

Legal Research Methodology: Technicalities in Legal Writing
Based on Oscola and Nalt Guide

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Abstract

Legal writing is technical. It is governed by technical rules. Technicalities in legal writing are the specialized techniques, structural conventions and stylistic rules used in the preparation of legal documents. Such technical issues include abstract, keywords, title, capitalization, italicization, punctuation, quotations, paragraphing, paraphrasing, abbreviations, footnotes, cross-references, pinpoint references and bibliographies. Some of these issues may overlap. For example, capitalization and quotation marks may be treated as part of punctuation. On the other hand, punctuation marks are used in quotations. As trivial as they may appear, they have great impact on legal writing. The aim of this paper is to examine technicalities in legal writing with practical examples from OSCOLA, the NALT Guide and the Australian Guide. It adopts the doctrinal research methodology. It relies on secondary data such as books, articles in journals, citation guides and internet materials.

Keywords: Abstract; Bibliographies; Cross-References; Keywords; Footnotes; Pinpoint References

1.0 Introduction

Legal writing is technical writing.¹ It is governed by technical rules. **Technicalities in legal writing** are the specialized techniques, structural conventions and stylistic rules used in legal documentation. These techniques, conventions and rules govern the preparation of legal documents and their technical components. They help legal writers to convey complex information clearly, concisely and accurately to a specific audience. Failure to observe these rules may result in abuses and blunders.

The technical components of legal documents include the title, keywords, abstract, punctuation, capitalization, italicization, quotations, paragraphing, paraphrasing, abbreviations, footnotes, cross-references, pinpoint references and bibliographies. Some of these issues may overlap. For example, capitalization and quotation marks may be treated as part of punctuation. On the other hand, punctuation marks are used in quotations. It is, however, intended to treat these issues under separate headings. As trivial as they may appear to be, failure to observe these technical rules and conventions in the preparation of legal documents will result in abuses and blunders.

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¹ YZG Chu, 'Legal Writing' [2011] <<https://www.scribd.com>> accessed 20 June 2019; Monaliza Lizts, 'Legal Writing' [2017] <<https://www.wcrbd.com>> accessed 22 July 2019; Jonnifer S Quiros, 'What Is Legal Writing?' [2017] <<https://www.scribd.com>> accessed 22 July 2019.

The aim of this paper is to examine technicalities in legal writing based on OSCOLA² and NALT Guide.³ The various technical rules, conventions and stylistic rules are examined with practical examples from OSCOLA, the NALT Guide and the Australian Guide to Legal Citation which is similar to OSCOLA in many respects. The paper adopts the doctrinal research methodology. It relies mainly on secondary data such as books, articles in journals, citation guides and internet materials.

2.0 Title

The title should precisely and concisely reflect the content of the work.⁴ It should be catchy and intriguing for the reader and should highlight the subject matter.⁵ In other words, it should stimulate the interest of readers and encourage them to read the full work.⁶

The title should be specific, short and sufficiently descriptive of the research work. It should not contain abbreviations⁷ and redundant words such as “A Study of ...” or similar words. It should be aptly expressed in less than twenty words, but preferably between ten and fifteen words.⁸

3.0 Abstract

The word **abstract** is derived from the Latin *abstractum*, which means a condensed form of a longer piece of writing. Thus, the abstract is a distillation of your research: a concise description of the problem addressed in your research, your method of resolving it, your findings and conclusion.⁹

The prime objective of an abstract is to enlighten the reader about the critical points of your research. In short, the abstract is seen as the idiomatic expression of your work. Usually, it does not contain references.¹⁰ It must be self-contained as a stand-alone-text without the need to refer to the full text.¹¹ Where reference is absolutely necessary, its details should be included in the text of the abstract.

The abstract is a very important part of reports and research papers. It is often the last item that you write, but it is the first thing people read when they want to have a quick overview of the whole paper. It is, therefore, advisable to write the abstract last, after the whole work,¹² because a clearer picture of all the findings and conclusions will only emerge at the end of the work.

² University of Oxford, *OSCOLA: Oxford Standard for the Citation of Legal Authorities* (4th edn, Hart Publishing 2012) ('OSCOLA').

³ Nigerian Association of Law Teachers, *NALT Uniform Format and Citation Guide* (NALT 2021) ('NALT Guide') 57-58.

⁴ Gill Marshall, 'Critiquing a Research Article' [2005] 11 *Radiography* 55-59, 56.

⁵ Sarah Cushieri, Victor Grech and Charles Savona-Ventura, 'WASP (Write a Scientific Paper): Structuring a Scientific Paper' [2019] 128 *Early Human Development* 114-117.

