Who wrote it
Richard Wydick, Emeritus professor of law at the University of California, Davis
Recipient of the Golden Pen Award from the Legal Writing Institute in 2005: “Perhaps no single work has done more to improve the writing of lawyers and law students and to promote the modern trend towards a clear, plain style of writing.”

What it offers
A practical Plain Language handbook, written for lawyers by a lawyer. It presents and explains Plain Language rules, with each chapter devoted to one rule.

Why you should read it
Wydick is a superb, clear writer who will teach what you need to know while making you chuckle. The book is easy to read and packed with legal plain language examples, language exercises, and concrete tips on how to pare down wordy documents.

Also check out
Plain English for Lawyers—Teacher’s Manual. This is a great manual to aid anyone teaching a class with Wydick’s Plain English for Lawyers.

“A lawyer’s words should not differ without reason from the words used in ordinary English. [...] Too often lawyers use Latin or archaic English phrases needlessly.”
–Chapter 7, “Choose Your Words With Care”
Who wrote it
Bryan Garner, Editor in Chief of Black’s Law Dictionary

“Acknowledged by linguists and lawyers alike as THE authority in legal language and usage, his influence is both far-reaching and profound [...] No one better bridges the worlds of law and language.”

What it offers
A detailed guide to the rules of legal writing, and a great complement to Wydick’s book. It sets out rules for punctuation, capitalization, word usage, terms of art and citations, and offers an extensive index of “troublesome words” that come up frequently in legal writing.

Why you should read it
This is a great go-to book not only for lawyers, but for any individual wishing to improve his or her writing and editing abilities — a valuable resource for writers crafting legal documents.

“Just because you know [...] what a habendum clause does is no reason to use such language at the dinner table. A lawyer should keep in mind that the purpose of communication is to communicate, and this can’t be done if the reader or listener doesn’t understand the words used.”
– Chapter 11, “Stuffy Words and Legalese”

“Ask yourself the six Orwellian questions. In one of the most famous essays ever written, [...] George Orwell wrote that a scrupulous writer, while writing each sentence, asks these crucial questions...”
– Chapter 13, “Editing and Proofreading”
Adult Literacy in America
National Adult Literacy Survey
From the National Center for Education Statistics

**Literacy** is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential.

**Background**
In the 90’s, Congress commissioned the U.S. Department of Education to study adult literacy in the U.S. This landmark study, published in 2002, remains the most comprehensive account of adult literacy in the U.S. to this day.

**Aim of the survey**
Evaluate adult literacy in the U.S. using materials encountered in daily life.

**Why it is significant**

1st comprehensive study of U.S. adult literacy
Other studies have looked at the literacy of certain groups – e.g., job seekers – but never of the entire U.S. adult population.

Extensive
Surveyed 26,000 adults in U.S. households.

New approach
Past studies attempted to count the number of “illiterates” using a single task or combining results from diverse tasks into one score. The 2002 study addressed the complexity of literacy levels by avoiding school-based terms and grade-level scores to assess adult literacy; it used 165 assessment tasks, 80 of which were new, and employed three scales (prose, document, and quantitative, 0 to 500).

**What it found**
“Many of those who demonstrated limited literacy skills did not perceive that they had a problem.”

45% tested at the lowest skill levels.
They could enter background information on a simple form, and make simple inferences using printed materials.

They could **not**:
- process complex or lengthy passages, or
- perform quantitative tasks with two or more sequential operations.

“Literacy can be thought of as a currency in this society. Just as adults with little money have difficulty meeting their basic needs, those with limited literacy skills are likely to find it more challenging to pursue their goals – whether those involve job advancement, consumer decision making, citizenship, or other aspects of their lives.”
Who wrote it
Maryanne Wolf, Director of the Center for Reading and Language Research

“Blindingly fascinating, detailed and scholarly... You’ll find yourself focusing on words in new ways. For people interested in language, this is a must.”

What it offers
We were never born to read. There is no “reading gene”. Yet a few thousand years ago we invented reading, one of the single most remarkable inventions in history. The human brain’s extraordinary abilities and plasticity made this breakthrough possible.

Proust and the Squid tells the story of the “reading brain” in the context of our continuing intellectual evolution, and explores these changes over time and within individuals. We still have much to learn about the brain, which not only invented alphabets and learned to read, but also compensates in impressive fashion when it cannot!

Why you should read it
Described by the author as “2 parts science, 1 part personal observation”, this book explains the history and science of reading thoroughly and insightfully. Wolf explores the development of writing systems, the constant adaptation of the brain, and the complexities of reading development. She does a wonderful job conveying the human brain’s marvelous plasticity and complex design.

Wolf accompanies her text with fascinating images of the brain in various stages of development. She offers comments and anecdotes from scholars, authors, artists, scientists and her family, and examples from her work with readers of all ages.

“Reading can be learned only because of the brain’s plastic design, and when reading takes place, that individual brain is forever changed, both physiologically and intellectually.”