How to Master Communication and Writing—for Paralegals

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As many know, behind every great attorney is an equally great paralegal. Paralegals handle many tasks traditionally associated with attorneys, such as communicating with clients, drafting briefs, and appearing in court. With the amount of communication and writing a paralegal handles in their day-to-day work, it's vital their skills are up to snuff.

As a paralegal yourself, developing your communication and writing skills might feel daunting (especially when you're working in a busy law firm!), but there are plenty of easy ways to hone your skills. And as a bonus, these skills can help make your job easier, impress your coworkers, and help you deliver a client-centered experience.

This article explains why communication and writing for paralegals is essential, provides tips and tricks for becoming a confident legal writer and communicator, and demonstrates how legal practice management software can help you take your skills to the next level.

Why is communication important for paralegals?

Paralegals traditionally wear many different hats in a law firm. As an attorney's right-hand person, a paralegal could be communicating with anyone from clients to coworkers to the courts. Paralegals with effective communication skills can easily navigate their daily tasks and better serve their clients.

Why are writing skills important for paralegals?

Whether an attorney or a paralegal, working in a law firm usually involves ample writing and drafting. For example, some everyday paralegal work include:

- Communicating with clients and other parties by mail or email: You could be answering a client's questions or providing instructions, or requesting documents from an opposing party, etc.
- Drafting legal documents: Chances are you'll be drafting pleadings and other court forms. You may even be drafting longer-form legal documents, such as applications or submissions for trial.

- Drafting internal documents: This includes completing document reviews or drafting any number of memos and other strategic documents.
- Legal research: You could be drafting legal research memos.

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How to become a confident legal writer and communicator

Communicating and writing for paralegals can be mastered, but you must put in the work. By writing daily, asking for feedback, considering your audience, learning about legal research and citation, and—above all—writing well, you'll be wowing your coworkers and clients in no time.

Try to write every day

There's no shortcut to becoming a great writer. Good communication and writing for paralegals comes only from practice. That's why it's essential to take every opportunity to practice your writing and communication skills to become a confident, skilled writer.

Whether you start a journal or actively seek opportunities to write more at work, write as much as you can. Check out online resources for legal writing tips to help broaden your skills and gain insights into the tips and tricks for improving your writing.

Ask for feedback

Asking for feedback is one of the more surefire ways to improve your writing. While asking for feedback might make you feel self-conscious, getting a different perspective on your writing habits will ultimately make you a stronger writer and able to better service your law firm's clients.

Whether you're seeking feedback from a legal professional at your firm or someone outside your organization, you're sure to learn something from the experience. There are other benefits to seeking feedback, too—it can help strengthen your workplace relationships and even help you network with other paralegals.

Keep your audience in mind

Paralegals are often the jack of all trades at a law firm, so unsurprisingly, they can find themselves writing for many different audiences! That's why you must keep your audience in mind when you're writing.

Each audience will have different needs in terms of readability and legal knowledge. For example, on a given day, a paralegal might write an email to a client answering questions they have about their case, prepare a research brief for a senior lawyer, and draft a form to be filed at a court registry. There may also be specific style conventions you'll have to follow if you're submitting forms or documents to an external organization—in some cases, you may even need to consider your audience for a paralegal cover letter.

When it comes to your audience, think about the following for determining the tone, style, and level of detail:

- Their role and relationship to you
- Age
- Income
- Economic status
- Education
- Values
- Their knowledge of the writing topic

Considering the above points will help you connect better with your readers and minimize miscommunications.

Fact-check everything

Practicing law can feel like performing surgery—when it comes to legal documents, every word is critical. Not only that, clients rely on their lawyers and paralegals to represent them effectively. While mistakes happen, maintaining credibility is integral. It's essential to fact-check your work to ensure the information you communicate is correct. It's also important to consider the meaning of your work—is your explanation clear? Could it be taken out of context by a client or mislead them?

Master legal citation

You will likely need to learn legal citation if you're drafting legal briefs or submissions. While legal citation can be challenging to learn, you'll be surprised how quickly you can pick it up with practice. Attorneys typically use The Bluebook guide to legal citation but check with others in your law firm to make sure Bluebook style is preferred.

Prioritize grammar above all else

To the same point, grammatically-correct writing is critical in communication and writing for paralegals. Following grammatical convention helps you maintain credibility and ensures your writing is clear and concise.

Whether a new paralegal or a seasoned pro, it's always a good idea to refresh your writing skills. Some of the books listed in this blog post are an excellent place to start, including:

- Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation (Lynn Truss): makes a powerful case for the understanding and application of proper punctuation.
- The Elements of Legal Style (Bryan A. Garner): one of the best books for lawyers on word choice, grammar, mechanics, and more.

For extra credit, take a peek at the following books:

- The Winning Brief: 100 Tips For Persuasive Briefing in Trial and Appellate Courts (Brian A. Garner): an essential read for drafting persuasive briefs (the attorneys at your law firm will also want to read it!).
- Legal Writing in Plain English (Brian A. Garner): an excellent resource for learning how to simplify your legal writing (including exercises if you want to practice!).

Document automation can help

Though we've outlined the importance of writing and communication for paralegals above, there will be times when you can benefit from document automation. For instance, many routine writing tasks for paralegals can be time-consuming, and you may be bogged down in paperwork. That's where document automation comes in.

Tools like Clio Draft can help your law firm automate templates and documents, leaving you more time to focus on complex writing tasks. For example, with Clio Draft, you can create standard templates and use the software to input names and contact information

automatically. You can create more comprehensive templates, like wills or family law agreements, and then generate a complete document after telling the software what you need.

By automating routine paralegal tasks with tools like Clio Draft, you can save time, drive innovation, and ultimately grow in your role by focusing on more complex writing and communication tasks.

Final notes on communication and writing for paralegals

Communication and writing for paralegals is a crucial skill that will help you navigate your daily tasks easily. While developing these skills can take time, the results are well worth it.

It's also worth considering whether specific tasks can be automated, too. By automating routine legal tasks, you can save time while providing accurate and high-quality documents for your clients. You may even find yourself developing skills with your newfound free time!

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