⁶ D Drummond, 'Reviewing a Research Article' [1996] 4(12) *British Journal of Occupational Therapy* 84-86.

⁷ Sarah Cushieri, Victor Grech and Charles Savona-Ventura, 'WASP (Write a Scientific Paper): Structuring a Scientific Paper' [2019] 128 *Early Human Development* 114-117. See also Gill Marshall, 'Critiquing a Research Article' [2005] 11 *Radiography* 55-59, 56.

⁸ M Monroy and H Franco and JR Garcia, 'Criteria of Formality and Structural Elements of Research Proposal' [2022] *Education Research International* 1, 2.

⁹ Sarah Cushieri (n 7) 115.

¹⁰ Sue Jenkins, 'How to Write a Paper for a Scientific Journal' [1997] 53(1) *SA Journal of Physiotherapy* 3-5, 4.

¹¹ F Ecarnot and others, 'Writing a Scientific Article: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners' [2015] 6 *European Geriatric Medicine* 573-579, 577.

¹² Sarah Cushieri (n 7) 118.

The abstract should provide brief of the context or background information, the aim and objectives of the study, methodology and method of analysis, findings, recommendations based on the findings and conclusion.¹³ It should provide an accurate recapitulation of the information within the main text. In other words, it should avoid any additional information that is not found within the main text.¹⁴

It cannot be overemphasized that the abstract is the quintessential marketing tool for any research work. The acceptable word counts for abstract vary from journal to journal and from institution to institution and the hardest part of the abstract is often shortening it sufficiently to fit with the word limit of the target journal or institution.¹⁵

However, under the NALT Guide, the abstract should not be more than 200-350 words for undergraduate long essay,¹⁶ 400-500 words for master's dissertation¹⁷ and 500-600 words for doctoral thesis¹⁸ in a single paragraph located within the preliminaries preferably the last page of the preliminaries before chapter one. Finally, the abstract should not be more than 250-300 words for article in a journal.¹⁹

The format required for structured abstracts differs from journal to journal, and some journals use more than one format. As such, legal writers need to prepare the abstracts in the format specified by the journal they have chosen. The types of abstracts and their structure have been examined in a separate treatise.²⁰

4.0 Keywords

Keywords are composed of one or two words which represent the key concepts of the work, which serve as keys to indexing and abstracting services.²¹ They should be widely accepted terms²² and should be drawn from the body of the work and not from the title.

The common number in most journals is three to six keywords. However, the number of keywords should be consistent with editorial guidelines.²³ If care is not taken to select appropriate keywords, it will be difficult to locate your work through online searches.

5.0 Paragraphing

A **paragraph** is a collection of two or more sentences developing a single topic, theme or idea. All the sentences in a paragraph should thus be related in some way and tell the reader something more about the key idea. In persuasive writing, a paragraph usually has at least three elements:²⁴

Claim + Evidence + Analysis

¹³ Ibid 115. See also NALT Guide 26.

¹⁴ Sarah Cushieri (n 7) 115.

¹⁵ Ecarnot and others (n 14) 577.

¹⁶ Ibid 15.

¹⁷ Ibid 15.

¹⁸ Ibid 16.

¹⁹ Ibid 25.

²⁰ GG Otuturu, 'Legal Research Methodology: A Practical Approach to Research Report Writing' [2025] 10(1) *Journal of Law and Global Policy* 37-53

²¹ Sarah Cushieri (n 7) 115.

²² Sue Jenkins, 'How to Write a Paper for a Scientific Journal' [1997] 53(1) *SA Journal of Physiotherapy* 3-5, 4.

²³ Gill Marshall, 'Critiquing a Research Article' [2005] 11 *Radiography* 55-59, 56.

²⁴ Harvard University, 'Anatomy of a Body Paragraph' (Harvard College Writing Centre 2025) <writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu> accessed 15 March 2026.

The sentence must start with a **claim** (or assumption), then **evidence** (or data or primary source) that supports the claim, and then gives an **analysis** (or explanation) of exactly how the evidence supports the claim. Thus, for a paragraph to be effective, it must begin with a topic sentence, have sentences that support the main idea and maintain a consistent flow.²⁵

The first sentence of a paragraph tells the reader what to expect, and it makes a claim that the rest of the paragraph will support or back up. Your readers may not necessarily agree with the claim you make in the topic sentence, so you have to convince them with evidence. To do so, you will usually use a quotation or secondary material, facts or statistics, or primary source material.²⁶

