

City University of Hong Kong
Course Syllabus

offered by Department of English
with effect from Semester A 2020/2021

Part I Course Overview

Course Title: Legal English

Course Code: GE2411

Course Duration: One semester

Credit Units: 3

Level: B2

Arts and Humanities

Study of Societies, Social and Business Organisations

Science and Technology

Proposed Area:
(for GE courses only)

GE English

Medium of Instruction: English

Medium of Assessment: English

Grade D in HKAL Use of English or Grade 4 in HKDSE or;
successful completion of English Academic Proficiency Courses
(EL0220, EL0222, EL0223 and EL0225 – 6 credits) or;
English for Academic Purposes (EL0200 – 6 credits) or;
English for Academic Purposes 2 (LC0200B/EL0200B – 3 credits) or;
Grade B or above in English for Academic Purposes 1 (LC0200A/EL0200A – 3
credits)

Prerequisites:
(Course Code and Title)

Precursors:
(Course Code and Title) None

Equivalent Courses:
(Course Code and Title) None

Exclusive Courses:
(Course Code and Title) None

Part II Course Details

1. Abstract

This course aims to provide students with the necessary communicative competence to operate effectively in academic legal contexts. Students on the course will learn how to find and critically evaluate a range of legal texts (including legislation and judgments) and how to present these texts creatively, in plain legal language that is accessible to both specialist and non-specialist audiences. Students will learn how to construct legal arguments by ‘thinking like a lawyer’ and using the English language in a way that is appropriate to an academic legal context, drawing on appropriate rhetorical structure, grammar and vocabulary. Students will learn how to explore legal texts using linguistic search tools, making discoveries that inform their learning and use of the language of the law. Finally, students will have the opportunity to collectively reflect on their learning by engaging in online discussions related to key concepts on the course.

2. Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

(CILOs state what the student is expected to be able to do at the end of the course according to a given standard of performance.)

| No. | CILOs [#] | Weighting* (if applicable) | Discovery-enriched curriculum related learning outcomes (please tick where appropriate) | | |
|-----|--|-------------------------------|---|----|----|
| | | | A1 | A2 | A3 |
| 1. | Find and critically evaluate legal texts, such as legislation or judgments, in terms of audience, purpose, cognitive structure, linguistic features and social impact | | √ | √ | |
| 2. | 'Easify' legal texts, such as legislation and judgments, and make them accessible to both specialist and non-specialist audiences | | √ | √ | √ |
| 3. | Construct legal opinions for a specialist audience, making effective use of appropriate legal language, rhetorical structure and academic legal referencing conventions (i.e. avoiding plagiarism) | | | √ | √ |
| 4. | Use writing as a tool for lifelong learning, by monitoring and evaluating their own learning processes and discoveries made, and the impact of their discoveries on their development as a member of academic and professional legal communities | | | √ | |
| | | 100% | | | |

* If weighting is assigned to CILOs, they should add up to 100%.

[#] Please specify the alignment of CILOs to the Gateway Education Programme Intended Learning outcomes (PILOs) in Section A of Annex.

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to self-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

3. Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)

(TLAs designed to facilitate students' achievement of the CILOs.)

| TLA | Brief Description | CILO No. | | | | | | Hours/week (if applicable) |
|-----|--|----------|---|---|---|--|--|-------------------------------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 1. | <p>Interactive tutorials introducing key concepts and skills, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding and critically evaluating legal texts, in terms of audience, purpose, cognitive structure, linguistic features and social impact; • Critically and creatively interpreting and constructing texts for a range of specialist and non-specialist audiences; • Reading and writing strategies for specialist legal texts • Legal writing conventions (including citation, referencing and avoiding plagiarism); • The use of corpus tools to make discoveries about language in use in legal contexts <p>Students are expected to participate actively in class activities</p> | √ | √ | √ | √ | | | |
| 2. | <p>Practical research, discussion and writing activities which provide opportunities to practice the skills introduced</p> | √ | √ | √ | √ | | | |

4. Assessment Tasks/Activities (ATs)

(ATs are designed to assess how well the students achieve the CILOs.)

| Assessment Tasks/Activities | CILO No. | | | | | Weighting* | Remarks |
|---|----------|---|---|---|--|------------|---------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| Continuous Assessment: 100% | | | | | | | |
| In-class quizzes (2 per semester) This assessment task will provide students with opportunities to critically analyse the linguistic features of legal texts, including legislation and cases. | √ | | | | | 20% | |
| Legal popularization This assessment task will provide students with the opportunity to locate legislation of interest to a non-specialist audience and rewrite that legislation in a form that is accessible to such an audience. Students will write a popular legal text similar to a brochure and present their text to the class. | √ | √ | | | | 30% | |
| Legal problem question This assessment task will provide students with the opportunity to construct a legal argument on a simulated fact situation, making effective use of appropriate legal language, rhetorical structure, and academic legal referencing conventions (i.e. avoiding plagiarism). Students will write an answer to a legal problem question (1,250 words). | √ | | √ | | | 40% | |
| Reflective online discussion This assessment task will provide students with the opportunity to reflect on communication strategies, including document design and the use of visuals, that can be employed when writing for different specialist and non-specialist audiences. Students will participate in an online discussion. | | | | √ | | 10% | |
| Examination: 0% | | | | | | | |

* The weightings should add up to 100%.

