

**Professional Writing Strategies**  
**5342 Professional Writing Strategies - SWIFT- 18238**  
**Fall 2026 Syllabus**

**Prof. Kenneth R. Swift**  
[krswift@central.UH.edu](mailto:krswift@central.UH.edu)

**Introductory Notes:** (1) With an online course it is very important that you read every document and e-mail closely, beginning with this syllabus, to ensure that you understand all of the course assignments, procedures, and due dates. Additionally, from time to time there may be changes, reminders, and additional content sent to organize and supplement the course. You are responsible for knowing all such information.

(2) This course is designed for students who will be taking the Texas bar exam prior to July 2028. In July 2028, the current Texas bar exam format will be replaced by the NextGen Bar and the format of some bar exam questions will change, including the MPT questions which are the focus of this course. If you are planning to take the bar exam in another jurisdiction, you should investigate as to the format for that jurisdiction.

## **I. Texts and Materials**

Richard C. Wydick and Amy E. Sloan, *Plain English for Lawyers*, Carolina Press 7<sup>th</sup> edition 2024, ISBN 978-1-5310-2349-2. (“Sloan”)

Alexa Z. Chew and Katie Rose Guest Pryal, *The Complete Bar Writer*, Carolina Press 2020, ISBN 978-1-5310-1787-3, EISBN 978-1-5310-1788-0 (“Chew”).

\*\* Please note that this book comes with a subscription to Core Knowledge for Lawyers ([www.coreknowledgeforlawyers.com](http://www.coreknowledgeforlawyers.com)). Thus, you will need a new addition of the text. **See below**, section V(C)(iv), for further details on the exercises.

## **II. Course Overview and Learning Goals**

As defined by the National Conference of Bar Examiners:

The Multistate Performance Test is designed to test an examinee’s ability to use fundamental lawyering skills in a realistic situation and complete a task that a beginning lawyer should be able to accomplish. The MPT is not a test of substantive knowledge. Rather, it is designed to evaluate six fundamental skills lawyers are expected to demonstrate regardless of the area of law in which the skills are applied.

## **Learning Outcomes**

This course is designed to prepare the student to successfully answer the various types

of MPT questions commonly found on the bar exam and further develop and refine the professional writing, editing, and drafting skills necessary for success on the MPT and within the profession.

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to accomplish the following tasks, as set forth by the National Conference of Bar Examiners:

- (1) sort detailed factual materials and separate relevant from irrelevant facts;
- (2) analyze statutory, case, and administrative materials for applicable principles of law;
- (3) apply the relevant law to the relevant facts in a manner likely to resolve a client's problem;
- (4) identify and resolve ethical dilemmas, when present;
- (5) communicate effectively in writing; and
- (6) complete a lawyering task within time constraints.

### **III. Course Structure and Technology**

This course is taught fully online. With the exception of readings from the assigned texts, all aspects of this course, including additional readings, assignments, and videos, will be available online.

#### **A. Course Website**

The course website is hosted by the University's Canvas course management system. (Note that this is the first time the course has been offered using the University's new Canvas system). To access the course website:

1. Log into access UH: <https://accessuh.uh.edu> .
2. Under University Services, click on Canvas.
3. Under courses select Professional Writing Strategies.
4. The website will be available approximately 1 week prior to the official start of the course. You will be automatically enrolled in the course.

#### **Support is available 8-8 (M-F):**

1. Phone: 713-743-1411
2. Live chat: <http://www.uh.edu/infotech/livechat>
3. Email: [support@uh.edu](mailto:support@uh.edu)
4. In person: 58 MD Anderson Library

**NOTE:** There is an introductory video assigned for the first unit. Some information in the video may be duplicative of the information below, but some will not be. You are responsible for information both in this document and in the introductory video.

## **B. Course E-Mail**

I will regularly send e-mails. You **must check** the e-mail address that is associated with the Canvas site to ensure it is the address you want to receive class e-mails. I am not able to change the e-mail associated with your account.

