

GE2411: LEGAL ENGLISH

Effective Term

Semester A 2026/27

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Legal English

Subject Code

GE - Gateway Education

Course Number

2411

Academic Unit

English (EN)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

GE Area (Primary)

University GE English

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Grade D in HKAL Use of English or Grade 4 in HKDSE English Language or successful completion of English for Academic Purposes 2 (LC0200B – 3 credits) or Grade B or above in English for Academic Purposes 1 (LC0200A – 3 credits).

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

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.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-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		x	x	
2	'Easify' legal texts, such as legislation and judgments, and make them accessible to both specialist and non-specialist audiences		x	x	x
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)			x	x
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			x	

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 real-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.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Interactive tutorials	Students participate in interactive tutorials introducing key concepts and skills, including: 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. Students are expected to participate actively in class activities	1, 2, 3, 4	
2	Research and writing tasks	Students participate in practical research, discussion and writing activities which provide opportunities to practice the skills introduced	1, 2, 3, 4	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs		CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- " for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	In-class quizzes (2 per semester) Students critically analyse the linguistic features of legal texts, including legislation and cases.	1	20	-	No

2	Legal popularization Students locate legislation of interest to a non-specialist audience and rewrite that legislation in a form that is accessible to such an audience. Students write a popular legal text similar to a brochure and present their text to the class.	1, 2	30	The level of AI adoption in the assignment is restricted as outlined in the assessment guidelines in the course.	Yes
3	Legal problem question Students 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 write an answer to a legal problem question.	1, 3	40	-	No
4	Reflective online discussion Students 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 participate in an online discussion.	4	10	-	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

1. Legal Popularization

Criterion

Popularization

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

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.

Good (B+, B, B-)

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.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

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.

Marginal (D)

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.

Failure (F)

The popularization is not appropriately written for a non-specialist audience.

Assessment Task

1. Legal Popularization

Criterion

Presentation

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

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 an excellent reflection on use of digital tools in the process, including GenAI.

Good (B+, B, B-)

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 a good reflection on use of digital tools in the process, including GenAI.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

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. Provides an adequate reflection on use of digital tools in the process, including GenAI.

Marginal (D)

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. Some attempt to provide a reflection on use of digital tools in the process, but may not be adequate.

Failure (F)

Fails to describe features of legal English encountered in the original text. Fails to explain strategies used to simplify the text. Fails to provide a reflection on use of digital tools in the process.

Assessment Task

2. Legal Problem Question

Criterion

Organization and structure

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

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.

Good (B+, B, B-)

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.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

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.

Marginal (D)

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

Failure (F)

Poor macro-structure and internal organization of paragraphs, which leads to a lack of coherence in the answer.

Assessment Task

2. Legal Problem Question

Criterion

Accuracy and appropriacy of English

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

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 (B+, B, B-)

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.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

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.

Marginal (D)

Some evidence of adequate accuracy and appropriacy in English, but shortcomings in choice of language use affect the clarity of the writing.

Failure (F)

Poor use of English, with errors of grammar and vocabulary that frequently affect the clarity of the writing. Choice of language is frequently inappropriate.

Assessment Task

2. Legal Problem Question

Criterion

Citation and referencing

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

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 (B+, B, B-)

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.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

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.

Marginal (D)

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.

Failure (F)

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.

Assessment Task

3. Reflective online discussion

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

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.

Good (B+, B, B-)

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.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Makes an adequate contribution. Sometimes participates actively in the forum. Posts to forum some of the time and comments occasionally on posts of others.

Marginal (D)

Makes little contribution. Seldom participates actively in the forum. Seldom posts to the forum and seldom comments on the posts of others.

Failure (F)

Makes a poor contribution. Fails to actively participate in the forum because posts and comments are so infrequent and insubstantial.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

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

Reading List**Compulsory Readings**

Title	
1	Bhatia, V. K. (1993). Analyzing genre: Language use in professional settings. London: Longman.
2	Conley, J. M., & O' Barr, W. M. (1990). Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3	Conley, J. M., & O' Barr, W. M. (2005). Just words: Law, language and power (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). The language of law school: Learning to think like a lawyer. New York: Oxford University Press.
8	Tiersma, P. (1999). Legal language. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
9	Vandevelde, K. J. (1996). Thinking like a lawyer. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Nil

Annex (for GE courses only)

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:

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

1, 2, 3, 4

PILO 2: Explain the basic methodologies and techniques of inquiry of the arts and humanities, social sciences, business, and science and technology

1, 2, 3, 4

PILO 5: Produce structured, well-organised and fluent text

1, 2, 3

PILO 6: Demonstrate effective oral communication skills

1, 2, 3, 4

PILO 7: Demonstrate an ability to work effectively in a team

2

PILO 9: Value ethical and socially responsible actions

1, 2

PILO 10: Demonstrate the attitude and/or ability to accomplish discovery and/or innovation

2, 4

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