



ACUITY PDH

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR SURVEYORS AND ENGINEERS

Writing Defensible Legal Descriptions

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Course Description

A legal description is the specific language, found in a deed, plat, or other recorded instrument, that identifies a particular parcel of land with the precision the law requires to distinguish it from every other parcel in existence. Every survey a surveyor performs, and every deed a client relies upon, ultimately traces back to this written description, and a description that is ambiguous, internally inconsistent, or simply incorrect can create problems that persist for decades after the surveyor who wrote it has moved on to other work. This course examines what makes a legal description defensible, meaning capable of surviving scrutiny by a court, a title examiner, or a future surveyor working from the same document decades later.

The course begins by examining the several distinct types of legal descriptions a surveyor is likely to encounter or prepare, including metes and bounds descriptions, lot and block references to a recorded plat, and descriptions based on the rectangular survey system. It then examines the specific elements that make a metes and bounds description defensible, including proper point of beginning language, closure, and internal consistency between courses and distances. From there, the course addresses the common errors and ambiguities that undermine legal descriptions in practice, and the review procedures a surveyor should apply before a description is finalized and delivered. The course closes with an examination of special situations, including descriptions involving exceptions and reservations, curved boundaries, and other complexities that arise in ordinary practice.

This course addresses general principles of legal description drafting and does not constitute legal advice. The specific requirements for a recordable legal description, and the legal consequences of a defective one, vary by jurisdiction. Surveyors should consult applicable recording requirements regarding specific description questions.

Participants completing this course will gain a structured understanding of what makes a legal description defensible and practical guidance for drafting, reviewing, and correcting legal descriptions in ordinary survey practice.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, the participant will be able to:

1. Distinguish metes and bounds, lot and block, and rectangular survey system descriptions and identify when each is appropriate.
2. Identify the essential elements of a properly constructed point of beginning.
3. Explain the requirement that a metes and bounds description close mathematically and describe how closure is verified.
4. Identify common sources of ambiguity in course and distance calls and explain how to avoid them.
5. Explain the role of monuments, both natural and artificial, in a legal description and how they relate to courses and distances.
6. Identify common errors that arise when a legal description is drafted from incomplete or outdated field data.
7. Describe a systematic process for reviewing a legal description before it is finalized and delivered.
8. Explain how to draft a description involving an exception or reservation without creating an ambiguous remainder.
9. Describe the considerations involved in drafting a description that includes a curved boundary.
10. Identify the risks associated with reusing or modifying a prior legal description without independent verification.
11. Explain the surveyor's professional responsibility when a legal description prepared by another party is found to be defective.
12. Apply the principles covered in this course to draft and review legal descriptions in ordinary survey practice.

Table of Contents

1. Course Description
2. Course Objectives
3. Table of Contents
4. Section 1 -- Introduction
5. Section 2 -- Types of Legal Descriptions and Their Appropriate Use
6. Section 3 -- Elements of a Defensible Metes and Bounds Description
7. Section 4 -- Common Errors and Ambiguities
8. Section 5 -- Reviewing and Checking Descriptions Before Delivery
9. Section 6 -- Special Situations: Exceptions, Curves, and Complex Parcels
10. Section 7 -- Closing Summary
11. Section 8 -- Review Questions

Section 1 -- Introduction

A legal description is, in a very real sense, the entire point of a boundary survey. All of the fieldwork, the research, the computation, and the professional judgment that go into a survey ultimately exist to support a single written product, a description precise enough that a stranger, decades in the future, working from nothing but the words on the page, could locate the exact same parcel of land on the ground. Every other deliverable a surveyor produces, the plat, the report, the certification, supports or illustrates the description, but the description itself is what actually gets recorded, what actually conveys title, and what actually endures as the legal identity of the parcel long after the survey that produced it has been forgotten.

This central role makes the quality of a legal description disproportionately important relative to the relatively modest amount of time most surveyors spend actually drafting one. A description can be produced quickly, sometimes assembled largely from software output with only a final review by the surveyor, and the speed with which a description can be generated today stands in some tension with how much can go wrong if that speed comes at the expense of careful review. An error in a legal description does not merely create an inconvenience. It can cloud title, create boundary disputes between neighbors who never intended to disagree, generate significant legal costs to correct, and in serious cases expose the surveyor who prepared the flawed description to a professional liability claim.