## **IV. “Attendance” and Penalties for Late Assignments**

In an online course there is, obviously, no physical “attendance.” However, you are required to keep up with the assignment schedules as set forth in the weekly checklists. Falling behind schedule may result in your **forced withdrawal** from the course. All units must be completed, and the standards met for credit, to receive credit for the course and to be cleared to take the final exam. Failure to do so will result in an incomplete. You are also required to watch all course videos and you will be asked to affirm that you have done so.

It is important to keep up with the weekly readings, assessments. It will be important to work on course activities consistently and not put them aside until the due date as there will be group assignments and activities which will require participation throughout the week.

### **Penalties for Late Course Assignments**

Assignments for each weekly unit are due by 11 p.m. on Tuesday. Meeting deadlines is critical for the operation of this course and success on both the bar exam and as a practicing attorney. This course is designed around receiving and providing feedback, through the peer review process as well as self-reflection and from the professor. For example, not completing a practice MPT in one week affects the course operation, both for you and the rest of the class. As such, the weekly deadlines are **strictly enforced**, with rare exceptions, and will not be granted for work, family, or school commitments. This is particularly the case for the timed practice MPTs, which must be completed by the deadline because of the follow-up peer review exercises. Similarly, the peer review exercises must be submitted and completed on time to receive the allotted points.

## **V. Course Structure and Assignments**

The course is divided into 14 weekly units. Within each unit, which will be organized through a weekly checklist, there will be several items, including:

**A. Videos:** These are videos which provide an introduction to, and overview of, the materials in skills you will be practicing in the unit. Some videos also include questions which must be answered during the video.

**B. Readings:** These are the required textbook chapters, cases, statutes, and articles.

**C. Assessments and Activities:**

- i. **Practice MPTs.** Throughout the course you will take numerous practice MPTs. While a couple will be untimed, most will be 90-minute, timed exercises.
- ii. **Peer review exercises.** On three occasions throughout the course you are going to be required to provide an assessment of a classmate's practice MPT. This process is anonymous and based upon a provided rubric. You will also be asked to assess your own MPTs.
- iii. **Writing and skills exercises.** Throughout the course you will be asked to complete exercises designed to practice the organizational and writing skills necessary to successfully complete the MPT questions. Additionally, you will be asked to complete writing exercises designed to review and enhance your professional writing skills.
- iv. **Questions on Core Knowledge for Lawyers**  
As part of your book purchase of The Complete Bar Writer, you are provided a subscription to [www.coreknowledgeforlawyers.com](http://www.coreknowledgeforlawyers.com) (should be on a card inside your copy of the book). Once you log into the website, you will "activate" your subscription. When you activate your subscription, enter the unique Class Code that corresponds to this course. Here is the code:

**326-209-6007**

## **VI. Calculating Grades**

Each exercise, assignment, and exam is assigned a point total. At the conclusion of the semester, I will add up all of the points and determine final grades.

**Points Awarded on the Reasonable Effort Standard (standard discussed below)**

Timed practice MPT questions (3 question/5 pts each)	15
Peer review (3 question, 5 pts each)	15
Writing Skills and other Exercises (1pt. each)	25 ( <u>approximate</u> number)
Participation and Effort	10

**Graded Points**

Other MPT-type exam question	25
Final Exam	75

***Point totals may be adjusted throughout the semester.***

### **Exam/ Graded Points**

The final exam will be online and scheduled by the Law Center. The Law Center will publish the final exam schedule shortly after the official reporting day (ORD day - marked on the academic calendar). The final exam will consist of two 90-minute MPT writing questions, one objective, and one persuasive. Additionally, in the final week of the semester there will be a graded MPT question, taken online, on one of the “other” types of MPT questions.

### **Reasonable Effort Standard**

The reasonable effort standard means a good faith attempt at completing a practice MPT question or another exercise that demonstrates both a significant effort and familiarity with the materials presented in the readings and videos. Further details are provided in the introductory video. These points are not based upon a curve, and it is my hope that every class participant will receive all of the allotted points.

