

Jared Kalmowitz

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English 125

February 9, 2025

Transliteration

“What letter is this, Jared?”

I lean forward as my eyes dart up to the board, right above where Ms. Zeman’s finger was pointing. I looked at it and saw a *G*.

“Gimmel,” I reply, returning to my lounging position.

“And this one?” she asks, directing my eyes to a letter two rows beneath the previous one. I see an *L*.

“Lamed.”

When I see Hebrew writing, the letters morph into their English counterparts. There are three main differences between the two languages: (1) Hebrew is read from right to left, as opposed to English’s common left to right manner, (2) they both have a completely separate set of symbols with different sounds, and (3) Hebrew does not have vowel letters, just marks above, below, or beside the letters. Even with these differences, when I read Hebrew, I see the words as if they were written phonetically in English. I think it’s because that is how I learned to read them; I was taught in comparisons. When we would see a letter, we would remember its sound by being given the English letter that has the same sound. For example, when we were shown the letter “מ,” my teacher would say: “This is ‘mem.’ It makes an ‘M’ sound. Muh, muh, muh, an ‘M’ sound.” After a few classes, all of the students could say the entire Hebrew alphabet. We would sit there rattling off the letters in unison, but we were thinking in English. We would read

words, sentences, prayers, but we were thinking in English. We would stand in front of our congregation, chanting the verses from the Torah, becoming an adult in the eyes of Judaism, but we were thinking in English. I can remember how I learned Hebrew, as I had a foundation of communication in another language. I could base this new form of conversing off of what I knew from my previous form of conversing. But before English, I had no written language to connect in. If there were no words in my head, how could I have learned a language?

We first communicate through our senses. We can't immediately form words, yet we can still feel feelings. I could point, grab, wail, or just look, and that would convey whatever thoughts were in my head. The first book I could read on my own was a sensory book. Thick cardboard pages would flip to reveal cutouts of various materials, all with different feelings and textures, aiding the author in telling their story. If they said the cat was soft, the patch planted on the page would gently soothe my fingers as I rubbed across it, with me expecting it to purr or hiss at me. If they said the tree was rough, the spot would have raised small specks sprinkled about, as if my hand was against the cedar trees in my backyard. The sensory books would give me the context clues to understand the words that I was reading and relate them to something I had interacted with before. While I might not have known the word *tree*, I would know what it was like to touch one. English was also taught in comparisons, just like Hebrew, even if I didn't know words to compare it to. I knew the feeling. The word next to the picture next to the feeling gave me all of the context clues needed to put together the story.

Similarly, bedtime stories, courtesy of my parents, significantly helped with my process of learning how to speak and read: the tone in which they would portray the words, from exuberantly singing one line to sulkily saying the next, would tell me what emotion the words meant. I would beg to be read *Snuggle Puppy*, a sing-along book. I eventually memorized the

sounds to join into the song, but my dad's care and compassion brought me to understand what the lines, "I love what you are, I love what you do, Fuzzy little Snuggle Puppy, I love you," really meant. It was how my parents felt for me, their unwavering support. I could read it in their body language and began to associate the sounds that they were saying to how they were acting.

Learning to communicate is more than just learning words; our languages carry emotion, history, and personality. One phrase can have different connotations just off of who says it and how it is received. Our ability to adapt and interpret these nuances is what allows communication to be truly meaningful, bridging the gap between diverse perspectives. With writing, putting pen to paper is only half of it; you have to convey feelings, whether it's through sensory details or intentional word choice. Every written word looks the same, but it's the surrounding words that form together to create purpose. If every word was said the same way, it would be hard to understand the importance. The way in which we all speak can be different: our accents, cadences, tones, and definitions can all come from each individual's backstory. But the way in which we learn, no matter where we come from, is by translating into a medium we understand.

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Lawyer Up

I've always loved a good puzzle; ones that make you pause, rethink, and see things from a new angle. Solving them isn't just about knowing the answer, but how your out-of-the-box thinking can get there. The law works the same way. Every case, every argument, and every precedent are brainteasers waiting to be solved, and I am especially drawn to that world.

