FREE FIELD GUIDE

Anatomy of a Legal Billing Description

The four-part formula, practice-area rewrites, block-billing fixes, flagged words and a pre-release review checklist

MIRA · miranow.ai · Updated October 2026

4 parts
Action, subject, focus and purpose

1 task
Per entry, each with its own time

A101-A111
UTBMS activity codes that match the verb

Rule 1.5
ABA Model Rule requiring reasonable fees

1 The Four-Part Formula

1 Action
A concrete past-tense verb: reviewed, drafted, revised, analyzed, researched, conferred, negotiated, prepared.

2 Subject
The document, filing or communication: purchase agreement, deposition notice, call with client.

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3 Focus
The issue, provision or category: indemnity terms, privilege issues, limitation period.

4 Purpose
Why the work was needed: for client comments, to support motion to dismiss, for closing.

5 Assembled
Analyzed indemnity terms in revised purchase agreement for client comments.

2 Vague to Clear: Rewrites by Practice Area

Practice area	Vague	Clear
Litigation	Worked on motion	Drafted motion to compel argument on overdue interrogatory answers
Corporate and M&A	Deal work	Revised disclosure schedules to reflect client's updated contract list
Real estate	Review title	Reviewed title commitment and flagged easement exceptions for buyer
Employment	Research	Researched noncompete enforceability under state law for client advice
Family law	Call with client	Conferred with client on proposed parenting schedule and next filing
Intellectual property	Trademark matters	Analyzed office action refusal and outlined response arguments
Insurance defense	Reviewed file	Summarized plaintiff medical records for initial report to carrier
Estate planning	Drafted documents	Drafted revocable trust with distribution terms requested by client
Bankruptcy	Attention to claims	Reviewed filed proofs of claim and identified objections for plan
Regulatory	Compliance work	Analyzed new reporting rule and summarized filing duties for client

Adapt each example to the actual work, the matter and the client's billing guidelines.

3 Block Billing: Spot It and Split It

What it is

Several tasks recorded in one entry with a single total time, so no one can see how long each task took.

Why it gets cut

Many client billing guidelines prohibit it, and courts reviewing fee requests may reduce block-billed time.

BEFORE

Block billed: 3.4 hours

Reviewed production; call with client; drafted letter to opposing counsel.

AFTER

Split: 1.8 + 0.6 + 1.0 = 3.4

Reviewed plaintiff production for privilege issues (1.8). Conferred with client on production gaps (0.6). Drafted deficiency letter to opposing counsel (1.0).

4 Wording That Draws Questions or Rejections

Flagged wording	Why reviewers flag it	Write instead
Attention to file	No action and no subject	Name the document and what you did to it
Work on matter	Says nothing about the task	Action + subject + focus + purpose
Review file	Unclear scope; can look duplicative	Name the documents and the reason for review
Research (alone)	No issue and no purpose	Researched [issue] under [law] for [purpose]
Conference or meeting	Participants and topic missing	Name participants by role and the topic
Emails	No recipient and no subject	Email to [recipient] regarding [issue]
Follow up	Unclear what was done	State the action: called, wrote, confirmed
Various or miscellaneous	Signals unreviewed time	Record each task as its own entry
Prepare for (alone)	No event or document named	Prepared outline for [hearing or deposition]
Organize file, schedule call	Often treated as administrative work	Check guidelines; mark non-billable if required
Internal conference	Guidelines often limit internal meetings	State the purpose and each participant's role
Travel	Guidelines often cap or exclude travel	Follow the client's travel rule; state purpose

The client's outside counsel guidelines decide what is billable. Check them before writing.

5 Match the Verb to the UTBMS Activity Code

Narrative verb	Activity code
Planned, prepared strategy for	A101 Plan and prepare for
Researched	A102 Research
Drafted, revised	A103 Draft/revise
Reviewed, analyzed	A104 Review/analyze
Conferred with a colleague in the firm	A105 Communicate (in firm)
Called, emailed or met with the client	A106 Communicate (with client)
Conferred with other outside counsel	A107 Communicate (other outside counsel)
Communicated with other external parties	A108 Communicate (other external)
Appeared at, attended	A109 Appear for/attend
Organized or managed documents and data	A110 Manage data/files
Anything else	A111 Other

Activity codes from the ABA UTBMS code set. Task codes, such as L310 Written Discovery, are chosen separately by phase and task.

6 Confidentiality: Enough Detail, No Strategy

Do

- ✓ Describe the category of issue: privilege issues, indemnity terms
- ✓ Refer to people by role: client, opposing counsel, expert
- ✓ Name the document type and the purpose of the work
- ✓ Keep sensitive facts in the matter file and off the invoice

Avoid

- ✕ Spell out legal theories or settlement positions
- ✕ Name confidential sources or undisclosed witnesses
- ✕ Quote privileged advice in the narrative
- ✕ Include personal, health or financial details beyond need

7 Pre-Release Review Checklist

- ☐ Starts with a concrete past-tense verb
- ☐ Names the document, filing or communication
- ☐ States the issue or provision addressed
- ☐ States the purpose or next step
- ☐ One task per entry, each with its own time
- ☐ Time recorded matches the work described
- ☐ Correct client and matter selected
- ☐ Task and activity codes match the narrative, if required
- ☐ No flagged vague wording left
- ☐ Administrative work marked as the client guidelines require
- ☐ No privileged strategy or unnecessary sensitive detail
- ☐ Written the same day as the work, or close to it
- ☐ Readable by a client reviewer without extra context

8 Drafted for you, approved by you

MIRA captures work from Outlook, Teams, documents and research, then drafts a clear billing description for each entry. Lawyers review, edit and release every entry before it reaches billing.

Sources and references: ABA Model Rule 1.5 (Fees); ABA Model Rule 1.6 (Confidentiality of Information); ABA Formal Opinion 93-379 (Billing for Professional Fees, Disbursements and Other Expenses); ABA Uniform Task-Based Management System (UTBMS) Litigation Code Set. General information, not legal advice. Check your jurisdiction's rules and your client billing guidelines.

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