Evidence, however, is never enough to support a claim. After you give a quotation, a fact, or a primary source, you always have to show how it backs up your claim. You have to analyze the evidence and show how it directly supports your claim. The more carefully you analyze and explain the evidence and how it supports your claim, the more convincing your writing will be.²⁷

Each paragraph must end with a concluding sentence. The concluding sentence may be a brief summary of the information contained in the paragraph or a statement about the implications of that information. However, it is advisable not to end a paragraph with a transitional sentence. Introducing a transitional sentence at the end of a paragraph may confuse your readers. Such transition should appear in the topic sentence of the next paragraph.²⁸

6.0 Punctuation

Punctuation is simply a series of conventions that make it easier for readers to follow your train of thought. Good punctuation makes a sentence clear and easy to read and understand, because it shows the grammatical structure of the text, its meaning, and often the relationship between words or clauses. Thus, legal writers use punctuation as a guide to meaning.²⁹

The full stop, exclamation mark and question mark are known as closing punctuation marks. The **full stop** or **period** (.) is used to indicate the end of a declarative sentence or footnote. It should not be used in abbreviations, after initials.³⁰ The **exclamation mark** (!) is used at the end of an exclamatory statement to express surprise, command, shock or intense feeling in writing, while a **question mark** (?) is used at the end of an interrogatory statement.³¹

The comma, semi-colon and colon are used to indicate varying degrees of pause. The **comma** (,) is used to separate parts of a series or list and to separate independent clauses joined by a conjunction. The **semicolon** is used to separate independent statements that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so). The **colon** is used after an independent clause (complete sentence) to direct attention to a list, an appositive or a quotation. It is also used to separate two independent clauses when the second summarizes or explains the first.³²

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Kristin Messuri, 'Writing |Effective Paragraphs' [2016] 4(15) *The Southwest Respiratory and Critical Care Chronicles* 86.

²⁹ RC Wydick, 'Should Lawyers Punctuate?' [1990] *Scribes Journal of Legal Writing* 7.

³⁰ Melbourne University Law Review Association Inc, *Australian Guide to Legal Citation* (4th edn, Melbourne University Law Review Association Inc 2010) ('Australian Guide') 18-19.

³¹ Arwa Luay Abdulkhaleq, 'Punctuation Marks in English' [2019] 6-7 <www.researchgate.net> accessed 13 March 2026.

³² Alison Suthers and Mihael Roberts, 'Tips for Effective Punctuation in Legal Writing' (Georgetown University Law Center 2005) 2-3 and 11-12.

An **em-dash** (--) may be used to indicate an interruption within a sentence or in place of a colon. Em-dash may also be used on both sides of a parenthetical remark or apposition. An **en-dash** (-) is half the length of an em-dash and may be used to indicate a space between two numbers (for example, pages 12-23). An en-dash should be used in preference to a forward slash (/) to mark a tension or disjunction between two concepts. However, a forward slash may be used to separate alternatives.³³

A **hyphen** (-) is half the length of an en-dash and is used to connect the parts of a compound word. Generally, if a hyphenated word should be capitalized, the letter following the hyphen should also be capitalized (for example, 'Twenty-First Century' not 'Twenty-first Century').³⁴

7.0 Quotation

Quotation involves using the exact words used by the original authors in their work, indicated by quotation marks. The term 'direct quote' is often used to distinguish a quote from a paraphrase. If you are using someone's idea word for word, you must quote it. If not, simply paraphrase it and reference it. Thus, paraphrasing is an alternative to using direct quotations.³⁵

Direct quotations are marked with single '...' or double "... " quotation marks. You should quote where the exact words of an authority would lend support to your own ideas. You should also quote when you want to give the author's exact position.

In the body of the text and in the footnotes, short quotations of three lines or less should be incorporated within single quotation marks. Long quotations of more than three full lines should appear indented from the left and right margins, in a smaller font size, and without quotation marks.³⁶ Legislative and treaty extracts, regardless of length, may also appear this way.³⁷

In short quotations integrated within the text, double quotation marks should be used for a quotation within the quoted text, single quotation marks for a further quotation inside that, and so forth. Punctuation marks at the end of quoted text (full stops, commas, etc.) should not be included in a quotation unless the punctuation mark forms part of and is important to the quotation. Other punctuation marks within a quotation should be retained in quoted text.³⁸

If a quotation is altered, the alteration should be included within **square brackets**. Square brackets should be used to indicate an amendment to a quotation, for example, where a letter that was upper-case in the original text has been changed to lower-case or vice versa. They may also be used to enclose amendments that did not appear in the original text being quoted.³⁹

Omission from a quotation should be indicated by an **ellipsis**, that is, three periods or dots (...). Ellipses are used to save space or to remove material that is less relevant.⁴⁰ Where the omitted text immediately follows a complete sentence, a full stop or other closing punctuation at the end of that sentence should be included before an ellipsis.