When I first learned about this project, I thought of the best professional writer I know: Julie Weil. Basically my second mother, Julie raised my best friend while writing short stories, novels, children's books, and plays, all while teaching English to elementary schoolers. To me, writing always looked like what she did: sitting up straight, computer monitor aglow, pointer fingers residing comfortably on *F* and *J*. After just a few classes, however, I have learned that this is narrow-minded thinking of what a writer actually is. Yes, Julie is a writer, but does someone need to be a writer to write? Really, all writing requires is jotting symbols. That's why, after some consideration, I figured out the person who I wanted to be the focal point of my project: Julie's husband of 32 years, Steven Weil, a lawyer.

Steven Weil is a partner at Doherty, Dugan, Cannon, Raymond & Weil, P.C. in Franklin, Massachusetts, and has been practicing law since 1986. While he does nail the stereotypical part of the job, screaming "Objection!" in court, behind the scenes, he does a *lot* of writing. At the beginning of my 45-minute call with Steven, he alluded to the many types of writing. He

described many different forms: letters, poems, creative, but, Steven described, in work he uses legal writing. When I asked him what exactly that meant to him, he stated:

To explain to somebody who's not a lawyer what legal writing is, you have to think about what a lawyer does... Lawyers are professional problem solvers... A lawyer has to rely on what his or her client is going through to inform them by figuring out what the issues are that are defining the problem, figure out what the law is that applies to that problem, and then analyze the facts and apply the law.

Legal writing is persuasive writing. There is no fluff, no impressing people with exuberant vocabulary or "flowery prose." It's about being direct and presenting your case in a formally structured way that is used by lawyers and understood by courts. As in every form of writing, there are good and bad writers. Good legal writers start with their research and analysis. "You *have* to do the work," Steven stressed. Reading and understanding laws, statutes, and court decisions requires time and effort, but reconciling previous, differing cases and applying them to the situation at hand plays a large part in the gig. They also properly format their work, adhering to the required structure, accompanied with proper citations. It is a necessity to make outlines, a lawyer can't just write legal memos and briefs and memorandums from a stream of consciousness. Bad legal writing meanders, introducing extraneous or irrelevant information that doesn't really relate to the issue the attorney is trying to solve. When he was a law clerk for the superior court in Massachusetts, Steven would write legal decisions for judges, listening to arguments and forming his opinion on how a case should turn out. With bad legal writers, he would see a theme:

When I would go to do the work, I would see if somebody might have done a really good job researching the law and presenting their case, but it was so poorly presented.

Formatting stuff was off. The case citations weren't in proper form. The statutes were miscited. The paragraphs were run on. Those things can really hurt you because it sort of shows a sort of sloppiness that takes away from the product.

The difference between good and bad legal writers can be the difference between winning and losing. Steven would see strong research go to waste over poor organization. No matter how powerful your ideas are, the most important part is how you convey them. To the naked eye, legal writing looks like a whole bunch of boring jargon with an excessive number of letters per word meant that would confuse the average person. It's complex for a reason: legal documents not only cover convoluted concepts; they must eliminate any ambiguity. Every word matters and is put in its place for a reason. It is a structured, sometimes tedious process, and can seem like it completely lacks creativity.

Steven always considered himself a pretty good writer. He felt as though his descriptiveness could paint a picture in the readers mind, his keyboard the brush for the canvas that was his illuminated computer screen. He felt that his creativity and ability to engage audience in his writing distinguished him from others in his class. Because of this skill, Steven "didn't think [he] was going to have too much trouble learning how to write like a lawyer." When I asked him about his first experience of writing a professional legal document, he flashed back to his mandatory legal writing class in law school. This truly was his first time being exposed to writing like a lawyer. The students would be given real-life scenarios and have to research laws followed by preparing legal memorandum. Through submitting his first couple of assignments, Steven quickly learned that the professor didn't want to hear what his opinion was. Law school is designed to make you think like an attorney, and to do that one must remove themselves and their personal opinions from what they think is right or wrong and figure out the

way to best represent the client. This type of writing wasn't filled with lavish details or embellished writing. Still, there is a lot of room for creativity, but you cannot make up facts. Instead, the creativity comes from how can you present your facts.

Interviewing Steven was an enlightening opportunity. He had been preparing for a case over the last couple of weeks, so getting a hold of him for a call was not easy. Even with his busy schedule, he made some time to sit down and answer my questions. Even though I've known him as "Steven, my Friend's Dad" for 17 years, I didn't know "Steven, the Lawyer" at all. Sitting down with someone who was so accomplished in their field, with so much experience and knowledge to bestow, I was a little intimidated. I wanted to make sure I could match the level of professionalism that was on the other side of the call. After I asked my first question, these worries went away. I realized how eager Steven was to tell me about his profession, especially in the context of writing. I had told him about the project ahead of time and he noted that it combined two of his passions. When someone agrees to an interview, they *want* to get their word out, and once I realized this, I became less nervous.

