**Checklist for client-focused legal writing**Here’s a list of what to look out for when reviewing your (or someone else’s ) writing in a structured way:

* Is the document appealing to look at? Is there plenty of white space? Are there headings, bullet points etc to break up the text?
* Is the aim clear on first reading? Will the reader know what they’re meant to think, feel or do differently after reading the document?
* Are the writing style and content appropriate for the audience (both the addressee and anyone else who may also read the document)?
* Has the writer thought of the big picture (the “free spirit” stage)? Have they considered the knock-on effect of any advice? Have they analysed the situation correctly, taking everything relevant into account?
* Is there a clear structure to the document (the “architect” stage)? Does it follow a logical approach, starting with a summary of what’s important to the reader?
* Is the writing clear, simple and easy to read, even if it’s a complex topic (the “carpenter” stage)?
* Are sentences short enough? They should be under three lines (or 40 words) with an average sentence length of fewer than 20 words.
* Has the writer mainly used the active voice, and chosen verbs rather than nouns to keep the writing strong?
* Has the writer chosen simple words where possible, and avoided clusters of words if there’s a one-word equivalent?
* Have they explained any legal or other jargon (including acronyms)?
* Is there a worked example of anything complex, such as a formula? Are there any case studies showing how something would work in practice?
* Has the writer included flowcharts, diagrams, tables or graphs? If not, should there be? Will it save words, or simplify an explanation?
* Has the writer reviewed their work well (the “judge” stage)? Are there any typographical errors, or mistakes of grammar or punctuation?