This course is built around a single organizing question: what makes a legal description defensible. A defensible description is one that closes mathematically, that describes a single unambiguous parcel rather than one that could plausibly be read more than one way, that ties clearly to physical evidence and record monuments where they exist, and that will make sense to a surveyor working from the document decades from now, without access to the field notes, computer files, or institutional memory that made the description easy to draft in the first place. Defensibility, in this sense, is distinct from mere technical correctness. A description can be mathematically accurate and still be poorly drafted, if its language is unclear, if it fails to reference available monumentation, or if it is structured in a way that invites misreading.

The course begins with classification, examining the major types of legal descriptions in common use and the circumstances under which each type is the appropriate choice. It then turns to the specific technical and drafting elements that distinguish a well constructed metes and bounds description from a poorly constructed one, since metes and bounds descriptions, being drafted individually for each parcel rather than referencing a previously recorded plat, carry the greatest risk of error and the greatest need for careful, deliberate drafting. From there, the course examines the errors and ambiguities that most commonly undermine legal descriptions in practice, drawing on

patterns that repeat across the profession regardless of the specific parcel or jurisdiction involved.

The course then addresses the review process itself, treating description checking as a distinct professional skill deserving the same systematic attention as other aspects of surveying. The course closes with an examination of special situations that arise regularly in practice but that do not fit neatly into the more straightforward scenarios addressed earlier, including descriptions involving exceptions and reservations, curved boundaries, and other complexities that test a surveyor's drafting skill more thoroughly than a simple rectangular parcel ever would.

Throughout this course, the emphasis remains on the writing itself, on the specific words, phrases, and structural choices that separate a description a future surveyor can rely on from one that generates confusion, litigation, or an expensive correction years after the original work was completed. Technical surveying competence and drafting competence are related but distinct skills, and a surveyor who has mastered the mathematics of a traverse computation has not automatically mastered the art of translating that computation into language precise enough to withstand decades of scrutiny by people who were never present for the original survey.

It is worth acknowledging at the outset that legal description drafting sits at an unusual intersection of disciplines. It requires the mathematical precision of a traverse computation, the linguistic clarity of careful technical writing, and an awareness of legal principles governing how descriptions are interpreted and how disputes over their meaning are resolved. Few surveyors receive extensive formal training in the specifically linguistic and legal dimensions of this work, even though those dimensions matter as much to a description's ultimate reliability as the underlying survey mathematics does. This course aims to fill that gap directly, treating description drafting as a skill worth deliberate study in its own right rather than an incidental byproduct of competent fieldwork and computation.

The consequences of a defective legal description extend well beyond the immediate parties to the transaction the description was originally prepared for. A cloud on title created by an ambiguous or erroneous description can affect every subsequent owner of the property, every lender who extends financing secured by it, and every title insurer who issues a policy relying on the accuracy of the recorded description. Correcting a defective description discovered years or decades after the fact typically requires far more effort, expense, and legal involvement than getting the description right the first time would have required, since a correction often needs the cooperation of parties who may be difficult to locate, uninterested in cooperating, or in some cases no longer living, turning what would have been a routine drafting task at the time of original preparation into a genuinely difficult legal problem later. This asymmetry, between the modest

additional care required to draft a description well the first time and the substantial cost of correcting one drafted poorly, is a central reason this course treats description drafting as deserving the same rigorous attention this course series applies to other technical and professional practice topics.

Section 2 -- Types of Legal Descriptions and Their Appropriate Use

Legal descriptions in the United States generally fall into a small number of recognized categories, and understanding which category applies to a given situation, and why, is the starting point for drafting or reviewing any description competently. This section examines the major types a surveyor encounters in ordinary practice and the considerations that determine which type is appropriate for a given parcel.

A metes and bounds description identifies a parcel by describing its boundary as a connected series of courses and distances, beginning at a defined point of beginning and proceeding around the perimeter of the parcel until returning to that same point. This is the most flexible description type, capable of describing a parcel of any shape, and it is the type most commonly required when a parcel does not correspond to a previously platted lot or a section based aliquot (sub-part) part. Because a metes and bounds description is drafted individually for the specific parcel involved, rather than referencing an already recorded and verified document, it carries the greatest drafting burden and the greatest risk of error, and the bulk of this course focuses on the elements that make this type of description defensible.