Looking ahead, I will be doing more writing than I ever thought at Michigan. Had I been asked this question before the semester, I would've said, "Oh yeah, there's probably going to be a lot of essays and stuff I going to have to get done." Now, I realize, I'm writing constantly. Most forms of communication are evolved from writing, and part of college is figuring out how to communicate independently with a lot more responsibility than ever. There will definitely be professional papers and projects I'll have to complete, but outside of that, I will be writing every day, texting my friends and making sure to communicate with those around me. I will be drafting emails, signing up for clubs, and taking notes lectures. My interview with Steven reminded me of the many forms of writing, with so many branches and purposes. I will no longer think of it as

grinding out an essay for English class. Instead, I will grow in all facets of this art and enhance my communication skills through the most hands-on way learning to write can be: as a college student. We no longer have play-dates scheduled for us. Now, we have to reach out for whatever we are looking for on our own behalf.

The best author in the world would have significant difficulty writing a legal memorandum. The skill comes from a different mindset, cutting out every unnecessary detail and efficiently getting a point across. The best way to improve your legal writing, as Steven put it, would be, well, to write! You need to put pen to paper as early as you can, writing and rewriting, and figuring out what works and what doesn't. Because at the end of the day, the law doesn't reward the most eloquent writer. It rewards the one who can't be argued against.

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Reflection

First college essay down! It is going to be exhilarating to press submit. This project had multiple layers and high expectations, but I guess that is what I was expecting from a university-level assignment. Alas, I digress.

One of my biggest focuses within this project was recognizing writing as a form of communication. Relating learning to write to overall learning to communicate was very fun and I liked diving into my stories of learning to express my thoughts. When I thought about being taught a language, I first thought of all of my Spanish classes from grades 6-12, repeating conjugations until they sounded silly. That reminded me of my journey with Hebrew, and thinking of learning those languages brought a central question I think Part A answered: if I learned both of those languages by constantly translating to English, how did I learn English without another language to base it on? I was really intrigued by that, so I heavily concentrated on telling my story there. I felt that it was pretty unique and I'd say I'm proud of that. With Part B, it's more obvious how my idea changes because I actually reference it in the essay. I liked writing the twist of the essay being about legal writing when it starts with a focus on literary writing because it captures the common thought that writing is only for telling stories. That was my initial thought process, and choosing to interview a lawyer helped expand my understanding of writing's many forms.

Writing Part A felt very familiar, as I used my usual introduction of starting with a quotation to jump right in the middle of a conversation and setting the scene for the reader. I really like starting with anecdotes as it's a good way to present exposition. Starting with a story kicked things into gear and started a personal narrative that I was pretty comfortable with writing. This may have been because I was used to from writing so many college essays over the past few years. It was an essay that was very subjective, which is pretty par for the course for an English paper. Part B, however, was not familiar at all. I have done persuasive essays before, but I have never conducted an interview. Analyzing an interview or someone's perspective wasn't new, but going over my own work was pretty new to me.

Before conducting an interview, I felt inexperienced. Everything I knew about interviews was from the YouTube show *Hot Ones* or the *60 Minutes* advertisements that would play during the fourth quarter of NFL games. I knew that it was super important to not sound too rehearsed, but to also know my stuff and what I was trying to get out of the interview. I thought that I might be intimidated or have to come up with clever questions to really make my interviewee think deeply, but I realized a mix of both clever *and* simple was very effective with getting interesting answers. Some of the coolest responses came from modest questions, such as, "What separates good from bad legal writers?" and "What was your first experience with legal writing like?" These questions prompted passionate and candid answers. I think starting my interviewing career with someone I'm pretty comfortable with helps work on some of the basics of interviews. I probably would've had a much harder time with somebody I have no experience with.

All in all, I liked Project 1. It was an interesting introduction to English 125 and a cool way to reflect on my journey as a writer and communicator. I also appreciated being able to work on my abilities as an interviewer. While initially, I was nervous for what felt like such a daunting

task, the words flowed easily once I started writing because I was so passionate about the topic. I feel proud of my first assignment!