### **Grading Notes:**

1. I reserve the right to raise a grade by one grade increment (ex: B to B+) for significant and consistent work that exceeds the normal expectation of the class, as determined in my sole discretion. This would entail outstanding work on exercises, peer review, and other course items.
2. I also reserve the right to lower a grade by one grade increment (ex: B to B-) for significant and consistent work that does not meet the normal expectation of the class. This reduction may be in addition to loss of participation and effort points, discussed below.

### **Participation and Effort Points**

The points for participation and effort will be based upon:

1. Timely completion of all assignments and activities, including watching all course videos.
2. Thoroughness of responses to exercises and writing assignments.
3. Thoughtful feedback on Peer Review exercises

The participation points are not based upon a curve, and it is my hope that every class participant will receive all of the allotted points.

## **VII. Office Hours**

An online course can present some difficulties in instructor-student interaction, if only due to the lack of a planned meeting time that a physical classroom provides. However, know that I am always available to answer questions and discuss class topics via e-mail. I will have a weekly virtual office hour, normally Thursday 1-2, which will be posted on Canvas and may be updated from time to time, depending upon other activities, such as individual meetings. I check e-mail very frequently and normally respond within 24 hours (sometimes 48 hours on weekends). If you send an e-mail and you do not get a response within that timeframe, please feel free to contact me again.

## **VIII. Additional Resources and University Required Language**

### **Mode of Presentation (University required designation)**

(AS) Asynchronous classes do not meet face-to-face, and they do not have a regularly scheduled meeting time. Most of the class materials are available online at any time. Some asynchronous online classes may include virtual class meetings, which will be arranged on a class-by-class basis by the instructor.

### **CAPS**

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to the demands of a professional program, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS ([www.uh.edu/caps](http://www.uh.edu/caps)) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the “Let's Talk” program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus.

[http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets\\_talk.html](http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html)

### ***Mental Health and Wellness Resources***

The University of Houston has a number of resources to support students' mental health and overall wellness, including CoogsCARE and the UH Go App. UH Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers 24/7 mental health support for all students, addressing various concerns like stress, college adjustment and sadness. CAPS provides individual and couples counseling, group therapy, workshops and connections to other support services on and off-campus. For assistance visit [uh.edu/caps](http://uh.edu/caps), call 713-743-5454, or visit a Let's Talk location in-person or virtually. Let's Talk are daily, informal confidential consultations with CAPS therapists where no appointment or paperwork is needed.

The Student Health Center offers a Psychiatry Clinic for enrolled UH students. Call 713-743-5149 during clinic hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.

The A.D. Bruce Religion Center offers spiritual support and a variety of programs centered on well-being.

Need Support Now? - If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call CAPS crisis support 24/7 at 713-743-5454, or the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988, or chat 988lifeline.org.

### ***Title IX/Sexual Misconduct***

Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX website at <https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>. Please be aware that under the sexual misconduct policy, SAM 01.D.08, faculty are required to report to the University any information received regarding sexual misconduct as defined in the policy. Please note that the reporting obligations under the sexual misconduct policy reach to employees and students. ***Also, as a required reporting party, I am not a confidential resource.***

### ***Reasonable Academic Adjustments/Auxiliary Aids***

The University of Houston is committed to providing an academic environment and educational programs that are accessible for its students. Any student with a disability who is experiencing barriers to learning, assessment or participation is encouraged to contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center (Dart Center) to learn more about academic accommodations and support that may be available to them. Students seeking academic accommodations will need to register with the Dart Center as soon as possible to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations. Please contact the Dart Center by visiting the website: <https://uh.edu/accessibility/> calling (713) 743-5400, or emailing [jdcen@Central.UH.EDU](mailto:jdcen@Central.UH.EDU).

### ***Recording of Class (University required language)***

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the Center for Students with DisABILITIES. If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor’s recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor’s recordings are not authorized to be shared with *anyone* without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

### ***Resources for Online Learning***

The University of Houston is committed to student success and provides information to optimize the online learning experience through our Power-On website. Please visit this website for a comprehensive set of resources, tools, and tips including: obtaining access to the internet, AccessUH, and Canvas; requesting a laptop through the Laptop Loaner Program; using your smartphone as a webcam; and downloading Microsoft Office 365 at no cost. For questions or assistance contact UHOnline@uh.edu.

