LOGICAL REASONING

Mastering Legal Vocabulary for CLAT: 50+ Must-Know Words

22 September 2026 · 4 min read · 840 words · 13 views



Mastering Legal Vocabulary for CLAT: 50+ Must-Know Words

If you're preparing for CLAT (Common Law Admission Test), a strong legal vocabulary isn't optional — it's essential. The English Language and Legal Reasoning sections both draw heavily on legal and Latin-origin terms that you'll encounter in passages, legal maxims, and comprehension questions. Building this vocabulary early gives you a real edge on exam day.

Here's a curated list of 50+ important legal words and terms every CLAT aspirant should know, along with simple meanings.

Common Legal Terms

1. **Plaintiff** – The person who brings a case against another in a court of law.
2. **Defendant** – The person against whom a case is brought.
3. **Litigation** – The process of taking legal action; a lawsuit.
4. **Jurisdiction** – The official power to make legal decisions and judgments.
5. **Statute** – A written law passed by a legislative body.
6. **Precedent** – A previous case or legal decision used as a guide for future cases.
7. **Affidavit** – A written statement confirmed by oath, used as evidence.
8. **Acquittal** – A judgment that a person is not guilty of a crime.
9. **Bail** – Temporary release of an accused person awaiting trial, usually on payment of money.
10. **Bench** – The seat or position of a judge in court; also refers to judges collectively.
11. **Testimony** – A formal statement given as evidence in court.
12. **Verdict** – The decision made by a jury or judge on a disputed issue.
13. **Injunction** – A court order restraining a person from doing something.
14. **Tort** – A civil wrong causing harm, leading to legal liability.
15. **Contract** – A legally binding agreement between two or more parties.
16. **Breach** – Violation of a law, agreement, or duty.
17. **Liability** – Legal responsibility for one's acts or omissions.
18. **Indictment** – A formal charge or accusation of a serious crime.
19. **Deposition** – Sworn out-of-court testimony used in preparing for trial.
20. **Arbitration** – A method of resolving disputes outside the court, using a neutral third party.

Latin Legal Maxims (Frequently Asked in CLAT)

21. **Habeas Corpus** – "You may have the body"; a writ requiring a person to be brought before a judge.
22. **Mens Rea** – "Guilty mind"; the intention to commit a crime.
23. **Actus Reus** – "Guilty act"; the physical act of committing a crime.
24. **Bona Fide** – In good faith; genuine.

25. **Mala Fide** – In bad faith; with dishonest intent.
26. **Ex Parte** – A legal proceeding conducted for the benefit of one party only.
27. **Sub Judice** – A matter under judicial consideration; not yet decided.
28. **Prima Facie** – Based on first impression; accepted as correct until proven otherwise.
29. **Res Judicata** – A matter already judged and cannot be pursued further by the same parties.
30. **Amicus Curiae** – "Friend of the court"; a person who assists the court with expertise.
31. **Caveat Emptor** – "Let the buyer beware."
32. **De Facto** – In practice, though not officially established.
33. **De Jure** – By law; legally recognized.
34. **In Camera** – Proceedings held in private, not in open court.
35. **Ipso Facto** – By the fact itself; as a direct consequence.
36. **Suo Moto** – On its own motion; action taken without being prompted by another party.
37. **Ultra Vires** – Beyond one's legal power or authority.
38. **Status Quo** – The existing state of affairs.

Important Constitutional & Procedural Terms

39. **Writ** – A formal written order issued by a court.
40. **Mandamus** – A writ commanding a public official to perform a duty.
41. **Certiorari** – A writ to transfer a case from a lower to a higher court for review.
42. **Quo Warranto** – A writ questioning a person's right to hold a public office.
43. **Prohibition** – A writ preventing a lower court from exceeding its jurisdiction.
44. **Fundamental Rights** – Basic rights guaranteed to citizens under the Constitution.
45. **Directive Principles** – Guidelines for governance, not enforceable by courts.
46. **Judicial Review** – The power of courts to examine the constitutionality of laws.
47. **Amendment** – A formal change or addition to a legal document, like the Constitution.

48. **Ordinance** – A law promulgated by the President/Governor when the legislature isn't in session.
49. **Impeachment** – The process of charging a public official with misconduct.
50. **Sedition** – Conduct or speech inciting rebellion against the government.

Bonus Words

51. **Custody** – Legal guardianship or protective care of someone or something.
52. **Perjury** – The offense of lying under oath.
53. **Damages** – Monetary compensation awarded for loss or injury.
54. **Appellant** – A person who appeals a court decision.
55. **Respondent** – The party against whom an appeal is filed.

Tips to Retain These Words

- **Use flashcards** – Write the word on one side and the meaning on the other.
- **Read legal editorials** – Newspapers like *The Hindu* and *Indian Express* frequently use these terms.
- **Practice in context** – Don't just memorize; try using each word in a sentence.
- **Revise Latin maxims separately** – They're often tested directly with meaning-matching questions.

A strong grip on legal vocabulary won't just help you crack CLAT — it'll give you a head start once you're in law school too. Make revising these words a daily five-minute habit, and you'll notice steady improvement in both accuracy and speed.