³³ Australian Guide (n 30) 19-20.

³⁴ Alison Suthers and Mihael Roberts, 'Tips for Effective Punctuation in Legal Writing' (Georgetown University Law Center 2005) 8-9.

³⁵ James Cook University, 'Quoting, Summarizing and Paraphrasing Techniques: Academic Writing Part 3' <www.jcu.edu.au> accessed 13 March 2026.

³⁶ NALT Guide (n 3) 81-82.

³⁷ Australian Guide (n 30) 12.

³⁸ Ibid 14.

³⁹ Ibid 21.

⁴⁰ Jane Straus and Lester Kaufman, *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation* (11th edn, Jossy-Bass 2014) 46.

However, a full stop should not be included after an ellipsis, whether to show that words before the end of the sentence have been omitted, or to show that an omission falls between complete sentences in the source.⁴¹

8.0 Capitalization

Capitalization is the writing of a word with the first letter in uppercase and the rest of the letters in lowercase.⁴² The main function of capitals is to focus on particular elements within any group of people, places or things. Capitalization should be consistent throughout a document.

Generally, words should be capitalized in the following cases:

- (a) Where they appear at the beginning of a sentence, title or heading;
- (b) Where they are proper names; and
- (c) Where they appear after a full stop or period.⁴³

In the titles of all cited materials and in all headings and suitable subheadings, the first letter of the first word should be capitalized. All other words in the title heading should be capitalized except articles ('the', 'a', 'an'), conjunctions ('and', 'but') and prepositions ('on', 'with', 'before').⁴⁴ However, phrases appearing in foreign languages appearing in titles and headings should be capitalized in accordance with convention in that language, for example, Crown, Her Majesty, Attorney-General, Cabinet, President, etc.⁴⁵

9.0 Italicization

Italicization is the act or process of printing, typing or writing text in a slanted font style known as *italics*. It is also the act or process of underlining letters, words or other textual elements with a single line to indicate *italics*.⁴⁶ It is used to make the text to stand out from the surrounding normal text. In specific terms, it is used to add emphasis, highlight key terms or phrases, or differentiate specific types of information within a document.⁴⁷ However, do not italicize punctuation marks after italicized matter unless it is part of the italicized matter itself.⁴⁸

Titles of cases, books and journals should appear in *italics* in the text and footnotes regardless of whether a full citation of the source is included.⁴⁹ Foreign words and phrases (such as *ab initio*, *ad hoc*, *de facto*, *de jure*, etc.) should also be italicized.⁵⁰ Words within the text may also be italicized for emphasis. If words in a quotation are italicized for emphasis, a parenthetical clause must be inserted in the footnote to indicate this.⁵¹

However, do not italicize words that are in common usage in legal English such as *ultra vires*, *stare decisis*, *obiter dicta*, *ratio decidendi*, *a priori* and *a fortiori*. Commonly used abbreviations such as *ie* and *eg* should not be italicized and should not have full stops.⁵²

⁴¹ Australian Guide (n 30) 16.

⁴² Jane Straus and Lester Kaufman (n 39) 49.

⁴³ Australian Guide (n 30) 21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* 21-22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid* 22.

⁴⁶ *Collins English Dictionary* (HarperCollins 1979) <www.collinsdictionary.com> accessed 21 March 2026.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ Bryan A Tracy, *The Redbook: A Manual on Legal Style* (3rd edn, West Academic Publishing 2013) 84.

⁴⁹ Australian Guide (n 30) 23-24.

⁵⁰ *Ibid* 24. See also Joydev Basunia, 'Essential Latin Legal Terms' <www.academia.edu> accessed 21 March 2026.

⁵¹ Australian Guide (n 30) 23-24.

⁵² OSCOLA (n 2) 8.

10.0 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing involves rewriting another author's ideas in your own words while, at the same time, keeping the same original meaning. It is simply 'the author's thoughts in your words'⁵³ It is not enough simply to rearrange the sentence structure and replace words with synonyms. Even if this has been beautifully done, any information incorporated into your writing beyond what is considered as common knowledge in your field should be credited to the original author.⁵⁴

In practice, credit is given using citations in footnotes and bibliographies. Reproducing any portion comprising three or more words of someone's work directly, without giving the author credit, amounts to plagiarism, which is both illegal and unethical.⁵⁵ Thus, as a legal writer, you should paraphrase for the following reasons:

