

# RETAINING TOP TALENT: HOW EFFECTIVE LEGAL WRITING CAN STEM THE TIDE OF ASSOCIATE ATTRITION



Law firms are experiencing a troubling trend: promising associates leaving before they become profitable for their firms. Most associates leave by year three, and the vast majority are gone by year five.

While long hours and competitive salaries elsewhere often take the blame, an overlooked factor is costing firms millions: the struggle with legal writing and the often confusing and crushing feedback process.

## FROM CLASSROOM TO COURTROOM:

### THE WRITING CONUNDRUM

The polished essays that earned associates top grades in law school rarely translate to the demands of real-world practice. The transition from academic success to professional competence can be jarring. One day, an associate is confidently crafting academic papers. The next, they're drowning in client memos and court filings, frantically trying to meet deadlines and partner expectations.

The definition of quality changes starkly between academic and professional competence. Firms invest heavily in recruiting top talent and paying premium salaries, and they expect great work in return. When subpar drafts land on partners' desks, frustration naturally follows. However, many partners respond in ways that make the problem worse.

## THE FEEDBACK DILEMMA:

### GOOD INTENTIONS, UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Picture a common scenario: It's after dark, and a partner has just reviewed a draft that falls well short of expectations. She spends an hour marking it up, pointing out errors, and suggesting improvements. While intended to help, to an associate already working 80-hour weeks, all the red-lined corrections can be demoralizing.

Compounding the issue, different partners may have conflicting preferences. One partner's "clear and concise" might be another's "too abrupt." Associates struggle to discern grammatical errors from style preferences, leaving them confused and hindering improvement. This treatment can deeply affect an associate's sense of whether they belong in the firm, or in the practice of law.

## BEYOND THE DOCUMENT:

### THE RIPPLE EFFECT

This cycle takes a toll. Associates may begin to doubt whether they're cut out for legal practice. This leads to a crisis of confidence that can progress in several directions.

They may first attempt to switch to smaller firms, hoping for a more supportive environment. Some try to find areas of law where writing is less critical, only to discover that such areas don't exist. Eventually, many leave the profession entirely, despite years of hard work and significant student debt.

The cost to firms is staggering. Weakly written briefs or arguments can result in cases being lost or thrown out, unfavorable settlements, missed opportunities, and even fines from the court. Some have been so poorly written that they went viral, leading to significant reputational damage.

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Firms invest an average of 50–60% of an associate's salary to recruit and train them.

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When they leave before becoming profitable (typically around year five), that investment walks out the door with them. Moreover, the profession loses potentially outstanding lawyers who simply needed better support in developing their practical writing skills.

## TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED MENTORSHIP:

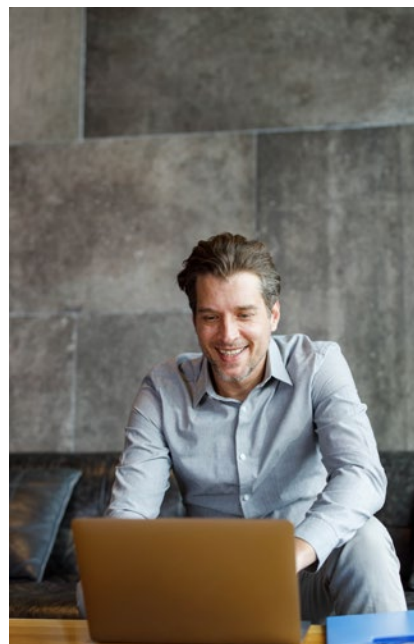
### A NEW APPROACH

But there's a solution that's inexpensive and easy to implement. WordRake offers a way to provide consistent, objective writing guidance without adding to already heavy partner workloads. More than just another piece of editing software, WordRake represents a shift in how firms can approach legal writing and associate development.

WordRake provides nonjudgmental editing suggestions based on well-established principles of clear writing. This helps associates distinguish between universal writing rules and individual partner preferences. Through consistent use, associates internalize good writing practices they may have forgotten or neglected while rushing to meet deadlines and learning to practice law.

The software serves as a patient teacher to young lawyers eager to impress. As associates watch their writing improve through consistent use of WordRake, their confidence grows, which goes a long way toward helping them feel like they belong in the legal profession and that they are ready to meet the firm's demands.

It's the writing mentor they need, when they need it most. At \$149 per user, it's a cost-effective solution to a problem costing firms millions in lost talent and productivity. WordRake also doesn't rely on generative AI. It's installed locally on individual computers, which makes sure sensitive client information never leaves the firm's protected environment.



## LEADING THE CHANGE:

### A CALL TO ACTION

Firms that take decisive action to address the legal writing crisis will decrease associate attrition and position themselves for long-term success in the face of increasing competition. Partners have the power to lead this change.

By investing in tools like WordRake and reimagining approaches to associate development, firms can create a more supportive, efficient, and profitable culture. The return on investment is clear: improved associate retention, higher-quality work, increased efficiency, and, ultimately, better service to clients.

But don't take our word for it. [Hundreds of legal professionals agree.](#)

WordRake stands out for the depth, breadth, and accuracy of its context-specific edits in Microsoft Word and Outlook. WordRake goes beyond grammar and spellcheck, identifying unnecessary words and simplifying complex language while respecting legally operative phrases and key legal content. At the click of a button, it gives in-line editing suggestions in the familiar track-changes style, like a professional editor, but faster.

WordRake runs exclusively on the local machine—no document or usage information is collected, transmitted, or stored.

**Bring WordRake to your organization for \$149 to \$229 per user per year.**

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