

**City University of Hong Kong  
Course Syllabus**

**offered by Department of English  
with effect from Semester B 2021/2022**

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**Part I Course Overview**

**Course Title:** Language in law and crime

**Course Code:** EN4573

**Course Duration:** 1 semester

**Credit Units:** 3

**Level:** B4

Arts and Humanities

**Proposed Area:**  Study of Societies, Social and Business Organisations

*(for GE courses only)*

Science and Technology

**Medium of Instruction:** English

**Medium of Assessment:** English

**Prerequisites:** Nil  
*(Course Code and Title)*

**Precursors:** Nil  
*(Course Code and Title)*

**Equivalent Courses:** EN2401 Language in Law and Crime  
*(Course Code and Title)*

**Exclusive Courses:** Nil  
*(Course Code and Title)*

## Part II Course Details

### 1. Abstract

(A 150-word description about the course)

As members of civic society, we are all of us subject to the formal, legal rules enacted by governments. However, these rules are conveyed through a language that has developed a reputation for being overly technical and consequently impenetrable to non-specialists. Language use in other legal domains like the courtroom is similarly opaque. This course aims to develop students' understanding of the relationship between language and the law and crime by offering a discourse analytical perspective to English legal texts and practices, especially language use in the construction and interpretation of legislation, and in the criminal justice system, including the courtroom. It considers the way that language may function as a forensic tool in particular legal cases. In addition it looks at the way that language is used to talk about law and crime, and aims to foster language and critical thinking skills that can be applied to related topics.

### 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.	Critically analyse data from legal settings and apply knowledge acquired from the course to their interpretation.		X	X	X
2.	Demonstrate an understanding of basic legal text and render it in plain English		X	X	
3.	Discuss law and crime-related topics using a range of appropriate language		X	X	X
4.	Present clearly constructed and critically sound arguments relating to legal issues		X	X	X
		100%			

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

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	
Interactive lectures	Students attend <b>interactive lectures</b> which provide examples and tools for analysis of data.	X	X	X		
Independent reading	Students complete <b>readings</b> which provide examples and tools	X	X	X		

	for analysis of data.					
Text analysis / discussion	Students <b>analyse and discuss</b> legal texts, developing their understanding of how language is used in legal contexts, applying their knowledge of legal language and conventions, and interpreting text in light of the wider social context by providing clear and logical reasons for arguments.	X	X	X	X	
Writing / presenting activities	Students rewrite examples of legal text to make them accessible to non-specialists. Students are exposed to sample presentations, and are asked to consider the arguments from a critical standpoint; they also give mini-presentations in preparation for the final assessment.		X	X	X	

#### 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 quiz	X	X			20%	Individual: Students analyse the features of a legal text and render it in plain English
In-class presentation	X	X	X	X	30%	Groupwork: Students critically compare legal interactions, using language that is specific and appropriate to the interactions they are presenting
Detailed evaluative report	X	X	X	X	40%	Individual: Students analyse a set of data and make judgments with respect to the legal implications, applying their knowledge and understanding of legal language and conventions
Class participation	X	X	X	X	10%	Individual: Based on how frequently, actively and constructively students participate.
Examination: ____% (duration: _____, if applicable)						

\* 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 1: In-class quiz: Text analysis and rendering in plain English

Items to be assessed	Excellent (A+, A, A-)	Good (B+, B, B-)	Fair (C+, C, C-)	Marginal (D)	Failure (F)
Analysis (10 marks)	The text is comprehensively analyzed and explained All key features of text are identified	The text is soundly analyzed and explained Most key features of text are identified	The text is adequately analyzed and explained Sufficient key features of text are identified	The text is inadequately analyzed and explained Insufficient key features of text are identified	The text is barely analyzed/The analysis is not at all comprehensible Few key features of text are identified
Rendering of text into plain English (10 marks)	'Translated' text is a completely clear and accurate rendition of original	'Translated' text is a mostly clear and accurate rendition of original	'Translated' text is an adequately clear and accurate rendition of original	'Translated' text is insufficiently clear and a generally inaccurate rendition of original	'Translated' text is mostly unclear and inaccurate rendition of original