- (a) To demonstrate your understanding of the ideas of the author;
- (b) To assist your readers by explaining difficult concepts or terminologies;
- (c) To change the emphasis of the ideas to better match your own context;
- (d) To avoid overuse of direct quotes and consequent risk of losing your own 'view'.⁵⁶

Two simple techniques have been suggested for effective paraphrasing. The first technique is **word substitution**, in which case, you substitute the keywords in the original text with different words or synonyms. To do this effectively, you should explore the meanings of the words used in the original text. Most words have more than one meaning. So, to paraphrase effectively, you must substitute words in the original text with new words that have the same meanings. Dictionaries and thesaurus are useful tools for finding appropriate synonyms for substitution.⁵⁷

The second is **rearranging the sentence structure**. It is not enough to alter the structure of the original sentences. You must read and reread the original sentences to understand how all the parts fit together. As you substitute new words and rearrange the sentence structure, you must ensure that the paraphrase means the same as the original sentence.⁵⁸

11.0 Latin Terms and Abbreviations

Abbreviations are the shortened forms of words or phrases used chiefly in writing to represent the complete forms such as 'rev' for revised, 'edn' for edition, eds for editors and 'ibid' for *ibidem*. There are some abbreviations you cannot avoid in legal writing especially in footnoting.⁵⁹ The Latin abbreviations **ibid**, **id** and **et al** are known as citation shortcuts. They are used primarily in footnotes and bibliographic citations to save space.

The abbreviation **ibid** stands for *ibidem* while **id** stands for *idem*, which means 'at the same place' or 'as above'. *Ibid* should be used to refer to a source in the immediately preceding footnote; that is, where is no intervening footnote.⁶⁰ Any variation is indicated by adding the page number or paragraph number such as 'ibid 245'. However, *ibid* should not be used where there are multiple

⁵³ Colorado State University, 'Paraphrasing: The Author's Thoughts in Your Words' <www.writing.colostate.edu> accessed 10 July 2015.

⁵⁴ Tracy Bartella, 'The Art of Paraphrasing' <www.antioch.edu> accessed 13 March 2026.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ University of Adelaide, 'To Paraphrase or to Quote' <www.adelaide.edu.au> accessed 20 July 2018.

⁵⁷ Colorado State University, 'Paraphrasing: The Author's Thoughts in Your Words' <www.writing.colostate.edu> accessed 10 January 2019.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

⁵⁹ See, for example, University of North Carolina Writing Centre, 'Latin Terms and Abbreviations' <www.writingcenter.unc.edu> accessed 14 July 2018; Celia M. Elliot, 'Common Latin Terms in Scientific Writing – What They Mean [and] When to Use Them' (Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina 2015) 1-7.

⁶⁰ NALT Guide (n 3) 80.

sources in the preceding footnote. Ibid should begin with initial capital if it appears at the start of a footnote. It should not be italicized at all.⁶¹

The abbreviation ‘**n**’ in round brackets (n ...) stands for ‘note’ meaning footnote. The space in the brackets is for the footnote number where the information cited first appeared. It is used mainly for cross-referencing.⁶² The abbreviation **cf** stands for *confer*, which means ‘compare’ or ‘compare with’. Do not italicize ‘ibid’ or ‘cf’.⁶³

The abbreviation **et al** is short form for *et alii* which means ‘and others.’ It is like **etc**, but it is used only for people. It is used in bibliographic entries for books, articles or other publications that have several authors, usually four or more authors, to save space. In such a case, the name of the first author is given in full and then followed by et al and the publication information.

Both OSCOLA and NALT Guide prefer ‘and others’ to *et al* for more than three authors.⁶⁴ For example, in the footnote, a reference to *Essential Handbook for Secretaries and Personal Assistants* edited by Gogo George Otuturu, Magnus Amadi, Sam Nmeje and Edison George Otuturu and published by Fresbury Publishers in 2000 at page 202 will be cited as follows:

GG Otuturu and others (eds), *Essential Handbook for Secretaries and Personal Assistants* (Fresbury Publishers 2000) 202.

The abbreviations **eg**, **etc**, **ie** are known as ‘the big three’. The abbreviation *eg* stands for *exempli gratia*, which literally means ‘for the sake of an example’ but you can really just cut out the stuff in the middle and read it as ‘for example’. It is used to give an example or a set of examples to help clarify the preceding idea. It should not be used for an exhaustive list.⁶⁵

The abbreviation *ie* stands for *id est* which literally means ‘that is’ or ‘in other words.’ Sometimes it might be more useful to translate it as ‘what that means is’ or ‘that is to say.’ It is used to clarify the preceding idea by restating or paraphrasing it in different terms. The abbreviation *viz.* stands for *videlicet* which means ‘namely.’ It is used to introduce specifically the items comprised by a previously expressed whole. In practice, *eg*, *ie* and *viz* are either enclosed in parentheses or marked off with double commas. For example:⁶⁶

The farmer sells his produce (e.g., apples, oranges, carrots) at the market.