A lot and block description, by contrast, identifies a parcel by reference to a recorded subdivision plat, typically citing a specific lot number, block number, subdivision name, and the recording reference for the plat itself, such as a plat book and page or a recording instrument number. This type of description is dramatically simpler than a metes and bounds description, since the actual boundary geometry is established once, at the time the subdivision plat is recorded, and every subsequent conveyance of a lot within that subdivision can rely on the same established reference rather than restating the full boundary geometry in every deed. The tradeoff is that a lot and block description is only as reliable as the underlying plat, and any error, ambiguity, or defect in the original recorded plat is effectively inherited by every lot and block description that references it going forward.

Descriptions based on the rectangular survey system, sometimes called aliquot part descriptions, identify a parcel by reference to the section, township, and range grid established under this system, describing the parcel as a specific fractional portion of a section, such as the northeast quarter of the northwest quarter of a numbered section within a numbered township and range. This description type is common in states

where the rectangular survey system governs the underlying land grid, and it offers considerable simplicity for parcels that align with the aliquot part boundaries, though it becomes considerably more complex, often requiring a metes and bounds description instead or in combination, when the parcel in question does not align neatly with the aliquot part grid, such as when only a portion of a quarter quarter section is being conveyed.

Strip descriptions represent a specialized format used most commonly for linear features such as roads, pipelines, and utility corridors, describing a parcel as a defined width extending along a described centerline or alignment, rather than describing the full perimeter boundary directly. This format is efficient for long, narrow parcels where a full metes and bounds description of the perimeter would be unwieldy, but it requires particular care in how the centerline is described and how the width is measured relative to that centerline, since ambiguity in either element can create significant uncertainty about the actual location and extent of the strip.

Choosing the appropriate description type for a given situation depends primarily on what already exists in the record and on the specific parcel being described. When a parcel corresponds exactly to a previously platted lot, a lot and block (whole or fractional) description is almost always the appropriate and most defensible choice, since it leverages an already established and recorded boundary rather than introducing new geometry that could conflict with the recorded plat. When a parcel corresponds to a standard aliquot part of a section, a rectangular survey system description is similarly appropriate and efficient. Metes and bounds becomes necessary when the parcel does not correspond cleanly to either of these simpler formats, such as when conveying an irregular portion of a larger platted lot, a portion of an aliquot part that does not align with the standard quarter section subdivisions, or any parcel in an area not covered by a recorded subdivision plat or the rectangular survey system at all.

A surveyor should also be alert to situations calling for a combination description, where a metes and bounds description begins by referencing a lot and block or aliquot part starting point before describing a more specific boundary that departs from the simpler underlying reference. This kind of combination description is common when conveying a portion of a platted lot or a portion of an aliquot part, and it requires the drafter to establish the reference point clearly before transitioning into the metes and bounds portion of the description, so that a reader is never left uncertain about which description format governs a given portion of the boundary being described.

A specialized variant worth understanding separately involves descriptions prepared for condominium and other common interest developments, where the legal description of an individual unit often combines a reference to a recorded condominium plat or declaration with a description of the specific unit boundaries, which may be defined by

the interior surfaces of walls, floors, and ceilings rather than by ground level courses and distances at all. This description type departs substantially from the ground based description formats examined elsewhere in this section, since a condominium unit typically exists as a defined volume of space within a larger structure rather than as a bounded area of land, and a surveyor working in this area needs to understand the specific requirements of the applicable condominium statute, which governs how the declaration and plat must describe both the individual units and the common elements shared among all unit owners.

The choice between description types is not always a matter of pure technical appropriateness, since client and title company expectations, local recording practices, and the specific requirements of the county or jurisdiction where the document will be recorded can all influence which format is expected or required for a given transaction. A surveyor working in an unfamiliar jurisdiction should confirm local recording practices before assuming that the description format customary in their usual area of practice will be accepted without modification, since some jurisdictions impose specific formatting or content requirements beyond the general principles this course addresses.

