

5 TIPS FOR AN AMAZING LEGAL LETTER

Legal letters need to be easy to follow, understandable, and concise. In order to save time and cost we need to communicate clearly with clients, their lawyers, judges, and other parties. Cutting out unnecessary time spent explaining legalese will result in a satisfied client, improved reputation, and good relationships. Here are some easy to follow tips on how to best ensure that your proceedings and communications flow quickly and effectively:

1 UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE



Who is your reader? Is it a client, a learned colleague, a judge?

- Tailor your letter to your reader

What is the aim of your letter? What is the reader seeking to find out?

- The length of the letter, the language use, and the depth of the research will depend on your reader and the keys issues

Do you have all the information you need?

- If there is any ambiguity, get clarification before making any assumptions
- Researching to clarify instructions or facts is a waste of time when a simple phone call can do the job
- Plan your research process and check whether you can use an existing precedent, if there is one available this will save you time and effort of creating a letter from scratch

2 RESEARCH BEFORE YOU DRAFT

What is the key question to answer?

- If you are familiar with your research, it will be easier to focus on complex ideas in a clear manner

What does your reader require?

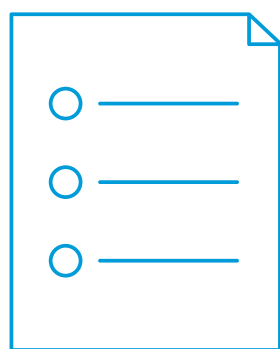
- Begin your research with general commentary, moving to case law and then secondary sources if necessary

Is your research current and correct?

- Refer to the most up to date, relevant cases and legislation



3 GET TO THE POINT



Do you have a large amount of content?

- A list or bullet points can help them to jump forward to what they really want to know
- Having an executive summary of the key points at the beginning of your letter can also be a great timesaver for a busy reader
- Draft an outline of the important points of your letter then arrange this in order of priority – this order will form the structure of your letter
- Write with authority and confidence
- Sentences that are too long or complicated will confuse your reader and make your ideas difficult to follow
- Avoid phrases such as “I think”, “Perhaps”, “It might be”
- Use words such as “much” or “is” instead of “maybe” or “might”

Write your conclusion and executive summary last. Ensure your conclusion is short, snappy, and succinctly outlines your answer. Time-poor readers will appreciate this!

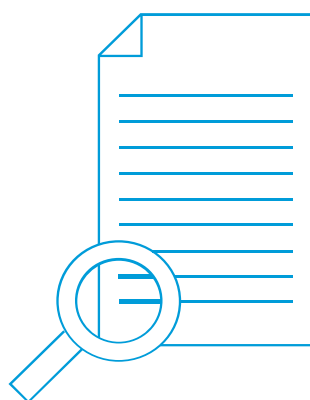
4 EDITING IS CRUCIAL

Have you re-read your letter?

- Re-read it, shuffle paragraphs and re-write it
- Edit out all the words and phrases that are unnecessary
- Get rid of legalese and jargon
- Editing is a crucial aspect of letter writing that should not be underestimated



5 DO NOT FORGET TO PROOFREAD



- In a study, more than half of practitioners admitted to skipping proofreading due to time and workload pressures
- Remember, a letter containing spelling or grammar mistakes will project an unprofessional image to your reader
- The impact of your letter will be lost if you make simple drafting mistakes. So, proofread your letter for drafting errors and to keep it concise

Put the final draft to one side for five or ten minutes and then re-read it to ensure any mistakes are caught in time. You will be surprised at what your eyes pick up after a quick break!

Drafting documents is an activity that 38% of lawyers spend over 2 hours a day doing.* Check out this [infographic](#) and learn three best practice tips to improve your legal drafting skills.

*LexisNexis® 2014 Australian Drafting Research Survey