The rocky plants (i.e., Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars) are closest to the sun.

The rocky planets (viz., Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars, are closest to the sun.

The so-called Latin ‘gadgets’ such as *supra*, *infra*, *ante*, *id*, *op cit*, *loc cit* and *contra* should be avoided in legal writing. The abbreviation *loc. cit.* stands for ‘loco citato’ which means ‘in the place cited’ whereas *op. cit.* stands for ‘opera citato’ which means ‘in the same work cited.’

⁶¹ Australian Guide (n 30) 7.

⁶² NALT Guide (n 3) 81.

⁶³ OSCOLA (n 2) 7.

⁶⁴ University of Salford, ‘Guide to Using OSCOLA for Legal Referencing’ (University of Salford 2012) 12.

⁶⁵ University of North Carolina, ‘Latin Terms and Abbreviations’ <www.writingcenter.unc.edu> accessed 14 July 2018.

⁶⁶ Ibid 2-3.

Generally, *loc. cit.* is used to refer to the same work and page number as the previous citation, while *op. cit.* refers only to the same work and may be followed by a different page number. Both OSCOLA and NALT Guide prefers *ibid* to *loc. cit.* and *op. cit.*⁶⁷

The word *supra* stands for any citation appearing ‘above’ and *infra* for ‘below’ to avoid repeating the citation. The term *inter alia* means ‘amongst other things’ to shorten a list or to avoid writing a long list of items which should have followed the items listed. The term *etc.* stands for *et cetera* which means ‘and the rest’ or ‘and so on’ can be used for the same purpose. However, *inter alia* is placed at the beginning of the list while *etc.* is placed at the end of the list to complete it.⁶⁸

Both OSCOLA and NALT Guide use as little punctuation as possible. Abbreviations and initials in author’s names do not take full stops. For example, Appeal Cases is abbreviated as ‘AC’ and Nigerian Weekly Law Reports is abbreviated as ‘NWLR’. Gogo George Otuturu is written as ‘GG Otuturu’ without the initials taking any full stop.⁶⁹

The term ‘sic’ is short form for the Latin phrase *sic erat scriptum* which means ‘thus it was written’ or ‘so it was’. It is simply translated as ‘thus’ or ‘so’.⁷⁰ It is placed in square brackets [sic] directly after a significant error in the material being quoted. It should be inserted only after an offensive expression in the original quotation. For example: ‘They underestimated [sic] me’, said John. Insignificant errors should be allowed as they appear in the original quotation.⁷¹

12.0 Footnotes

Footnoting is a style of referencing whereby Arabic numerals are used in superscripts in the text to identify sources of authority or issues to be explained and clarified. This means that every source cited must be reflected at the foot of each page with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3 ...) to see at a glance all information concerning the sources referred to with the Arabic numerals in the text.

Footnotes should be used to achieve the following purposes:

- (a) To provide authority for a proposition;
- (b) To acknowledge a source and its relevance;
- (c) To provide information to enable retrieval of relevant sources;
- (d) To provide additional information that is not appropriate for the body of the text.⁷²

There are two distinct types of footnotes. These are the authority footnotes and the textual footnotes. They are also respectively known as probative footnotes and explanatory or discussive footnotes.⁷³ **Authority footnotes** are used to substantiate legal propositions in the text. They are usually made up of long lists of cases with just two or three lines of text.⁷⁴

This type of footnotes may begin with a citation signal such as ‘see’, ‘see also’, ‘eg’ or ‘cf’. Each citation signal has a technical meaning and must be used correctly. For example, ‘see’ or ‘see

⁶⁷ OSCOLA (n 2) 7.

⁶⁸ University of North Carolina (n 65) 2.

⁶⁹ OSCOLA (n 2) 7.

⁷⁰ Ross Guberman, ‘What Does Sic Mean in Legal Writing? A Concise Guide’ [2026] <www.briefcatch.com> accessed 22 March 2026.

⁷¹ Australian Guide (n 30) 17.

⁷² Australian Guide (n 30) 1.

⁷³ Fred Rondell, ‘Goodbye to Law Review’ [1936-1937] 23 *Virginia Law Review* 35, 40.