100%

5. Assessment Rubrics

(Grading of student achievements is based on student performance in assessment tasks/activities with the following rubrics.)

| Assessment Task | Criterion | Excellent (A+, A, A-) | Good (B+, B, B-) | Fair (C+, C, C-) | Marginal (D) | Failure (F) |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| 1. Legal Popularization | Popularization | An excellent popularization which uses a range of simplification techniques, always appropriately written in plain English for a non-specialist audience. The simplified text represents the content of the original text very clearly and accurately. | A good popularization which uses a range of simplification techniques, mostly appropriately written in plain English for a non-specialist audience. The simplified text represents the content of the original text clearly and accurately. | An adequate popularization which may use a range of simplification techniques, sometimes appropriately written for a non-specialist audience. The simplified text represents the content of the original text somewhat clearly and accurately. | The popularization may not be adequately written for a non-specialist audience. The simplified text may not represent the content of the original text clearly and accurately. | The popularization is not appropriately written for a non-specialist audience. |
| | Presentation | Provides an excellent description of features of legal English encountered in the original text and an excellent explanation of strategies used to simplify the text. | Provides a good description of features of legal English encountered in the original text and a good explanation of strategies used to simplify the text. | Provides an adequate description of features of legal English encountered in the original text and an adequate explanation of strategies used to simplify the text. | Some attempt to describe features of legal English encountered in the original text, but may not be adequate. Some attempt to explain strategies used to simplify the text, but may not be adequate. | Fails to describe features of legal English encountered in the original text. Fails to explain strategies used to simplify the text. |
| 2. Legal Problem Question | Organization and structure | Excellently organized macro-structure. The internal organization of paragraphs is excellent, following steps of legal reasoning clearly and explicitly all of the time, so that the answer is always coherent. | Well organized macro-structure. The internal organization of paragraphs is good, following steps of legal reasoning clearly and explicitly most of the time so that the answer is mostly coherent. | Adequately organized macro-structure. The internal organization of paragraphs is adequate but follows steps of legal reasoning clearly and explicitly only some of the time, so that the answer is only sometimes coherent. | Some evidence of adequate macro-structure and internal organization of paragraphs, but shortcomings in organization and structure lead to a lack of coherence in the answer at times | Poor macro-structure and internal organization of paragraphs, which leads to a lack of coherence in the answer. |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|
| | Accuracy and appropriacy of English | Excellent use of English with few errors of grammar and vocabulary. Choice of language is always appropriate to a legal problem question answer and the register is consistent throughout. | Good use of English with some errors of grammar and vocabulary, though these do not affect the clarity of the writing. Choice of language is mostly appropriate to a legal problem question answer and the register is mostly consistent. | Adequate use of English with errors of grammar and vocabulary that sometimes affect the clarity of the writing. Choice of language is only sometimes appropriate to a legal problem question answer and the register is somewhat inconsistent. | Some evidence of adequate accuracy and appropriacy in English, but shortcomings in choice of language use affect the clarity of the writing. | Poor use of English, with errors of grammar and vocabulary that frequently affect the clarity of the writing. Choice of language is frequently inappropriate. |
| | Citation and referencing | Excellent use of citation and referencing that always provides appropriate support for the legal argument. Always follows the rules of style for legal citation taught on the course. | Good use of citation and referencing that mostly provides appropriate support for the legal argument. Mostly follows the rules of style for legal citation taught on the course. | Adequate use of citation and referencing that sometimes provides appropriate support for the legal argument. Sometimes follows the rules of style for legal citation taught on the course. | Some evidence of adequate use of citation and referencing, but shortcomings in use of citations may affect the quality of the legal argument. Does not adequately follow the style for citation taught on the course. | Poor use of citation and referencing that affects the quality of the legal argument. Little attempt to follow the rules of style for legal citation taught on the course. |
| 3. Reflective online discussion | | Makes an excellent contribution. Always participates very actively in the forum. Posts to the forum all of the time and comments very frequently on posts of others. | Makes a good contribution. Mostly participates actively in the forum. Posts to forum most of the time and comments somewhat frequently on posts of others. | Makes an adequate contribution. Sometimes participates actively in the forum. Posts to forum some of the time and comments occasionally on posts of others. | Makes little contribution. Seldom participates actively in the forum. Seldom posts to the forum and seldom comments on the posts of others. | Makes a poor contribution. Fails to actively participate in the forum because posts and comments are so infrequent and insubstantial. |

