

UC San Diego, Summer II, 2026

POLI 104J:

Introduction to Legal Reasoning: Reading and Writing

Monday and Wednesday, 2:00 p.m.- 4:50 p.m.

RCLAS: Remote and Synchronous Class: [Class Zoom Link](#)

Instructor: Furkan Y Benliogullari (fbenliog@ucsd.edu, SSB 342)

Office Hours: 12 pm – 1 pm, Monday and Wednesday, [OH Zoom link](#)

Teaching Assistant: Roberto Bonilla (robonilla@ucsd.edu)

Description of the Course

Lawyering requires many skills. For anyone working in the legal discipline, the most fundamental skills are reading and writing. Everyone in a college program can read and write, but doing so like a lawyer requires a different mindset. In this course, we will work through a set of practical questions, including the ones below:

- What does it actually mean to "think like a lawyer"?
- How do lawyers read cases, statutes, and commentaries — and why is that so different from ordinary reading?
- How do you get from a messy pile of facts to a clear, structured legal analysis?
- How do you communicate that analysis in the forms lawyers actually use — objectively or persuasively?

This is a skills course, and instead of surveying different areas of law, we will read the law closely, conduct legal analysis, and communicate our point effectively. The course has three complementary phases: (1) how lawyers read, (2) how lawyers think and analyze, and (3) how lawyers write. These skills will be useful to you if you plan to go to law school, work at a law firm as a paralegal or a legal assistant, seek a policy job, or pursue graduate studies. Beyond these job categories, legal reading and writing skills are extremely helpful to all of us in our everyday lives.

The prerequisites for this course are POLI104A and 104B. If you are taking this course without first taking 104A and 104 B, you are assuming the risk of struggling to understand the material. Although I will start with a quick summary of the US legal system, it is not the point of this class, and you should review the syllabi for [104A](#) and [104B](#) and read the parts that can help you understand the material in this course.

Instructional Team

About your instructor: I (Furkan) am a 6th-year Ph.D. candidate in the UCSD Political Science Dept. My research focuses on the use of force and legal arguments in territorial disputes. Because of my research focus, I am familiar with the literature and arguments of both legal and IR scholarship. Before the Ph.D. program, I worked as a legal researcher at The Advocates for

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Human Rights after getting my LL.M. degree from the University of Minnesota Law School. I love cooking, swimming, and playing strategy games.

About your teaching assistant: Roberto Bonilla

Learning Outcomes

The broad objective of this course is to give you skills that will serve you in academia, at law school, and in the legal job market. Specifically, by the end of the course you should be able to:

- Identify and formulate legal issues,
- Read and analyze both statutory law and case law,
- Analogize, distinguish, and synthesize cases to find the applicable law,
- Apply legal rules to a set of facts,
- Use legal-reasoning principles within an analytical framework (e.g., IRAC) to write an objective legal memorandum, and
- Advise a hypothetical client and provide a concrete course of action.

Some of these outcomes ask you to take in information passively. Others ask you to use that information to conduct legal analysis and present your position concisely and effectively. I therefore expect you to be an active learner who gathers information and a problem solver who finds workable ways through hypothetical problems by using both the tools provided in class and the reading materials.

Course Format and Expectations

This course will be conducted entirely remotely and synchronously via Zoom. We will meet twice a week, for 2 hours and 50 minutes each.

To succeed in this course, students must (1) complete all assigned readings on the syllabus before attending class, (2) actively participate in the class discussions, (3) fill out the exit ticket for participation, (4) complete the assignments on time, and (5) use the office hours and class time to ask questions and for clarification. For this course, **you need to spend 15 to 20 hours per week**, due to the condensed nature of summer courses. If you cannot show this level of commitment, consider taking this course when you can.

Assignments, Feedback, and Grading

Your grade will be based on three writing assignments (30% each) and participation (10%). As these assignments approach, I will provide more details. Roberto will grade your assignments based on the same criteria that will be available to you.

Written Assignments (30% each): Students submit three distinct written assignments. These assignments are similar to those you learn to write at law school and frequently write at a law firm.

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1. Office Memorandum (30%): An objective, predictive memo that applies case and statutory law to a client's facts using a disciplined analytical framework (IRAC). The audience is a supervising attorney. The goal is accurate, well-organized analysis, and the language is objective and may include legal jargon.
2. Client Advice Letter (30%): A clear and concise letter for a client who is not a lawyer and cannot understand the legal jargon. The goal is to translate your legal analysis into a plain-language summary and offer the client advice with actionable items.
3. Demand Letter (30%): A pre-litigation letter with formal language to be sent to opposing counsel. It usually lays out legal disputes along with the facts and demands specific relief by a deadline. The goal is to craft persuasive legal arguments addressing the opposing side and resolve the disputes before they escalate further into litigation.