⁷⁴ *Ibid* 40-41. See also Fred Rondell, ‘Goodbye to Law Review – Revisited’ [1962] 48 *Virginia Law Review* 279, 282.

also' is used for a direct authority; 'eg' is used for an indirect or inferential authority while 'cf' is used for an authority in support of opposing argument.⁷⁵

Textual footnotes are footnotes that contain substantive discussions. They carry some argument, explanation or discussion from the text to the footnotes. This type of footnotes may be used to define unfamiliar terms, to expand on the text or to explain complex text for the benefit of the reader. However, too many textual or explanatory (or discussive) footnotes should be avoided as they more often than not divert the reader's attention from the primary text.⁷⁶ The MLA Style Manual advises that 'if you cannot fit comments into the text, omit them'.⁷⁷

A footnote number should immediately follow the portion of text to which it is relevant. It should appear directly after any relevant punctuation. If a series of sources is cited within one footnote, a semicolon should be used to separate the sources. The word 'and' should not be used to separate the last two sources. A full stop (or other appropriate closing punctuation) should appear at the end of every footnote.⁷⁸ A citation in a footnote would take the following format:⁷⁹

- (a) Elizabeth Fisher, *Risk Regulation and Administrative Constitutionalism* (Hart Publishing 2007) 210.
- (b) E Fisher, *Risk Regulation and Administrative Constitutionalism* (Hart Publishing 2007) 210.

A good legal writer should acknowledge every source of information. Except you are making a comment on another author's work, you have to acknowledge the source. Use automatic footnoting by clicking references on your electronic device. Then, from the options, click 'Insert Footnote'.

In most legal documents, the normal font size and type for the body of the text should be 12 points Times New Romans with the exception of appellate briefs. The rules of court specify the acceptable font size and type as well as line spacing for appellate briefs.⁸⁰ Automatic footnoting changes the footnotes to 10 points. It ensures technical accuracy and consistency in legal documentation.

13.0 Cross-References

Cross-references direct the reader to points of substantive discussion elsewhere in your work. Never use a cross-reference that will be difficult for the reader to find, such as 'See above'. A good cross-reference takes the reader to the very place indicated, such as 'Ashwith (n 109) 101' or 'See Ben (n 109) 210.'

'Ibid' is also a cross-referencing device. Standing alone, 'ibid' means 'in the same place' while 'ibid 345' means 'in the same place' but this time at page 345. It is equally acceptable to repeat the immediately preceding citation without using 'ibid'. For example, 'Ashwith (n 109) 345' will do the same work as 'ibid 345'. See the following example:⁸¹

It is well represented in the case law, perhaps most notably in the expression of the no conflict rule advocated by Lord Upjohn in *Phillips v Boardman*,¹ and in the earlier Court of appeal decision in *Boulting v Association of Cinematograph, Television &*

⁷⁵ Richard Delgado, 'How to Write a Law Review Article' [1986] 20 *University of San Francisco Law Review* 445, 451.

⁷⁶ John Ames Magat, 'Bottomheavy: Legal Footnotes' 14 <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=1516307>> accessed 15 July 2022.

⁷⁷ Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (MLA 1985) 182.

⁷⁸ Australian Guide (n 30) 2-3.

⁷⁹ OSCOLA (n 2) 11.

⁸⁰ See Court of Appeal Rules 2021, Order 19 rule 3(6)(b); Supreme Court Rules 2024, Order 16 rule 3(7)(b).

⁸¹ OSCOLA (n 2) 3-4.

*Allied Technicians.*² In *Boulting* [or in the *Boulting* case], Upjohn LJ said that the rule ‘must be applied realistically to a state of affairs which discloses a real conflict of duty and interest and not to some theoretical or rhetorical conflict.’³ In *Phillips*, Lord Upjohn developed his view of the rule further by adding that there must be a ‘real sensible possibility of conflict.’⁴

1. [1967] 2 AC 46 (HL).
2. [1963] 2 QB 606 (CA).
3. *Ibid* 638 OR *Boulting* (n 2) 638.
4. *Phillips* (n 1) 124.

14.0 Pinpoint References

A **pinpoint** is a reference to a specific page, paragraph, footnote or other section of a source. It is also known simply as a **pin cite**, which is a short form for **pinpoint citation**.⁸² A pinpoint reference to a page should simply appear as a number. It should not be preceded by ‘at’, ‘p’, ‘pg’ or ‘pp’.⁸³ Multiple pinpoint references to the same source should be separated by commas to prevent the numbers from running together. A span of pinpoint references involving more than one page or paragraph should be separated by a non-spaced em-dash.⁸⁴

If the law report ends with the identification of the court in brackets, the pinpoint should follow the closing bracket, without a comma. If the pinpoint reference is to the first page of the report, repeat the page number.⁸⁵ See the following examples:⁸⁶

Beattie v E & F Beattie Ltd [1938] Ch 708, 720.

