle
- Spy
- Squeeze
- Squint
- Stagger
- Stare
- Starve
- Steal
- Steer
- Stick
- Sting
- Storm
- Strain
- Stretch
- Strike
- Strip
- Stroll
- Struggle
- Stumble
- Stymie
- Sunder
- Supercharge
- Supersize
- Surge
- Survey
- Suspend

- Swell
- Swipe
- Swirl
- Swoon

T

- Tail
- Tattle
- Tease
- Teem
- Thwart
- Toddle
- Transfigure
- Transform
- Travel
- Treat
- Trim
- Trip
- Trot
- Trudge
- Tumble
- Tussle

U

- Uncover
- Unearth
- Unify
- Untangle
- Unveil
- Usher

V

- Vanish
- Veil

- View

W

- Wail
- Wander
- Weave
- Wind
- Wreck
- Wrench
- Wrest
- Wrestle
- Wring

Y

- Yank

Z

- Zap
- Zing