

**FROM THE LEGAL WRITING CLINIC**  
**WRITING TIP OF THE WEEK**

**COUNSEL, COUNCIL, AND CONSUL**

While **counsel**, **council**, and **consul** sound alike, they are different words with different meanings. **Counsel** can be used as a verb or a noun, whereas **council** and **consul** are nouns.



**Counsel** as a verb means to advise; as a noun, it means the person doing the advising (such as an attorney) or the advice itself. Less commonly, **counsel** means guarded thoughts or advice. **Counselor** is another word for the noun form of counsel, or adviser.

- Alyssa Barton is counsel to the Acme Company. (counsel as a noun meaning adviser)
- She counseled the company during the hostile takeover. (counsel as a verb meaning to advise)
- Her counsel was critical to the plan's success. (counsel as a noun meaning advice)
- He's a loner who keeps his own counsel. (counsel as a noun meaning guarded thoughts)
- Ms. Greenlee is one of the counselors in the program. (advisers)

**Council** is a noun meaning an assembly of people, often elected or appointed, brought together to discuss or deliberate something. A member of a council may also be a **councilor**.

- The city council met today to vote on the new benefits package.
- One of the councilors abstained from voting.

Finally, **consul**, a noun, means a person appointed to represent a government in a foreign country.

- The President appointed Ben Masters consul to Albania.

For more information, see Bryan A. Garner, The Redbook: A Manual on Legal Style 198 (2002).