Beattie v E & F Beattie Ltd [1938] Ch 708 (CA) 720, 723.

AG v Nigerian Land & Property Development Trust Ltd [1990] 3 NLR 708, 708.

AG v Nigerian Land & Property Development Trust Ltd [1990] 3 NLR 708 (SC) 789-790.

16.0 Bibliographies

Bibliography is the systematic listing of secondary sources consulted by the researcher such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, theses, dissertations, etc. arranged in alphabetical order.⁸⁷ Reference is slightly different from bibliography. Reference contains only the works cited or quoted in the text while bibliography contains all materials consulted by the researcher.⁸⁸ Both

⁸² Royal Roads University, ‘What Is a Pinpoint and How Is It Used in a Legal Citation?’ <<https://www.writeanswers.royalroads.ca>> accessed 3 April 2026.

⁸³ Australian Guide (n 30) 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid* 4.

⁸⁵ NALT Guide (n 3)

⁸⁶ OSCOLA (n 2) 19.

⁸⁷ NALT Guide (n 3) 84.

⁸⁸ *Ibid* 26.

OSCOLA and NALT Guide prefer bibliography to reference. It is presented after the appendix, if any.⁸⁹

Items in bibliographies take the same form as all other citations except in the following respects:

- (1) The author's surname should precede his initials, without comma separating them but a comma after the final initial;
- (2) Only initials should be used, not forenames;
- (3) Titles of unattributed works should be preceded by a double em-dash (--).⁹⁰

Works should be presented in alphabetical order of author surname, with unattributed works being listed at the beginning of the bibliography in alphabetical order of first major word of the title.⁹¹ A citation of a book in the bibliography would take this format: author's surname followed by initials without punctuation marks but the final initial is separated by comma from the *title of the book in italics* (followed by additional information separated by comma from the publisher and year in round brackets). No page number is required in the bibliography. See the following examples:⁹²

Davies PL, *Gower's Principles of Company Law* (8th edn, Sweet & Maxwell 2008)

Fisher E, *Risk Regulation and Administrative Constitutionalism* (Hart Publishing 2007)

If you are citing several works by the same author in a bibliography, list the author's works in chronological order and in alphabetical order of first major word of the title within a single year. After the citation of the first work, replace the author's name with a double em-dash. Alphabetize works by more than one author under the first author's name but place them after that author's sole authored works.⁹³

If a first author has more than one co-author, arrange the co-authored works in alphabetical order of co-author's surname and, if you are citing more than one work by the same first author and co-author, arrange the works in chronological order, repeating the co-author's name each time.⁹⁴ For example:⁹⁵

Hart HLA, *Law, Liberty and Morality* (OUP 1963)

-- -- 'Varieties of Responsibility' [1967] 83 LQR 346

-- -- *Punishment and Responsibility* (OUP 1968)

-- -- and Honore AM, 'Causation in the Law' [1956] 72 LQR 58

-- -- and Honore AM, *Causation in the Law* (2nd edn, OUP 1985)

⁸⁹ Ibid 26.

⁹⁰ Ibid 11.

⁹¹ Ibid 11.

⁹² Ibid 11.

⁹³ Ibid 11-12.

⁹⁴ Ibid 12.

⁹⁵ Ibid 12.

14.0 Conclusion and Suggestions

Legal writing is technical writing. Apart from the technical rules, conventions and stylistic rules that legal writers must observe in the preparation of legal documents, there are also a lot of Latin terms and abbreviations. Many of the Latin terms and abbreviations such as *supra*, *infra*, *ante*, *contra*, *id*, *op cit*, *loc cit*, *passim*, *et seq*, etc.⁹⁶

However, a number of Latin terms and abbreviations have survived till this day and legal writers must be familiar with their meanings and uses. It is against this background that it is suggested that the teaching of current Latin terms and abbreviations should be included in the legal education curriculum at all levels. This will equip legal writers with appropriate knowledge and proficiency in the use of the specialized vocabulary of their profession.

It is also suggested that the teaching of the technical rules and conventions that govern the preparation of legal documents should also be included in the legal education curriculum at all levels. Emphasis should be placed on the technical rules and conventions governing paragraphing, paraphrasing, capitalization, italicization, punctuation, quotation, footnoting, cross-referencing, pinpointing and bibliographic citation in legal writing. This will equip legal writers with the ability to convey complex information clearly, concisely and accurately without breaching any legal or ethical code.

⁹⁶ Ibid 81.