



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE U.S. COURTS
DEFENDER SERVICES OFFICE TRAINING DIVISION

PERSUASIVE WRITING WORKSHOP
Atlanta, Georgia

June 25-27, 2026

AGENDA

Thursday, June 25, 2026

7:30 – 8:30 a.m. Registration – Continental Breakfast

8:30 – 8:50 a.m. Welcoming Remarks
Craig Crawford, *Attorney Advisor, Training Division, Defender Services Office, Washington, DC*

8:50 – 9:00 a.m. Introduction to Workshop
Craig Crawford, *Attorney Advisor, Training Division, Defender Services Office, Washington, DC*

9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Plenary Session: Issue Spotting Using a Fact-Based Approach
Susan Lin, *Partner, Kairys, Rudovsky, Messing, Feinberg & Lin, Philadelphia, PA*
Fredilyn Sison, *CJA Panel Attorney, Asheville, NC*

Wouldn't you like some facts with that law? Knowing the law is great, but it only gets us halfway to a persuasively-written document. In this interactive session, we will use the mock case to learn a fact-based approach to spotting legal issues and organizing your persuasive pleading.

10:00 – 10:15 a.m. Refreshment Break

10:15 – 11:45 a.m. Workshop Session I: Issue Spotting Using a Fact-Based Approach

Room locations for the small groups will be provided in a separate document available at the registration desk. All small groups will meet in the same rooms throughout the workshop.

Participants will meet with their small group facilitators to issue spot their cases using a fact-based approach.

11:45 a.m. –

1:00 p.m. Lunch – on your own

1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Workshop Session I: Issue Spotting Using a Fact-Based Approach (cont'd)

2:30 – 2:45 p.m. Break

2:45 – 3:45 p.m. Plenary Session: Discovering and Telling the Story
Fredilyn Sison, *CJA Panel Attorney, Asheville, NC*

Now that you have extracted the facts and identified the legal issues, you must develop the story of your case. This session will discuss the elements of the story; demonstrate how to craft the story using these elements; and discuss how to tell your client's story in the most persuasive manner by developing characters, structuring and sequence, and identifying the key emotions and themes. By the end of the session, you will understand the importance of summarizing the key factual, legal, and emotional aspects of your case that convey your story, before you begin to write.

3:45 – 4:00 p.m. Refreshment Break

4:00 – 5:30 p.m. Workshop Session II: Discovering and Telling the Story

Participants will meet with their small group facilitators to apply storytelling techniques to the facts of their cases.

5:30 p.m. Adjourn for the day

Friday, June 26, 2026

7:30 – 8:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast

8:30 – 10:00 a.m. Workshop Session II: Discovering and Telling the Story (cont'd)

Participants will meet with their small group facilitators to apply storytelling techniques to the facts of their cases.

10:00 – 10:15 a.m. Refreshment Break

10:15 – 11:15 a.m. Plenary Session: Strategies for Writing Persuasively

Johanna Christiansen, *Assistant Federal Defender for the Central District of Illinois, Peoria, IL*

Writing a legal document can be a daunting task. In this session, we will address how to break down the writing process into more manageable pieces and approach each section of a legal document as an opportunity for zealous advocacy. Participants will receive instruction on writing with purpose, developing themes, structuring arguments, and effective editing.

11:15 – 11:30 a.m. Break

11:30 a.m. –

12:30 p.m. Plenary Session: The Art of Storytelling in Writing

Tracy N. DaCruz, *Appellate Attorney, Office of the Federal Defender for the Middle District of Florida, Orlando, FL*

Philosophy, science, and research all support the use of story-based narratives to most effectively communicate with others. And the goal of legal pleadings is to persuade judges to rule in favor of our clients. But legal pleadings too often overlook storytelling techniques. This training will discuss the structure and components of good storytelling to empower participants to tell winning stories in their cases.

12:30 – 1:45 p.m. Lunch – on your own

1:45 – 3:00 p.m. Workshop Session III: Persuasively Writing the Facts

Participants will meet with their small group facilitators to draft and re-write the facts in their cases using the principles learned in the preceding plenary sessions.

3:00 – 3:15 p.m. Refreshment Break

3:15 – 4:45 p.m. Workshop Session III: Persuasively Writing the Facts (cont'd)

4:45 p.m. Adjourn for the day

Saturday, June 27, 2026

7:30 – 8:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast

8:30 – 9:30 a.m. Plenary Session: Integrating the Facts and the Law

Vince Brunkow, *Chief Appellate Attorney, Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc., San Diego, CA*

Jessie Agatstein, *Appellate Attorney, Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc., San Diego, CA*

This session will cover the principles of crafting a fact-driven legal argument, instead of an argument that reads like a law review article. We will discuss how to summarize and distill the crucial facts, how to blend the facts and the law so that they exist harmoniously, and how to find the right balance of facts and law for the particular document you are writing.

9:30 – 9:45 a.m. Refreshment Break

9:45 a.m.

– 12:00 p.m. Workshop Session IV: Writing the Argument

Participants will meet with their small group facilitators to draft and revise the first few paragraphs of the legal argument in their cases.

12:00 p.m. Adjournment

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