General Criteria for Assessment of Language Proficiency

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Proficient User | Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise and analyze information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations. Can create new and creative insights and texts by reflecting and thinking critically from reading and comprehending texts. |
| | Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices. |
| Independent User | Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. Can create new insights and texts by reflecting and thinking critically from reading and comprehending texts. |
| | Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. |
| Basic User | Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. Can create insights and texts by reflecting and thinking critically from reading and comprehending texts. |
| | Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. |

Part III Other Information (more details can be provided separately in the teaching plan)

1. Keyword Syllabus

(An indication of the key topics of the course.)

English for law, judgment, legislation, case note, problem question, plain legal language, thinking like a lawyer, legal writing and drafting, legal opinion, rhetoric

2. Reading List

2.1 Compulsory Readings

(Compulsory readings can include books, book chapters, or journal/magazine articles. There are also collections of e-books, e-journals available from the CityU Library.)

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | Bhatia, V. K. (1993). <i>Analyzing genre: Language use in professional settings</i> . London: Longman. |
| 2. | Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). <i>Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. |
| 3. | Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (2005). <i>Just words: Law, language and power</i> (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. |
| 4. | Hafner, C. A. (2010). A multi-perspective genre analysis of the barrister's opinion: Writing context, generic structure, and textualization. <i>Written Communication</i> , 27(4), 410 -441. doi:10.1177/0741088310377272 |
| 5. | Howe, P. M. (1990). The problem of the problem question in English for academic legal purposes. <i>English for Specific Purposes</i> , 9, 215-236. |
| 6. | Langton, N. (2002). Hedging argument in legal writing. <i>Perspectives: Working papers in English and communication</i> , 14(1), 16-51. |
| 7. | Mertz, E. (2007). <i>The language of law school: Learning to think like a lawyer</i> . New York: Oxford University Press. |
| 8. | Tiersma, P. (1999). <i>Legal language</i> . Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. |
| 9. | Vandevelde, K. J. (1996). <i>Thinking like a lawyer</i> . Boulder, CO: Westview Press. |

2.2 Additional Readings

(Additional references for students to learn to expand their knowledge about the subject.)

A. Please specify the Gateway Education Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) that the course is aligned to and relate them to the CILOs stated in Part II, Section 2 of this form:

| GE PILO | Please indicate which CILO(s) is/are related to this PILO, if any (can be more than one CILOs in each PILO) |
|---|---|
| PILO 1: Demonstrate the capacity for self-directed learning | All CILOs encourage independent learning and critical thinking/evaluation. CILO 4 requires students to make independent discoveries. |
| PILO 2: Explain the basic methodologies and techniques of inquiry of the arts and humanities, social sciences, business, and science and technology | Students learn how to ‘think like a lawyer’ and present or re-present information to specialist and non-specialist audiences (CILOs 1-4) |
| PILO 3: Demonstrate critical thinking skills | See above |
| PILO 4: Interpret information and numerical data | |
| PILO 5: Produce structured, well-organised and fluent text | Students are frequently involved in the analysis and construction of a range of legal texts for different purposes and audiences. CILOs 1-3 explicitly support this PILO. |
| PILO 6: Demonstrate effective oral communication skills | Students are involved in frequent in-class discussions in English (CILOs 1-4) |
| PILO 7: Demonstrate an ability to work effectively in a team | Students work in groups in order to create legal popularizations (CILO 2) |
| PILO 8: Recognise important characteristics of their own culture(s) and at least one other culture, and their impact on global issues | |
| PILO 9: Value ethical and socially responsible actions | Students interpret legal texts according to their social impact, from the perspective of both specialists and non-specialists (CILOs 1, 2 especially) |
| PILO 10: Demonstrate the attitude and/or ability to accomplish discovery and/or innovation | In CILOs 2 and 4 students demonstrate the ability to accomplish discovery and/or innovation by presenting information in novel ways for a wide audience of non-specialists. |

GE course leaders should cover the mandatory PILOs for the GE area (Area 1: Arts and Humanities; Area 2: Study of Societies, Social and Business Organisations; Area 3: Science and Technology) for which they have classified their course; for quality assurance purposes, they are advised to carefully consider if it is beneficial to claim any coverage of additional PILOs. General advice would be to restrict PILOs to only the essential ones. (Please refer to the curricular mapping of GE programme: http://www.cityu.edu.hk/edge/ge/faculty/curricular_mapping.htm.)

B. Please select an assessment task for collecting evidence of student achievement for quality assurance purposes. Please retain at least one sample of student achievement across a period of three years.

| Selected Assessment Task |
|--|
| Legal Popularization Legal Problem Question |