### Assessment Task 2: In-class presentation

Items to be assessed	Excellent (A+, A, A-)	Good (B+, B, B-)	Fair (C+, C, C-)	Marginal (D)	Failure (F)
Critical understanding and analysis of law and related issues (10 marks)	Shows full understanding of main concepts All relevant information is included in explanation of concepts Relevant information is comprehensively analyzed and	Shows sound understanding of main concepts Most relevant information is included in explanation of concepts Relevant information is analyzed and	Shows adequate understanding of main concepts Sufficient information is included in explanation of concepts Relevant information is adequately analyzed and explained	Shows inadequate understanding of main concepts Insufficient information is included in explanation of concepts Relevant information is inadequately analyzed and	Shows little understanding of main concepts Very limited information is included in explanation of concepts Relevant information is barely analyzed/The analysis is not at all

	explained	explained		explained	comprehensible
Construction of arguments (15 marks)	Arguments are completely clear Provides completely logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions	Arguments are mostly clear Provides mostly logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions	Arguments are sufficiently clear Provides sufficiently logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions	Arguments are insufficiently clear Provides somewhat illogical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions	Arguments are unclear Provides largely illogical or no explanation of relationship between data and conclusions
Use of language appropriate to the topic (5 marks)	A comprehensive range of appropriate language is used	A wide range of appropriate language is used	An adequate range of appropriate language is used	An inadequate range of appropriate language is used	Language used is completely inappropriate

### Assessment Task 3: Data analysis task

Items to be assessed	Excellent (A+,A, A-)	Good (B+,B, B-)	Fair (C+,C,C-)	Marginal (D)	Failure (F)
Analysis (20 marks)	The data are comprehensively analyzed and explained	The data are soundly analyzed and explained	The data are adequately analyzed and explained	The data are inadequately analyzed and explained	The data are barely analyzed/The analysis is not at all comprehensible
Use of language appropriate to the topic (law & crime) (5 marks)	A comprehensive range of appropriate language is used	A wide range of appropriate language is used	An adequate range of appropriate language is used	An inadequate range of appropriate language is used	Language used is completely inappropriate
Construction of arguments (15 marks)	Arguments are completely clear Provides completely logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions	Arguments are mostly clear Provides mostly logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions	Arguments are sufficiently clear Provides sufficiently logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions	Arguments are insufficiently clear Provides somewhat illogical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions	Arguments are unclear Provides largely illogical or no explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

### Assessment Task 4: Class participation

Excellent (A+,A,A-)	Good (B+,B,B-)	Fair (C+,C,C-)	Marginal (D)	Failure (F)
An excellent record of attendance and participation. Attended all classes punctually, always participated actively and constructively in class and group activities.	A good record of attendance and participation. Attended most classes punctually, mostly participated actively and constructively in class and group activities.	An adequate record of attendance and participation. Attended an adequate number of classes and was adequately punctual, sometimes participated actively and constructively in class and group activities.	An inadequate record of attendance and participation. Did not attend an adequate number of classes or was often not adequately punctual, occasionally participated in class and group activities but needs to be more active and constructive in class.	A poor record of attendance and participation. Often failed to attend class and/or often failed to participate in class and group activities.

### **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.)

Language and law, Forensic linguistics, Discourse analysis, Genre analysis, Conversation analysis, Legislation, Courtroom discourse, Police interviews, Plain legal English, Workplace communication, Professional discourse

#### **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.)

Bhatia, V. K. (1993): *Analysing genre: Language use in professional settings*. London: Longman.

##### **2.2 Additional Readings**

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

Cotterill, J. (Ed.) (2002): *Language in the legal process*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Gibbons, J. (Ed.) (1994): *Language and the law*. Harlow: Longman

Gibbons, J. (2003) *Forensic linguistics: An introduction to language in the justice system*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Leonard, R. (2005) Forensic linguistics: Applying the scientific principles of language analysis to issues of the law. *International Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 3.

Levi, J. N. and Graffam-Walker, A. (Eds.) (1990): *Language in the judicial process* Plenum Press: London

Shuy, R. W. (1993): *Language crimes: the use and abuse of language evidence in the courtroom*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Stygall, G. (1994): *Trial language: differential discourse processing and discursive formation*. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company:

Tiersma, P. M. (1999): *Legal language* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.