

## COURSE DESCRIPTION FOR

# Legal Usage for Virtuoso Legal Writers

---

Most language questions that occur to writers and speakers fall under the rubric of *usage*, which encompasses tough questions of word choice, grammar, punctuation, and even pronunciation. Whenever an otherwise competent user of a given language would pause to consider the proper selection—of word, construction, punctuation mark, or sound—a usage issue has arisen. Part of being a literate speaker or writer is knowing how to handle common language issues when they arise and how to resolve the less familiar ones by resorting to authoritative guides.

For most of the 20th century, the leading authorities were Fowler and Partridge for British English; and Bernstein and Follett for American English. (See the bibliography for full citations.) Today the leading authorities are widely considered to be my own *Garner's Modern American Usage* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Peculiarly for legal contexts are *A Dictionary of Modern Legal Usage*, *The Texas Law Review Manual of Usage and Style*, and *The Redbook: A Manual of Legal Style*. It's fair to say that 99% of all editorial questions you might have will be fully discussed in those guides.

It can be enjoyable, in fact, to check out these guides whenever your linguistic suspicions have been aroused. What's the best pronunciation of *certiorari*? Is it proper to say that someone *pleaded innocent*? And is the past tense of *plead* preferably *pleaded* or *pled*? Or perhaps *plead* (rhyming with *red*), as in *read–read*? And are *preferable* and *comparable* accented on the first or the second syllable? And is it all right to begin a sentence with *and*? And is *all right* not preferably spelled today as one word: *alright*? (No.) And when does a period go inside an end-parenthesis, as opposed to outside? And is there anything wrong with the phrase *outside of*? For the curious worker with words, the questions are almost limitless.

Fortunately, there are usage writers (or “usagists”) who have treated these questions with thorough erudition—so you needn't merely guess.

What follows are 100 questions that are either basic or intermediate. Choose what you think is the better answer for each one. Then we'll review the answers. You will be able to assess your current level of knowledge while instantly enhancing it.