

## Chapter 2

# The legal writer's aims

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Most people, whether lawyers or not, want legal language to convey meaning from one person to others accurately and as precisely and efficiently as possible. Lawyers in particular often have a fourth requirement: that their language should persuade. Unlike the traditionalists, we ... believe that plain language is compatible with, and even improves, all four of these qualities, subject to the reservations in Part D. All four are important, and there is some overlap between them:

- **Accuracy** is essential, for obvious reasons. We agree with the traditionalists about this, but – as we argue throughout this book – traditional language is often *inaccurate*.
- Absolute **precision** may be the ideal but is in practice impossible, thought and language being inherently *imprecise* and varying from one person to another. And when it is impossible to legislate precisely for all possibilities, flexibility is required. We discuss this in detail in Part D.
- By '**efficiency**' we mean the transfer of meaning from one person to another with the minimum effort by writer and readers. The benefits discussed in Chapter 1 will normally justify, for the writer as well as for readers, the initial investment of time and effort needed to improve traditional precedents.
- Accuracy and precision help to **persuade**, at least if the persuasion is fair and honest. And understanding is essential, unless the audience surrenders its critical faculties and is blinded by faith. We deal with persuasion in Chapter 19.