

FROM THE LEGAL WRITING CLINIC
WRITING TIP OF THE WEEK

USE PLAIN ENGLISH



Beginning legal writers sometimes make the mistake of using legalese to make their writing sound more “lawyerly.” But complex or archaic words and unnecessary Latin phrases only make your writing hard to understand. Use simple, standard English unless you have a good reason for doing otherwise.

- *Example:* At this point in time immediately subsequent to the termination of the aforesaid altercation on the above described premises, the defendant-appellant removed himself from the aforementioned locus and repaired to a situs on the premises immediately adjacent thereto.
- *Translation:* Right after the fight, the defendant went next door.
- *Example:* It behooves us to note that, prior to such accident, said plaintiff was domiciled with his wife.
- *Translation:* Before the accident, the plaintiff lived with his wife.

For more information on plain English, including a list of Latin words and phrases that are generally acceptable in legal writing, see Anne Enquist & Laurel Currie Oates, Just Writing 127-36 (3d ed. 2009); Laurel Currie Oates & Anne Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook 569-578 (5th ed. 2010); and C. Edward Good, Legal Writing & Its Cure ch. 8 (reprinted in Lawmanac—Clickable Help for Legal Writers 2009).