Participation (10%): Students are required to participate in the class and fill out the exit ticket (two-question surveys) after each class session. You are allowed to miss two class sessions without any penalty. If you miss more, you will lose points. Each class session will be 1.25% of your total grade ($1.25 * 8 = 10$).

- Joining the class, being active in the class discussions, and filling out the exit ticket are enough to receive the grade.
 - o Students who join via Zoom but do not participate in any way will not receive the participation grade, even if they fill out the exit ticket.
 - o Students who join right before the end of the course to fill out the exit ticket will not receive the participation point.
- Given the remote nature of the course, I understand that some of you may not feel comfortable enough to turn the camera on. As long as you actively participate in the class discussion, you are not required to have your camera on.

Late Policy: It is your responsibility to submit your work on time. For each day after the deadline, your submission will receive a 5% late penalty of the total grade for that assignment.

- Use the late policy strategically. If you don't have a viable document to submit at the time of the deadline, submit late instead of submitting something that will cost you more points than the late penalty.

Appeal: You can appeal your grade. You are required to write a one-page appeal with the arguments for a higher grade. Send your appeal to Roberto first.

AI Policy: You should not use ChatGPT and other AIs for writing assignments. This is a skills class. If you cannot develop the required skills here, it will be much more difficult to do so once you get to law school or get jobs at law firms. Do not waste this opportunity to learn how to write effectively. If you use AI to draft your assignments, we will treat this as cheating.

Accessibility

If you are a student with a documented disability who will be requesting accommodations in my class, please make sure you are registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://osd.ucsd.edu/contact/index.html>) and provide me with documentation outlining your accommodations. I am happy to meet with you privately during office hours to discuss how I can help you with the accommodation.

UCSD Rules of Academic Integrity

You are expected to do your own work. Students are not permitted to use unauthorized assistance of any kind. Students who are caught plagiarizing will receive a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office for administrative sanctions. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me or the TA.

Students also agree that by taking this course, all required written assignments will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted answers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Class Behavior and Inclusive Classroom

I am committed to providing an inclusive learning experience and supporting diversity of experiences, thoughts, and identities. Students are free to express their opinions respectfully and are expected to be respectful of classmates' views and behave courteously toward each other in and outside the classroom. If students encounter any barriers to participating in class, they are encouraged to notify me. No one shall target another class participant personally.

Course Material and Schedule

We do not have a designated coursebook. You will find your required readings on Canvas. For this class and future pre-law classes, I strongly recommend two books:

- Deborah A. Schmedemann & Christina L. Kunz, *Synthesis: Legal Reading, Reasoning, and Communication*, 5th ed. (Aspen Publishing, 2017).
- John C. Dernbach, Richard V. Singleton II, Cathleen S. Wharton & Catherine J. Wasson, *A Practical Guide to Legal Writing and Legal Method*, 7th ed. (Aspen Publishing, 2021).

If a reading has a "Recommended" tag, it is not required, but you will benefit from reading it. Finally, I recommend that you acquire the most up-to-date Bluebook (22nd edition). It is an essential piece in the library of all students of law.

Attribution: Maysa E. Nichter's syllabus for this course influenced this syllabus heavily. Please take a look at her course offerings and consider taking her classes. I also get inspiration from Karen Lundquist, my own professor at Minnesota Law.

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Week 1

August 3: Introduction to Legal Reasoning: Basics of the Legal System and Role of Lawyers

August 5: Understanding Cases: Reading, Analyzing, and Briefing

Week 2

August 10: Understanding Cases (cont.) & Reading Statutes and Commentary

August 12: Legal Reasoning and Analysis & IRAC — Applying Rules to Facts I

Week 3

August 17: Applying Rules to Facts II & Objective Legal Analysis & Writing: Office Memo I

August 19: Objective Legal Analysis & Writing: Office Memo II & Legal Citations

August 22: Office Memo Due

Week 4

August 24: Simple and Effective Writing: Client Advice Letter I

August 26: Simple and Effective Writing: Client Advice Letter II

August 29: Client Letter Due

Week 5

August 31: Communications to Opposing Counsel: Demand Letter I

September 2: Communications to Opposing Counsel: Demand Letter II & Tools for Self-Improvement

September 5: Demand Letter Due