The Little Red Crash-Course: How not to Write like (the Stereotype of) a Lawyer or Professor

Although academics and professionals usually are proficient at basic writing mechanics like grammar, their writing is often subjectively difficult to read. They often correct unclear writing on a trial-and-error basis, without systematically understanding why one phrasing subjectively feels easier to read than another. To maximize writing clarity, a number of guidelines have been made by a famed quarter-long course at the University of Chicago. This lecture will try to explain these guidelines, though they will require practice over time to master. At the macro level, this lecture will emphasize point-based outlining over topic-based outlining, and point-first structure for paragraphs and paper sections. At the individual-sentence level, this lecture will discuss in detail how authors can use clear, crisp sentence cores to communicate information with minimal cognitive effort by the reader. Alternately, reversing these guidelines for the concealment of the ignorance of the author regarding his/her topic of writing, for the adoption of a maximally pretentious style, or for the encouragement of the misattribution of the difficulty of reading unclear writing to the difficulty of comprehension of the complexity of the ideas of the author, is also possible without being grammatically-incorrect. But we will hate you.