### **Title IX/Sexual Misconduct**

Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX website at <https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>.

### **Security Escorts and Cougar Ride**

UHPD continually works with the University community to make the campus a safe place to learn, work, and live. Our Security escort service is designed for the community members who have safety concerns and would like to have a Security Officer walk with them, for their safety, as they make their way across campus. Based on availability either a UHPD Security Officer or Police Officer will escort students, faculty, and staff to locations beginning and ending on campus. If you feel that you need a Security Officer to walk with you for your safety please call [713-743-3333](tel:713-743-3333). Arrangements may be made for special needs.

Parking and Transportation Services also offers a late-night, on-demand shuttle service called Cougar Ride that provides rides to and from all on-campus shuttle stops, as well as the MD Anderson Library, Cougar Village/Moody Towers and the UH Technology Bridge. Rides can be requested through the UH Go app. Days and hours of operation can be found at <https://uh.edu/af-university-services/parking/cougar-ride/>.

### **Syllabus Changes**

Please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through email.

### **Helpful Information**

**Coogs Care:** <https://uh.edu/dsa/coogscare/>

**Student Health Center:** <https://www.uh.edu/healthcenter/>

## Law Center Required Syllabus Elements

### ***Honor Code***

The UHLC Honor Code applies to all aspects of this course. You are responsible for knowing all Honor Code provisions and for complying with the Honor Code. Please inquire if you have any questions regarding how the Honor Code's provisions apply to specific activities or situations related to this course. Your continuing enrollment in this course is deemed to be a pledge by you under the Honor Code to comply with the Honor Code in relation to this course and to comply with the instructions in the course syllabus. *It is an Honor Code violation to review the graded assignments distributed to, or written by, any of my students from prior years.*

### ***AI Generated Text***

The software technology known as artificial intelligence has recently expanded its capability to generate text and other work product (AI Generated Work Product). Examples of the technology include what are known as "generative" large language models (LLMs), and a specific implementation what is well known in the general public is ChatGPT. These systems can generate text and other work product in response to prompts and/or input of other text/documents/code/images. The output, the AI Generated Work Product, appears to have human-mimicking "intelligence" and is thus potentially usable as a substitute for material one might generate themselves. AI Generated Work Product can include computer code or programs as well as human language content and materials.

Your continuing enrollment in this course obligates you to not knowingly prompt, generate, or use any AI Generated Work Product in relation to any activity or assessment in this course. This applies to AI Generated Work Product from yourself or others. This obligation includes that your assessment materials in the course be without any contribution from AI Generated Work Product. This obligation specifically extends to not plagiarize any writing required of you for assessment in the course: AI Generated Work Product will be treated as from another/others in applying the plagiarism policy to this course. The term "assessment" means any material generated for this course that is submitted to the instructor or presented in a class session, regardless whether it is graded content or not. Assessments include mid-terms and final exams. AI Generated Work Product may not be used in the development or drafting of any assessments created by you in a non-proctored environment, such as a "take-home" final examination.

## **Week One**

**Due Date:** All items below must be completed by 11 p.m. on Tuesday, September 1.

### 1. Course Introduction

- A. **Watch and Complete:** *Course Introduction Video.*
- B. **Read:** Course Syllabus
- C. **Read:** *Chew*, Preface and Ch.1
- D. **Complete:** Core Knowledge, Ch. 1

### 2. Introduction to the Bar Exam and the MPT

- A. **Watch:** *Introduction to the Bar Exam and the MPT.*
- B. **Read:** *Chew*, Ch.2
- C. **Complete:** Core Knowledge, Ch. 2

### 3. Writing Skills

- A. **Read:** *Sloan*, Chapters 1 and 2.  
*The exercises within chapter 2 are optional, but you may want to give them a try (suggested answers are in the back of your book).*
- B. **Complete:** *Sloan*, Exercise, Ch. 2  
*You may also want to download the supplement, which includes the exercises in a Word document. Note that the exercises **must be submitted to the course website** to receive credit for the exercise.*