Air lot and volumetric descriptions represent a further specialized format, used when the interest being described exists above or below the ground surface rather than coextensive with it, such as a parcel of airspace above a parking structure reserved for future development, or a subsurface parcel associated with a tunnel or an underground utility vault. These descriptions typically combine an ordinary ground level metes and bounds boundary with stated upper and lower elevation limits, defining the parcel as a three dimensional volume rather than the two dimensional area that most ordinary descriptions address. A surveyor preparing this kind of description needs to establish the elevation references with the same care given to the horizontal boundary, including a clearly stated vertical datum, since an elevation limit stated without reference to a defined datum is just as indeterminate as a horizontal course stated without a defined basis of bearings.

Descriptions prepared for eminent domain or condemnation proceedings deserve separate mention because they often involve partial takings, where only a portion of a larger parcel is being acquired, leaving a remainder parcel whose description must be prepared with the same rigor as the taken portion. A surveyor working on this kind of project should treat the remainder parcel description as a full, independent description in its own right, subject to the same closure, monument, and review standards examined throughout this course, rather than as an incidental byproduct that receives less careful attention than the portion actually being acquired, since the remainder description will govern the owner's property for as long as they retain it, independent of the condemnation proceeding that created the current configuration.

Descriptions of leasehold interests present a further category worth distinguishing from the fee ownership descriptions that are the primary focus of this course. A leasehold description identifies the parcel or space subject to a lease, and while it often uses the same metes and bounds or lot and block conventions examined throughout this section, it typically requires additional care regarding the temporal dimension of the interest, since a leasehold description effectively describes a right to occupy the identified space for a defined period rather than a permanent interest in the land itself. A surveyor preparing a leasehold description should confirm with the client or the client's attorney whether any additional language, beyond the physical boundary description, is expected within the survey deliverable to address the temporal or contractual dimensions of the interest, recognizing that this additional language is typically a legal rather than a surveying matter even though the surveyor may be asked to coordinate the physical description with it.

The relationship between a legal description and the tax parcel identification system maintained by a local assessor deserves brief mention, since these two systems, while related, are not the same thing and should not be conflated in professional practice. A tax parcel number is an administrative identifier assigned by a taxing authority for assessment and billing purposes, and while it often corresponds closely to a specific legal description, the two are not always perfectly aligned, particularly for parcels that have been informally combined or split for tax purposes without a corresponding formal recorded conveyance reflecting that same combination or split. A surveyor should never treat a tax parcel number as a substitute for a proper legal description, and should be alert to situations where the tax records and the recorded legal description appear to describe somewhat different configurations, since this kind of discrepancy often signals an unrecorded transaction or an administrative error that deserves further investigation before a new description is finalized.

Section 3 -- Elements of a Defensible Metes and Bounds Description

A metes and bounds description is built from several essential elements, and understanding how these elements work together, and where they most commonly fail, is central to drafting a description that will hold up to scrutiny long after the surveyor who wrote it is no longer available to clarify what was intended. This section examines these elements in the order they typically appear within a description.

The point of beginning is the anchor from which the entire description proceeds, and it deserves more careful drafting attention than it often receives. A defensible point of beginning ties to a specific, identifiable location through language precise enough that a future surveyor could locate the same point independently, typically by reference to a

found or set monument, a tie course and distance from a recognized reference point such as a section corner or a platted lot corner, or coordinates referenced to a defined datum. A point of beginning described only in vague or relative terms, such as a reference to a physical feature likely to change over time, creates uncertainty that undermines the reliability of everything that follows in the description, since every subsequent course and distance is ultimately located relative to this single starting point.

Following the point of beginning, a metes and bounds description proceeds through a series of courses, each stating a bearing or angle and a distance, that together trace the perimeter of the parcel back to the point of beginning. Consistency in how courses are expressed matters considerably to the readability and reliability of the description. A description that mixes bearing formats, uses inconsistent significant figures for distances, or fails to clearly indicate the basis of bearings being used creates unnecessary opportunities for misreading. The basis of bearings, meaning the reference system to which all bearings in the description relate, should be stated clearly and early in the description (and on the survey plat map as well), since a course described relative to one basis of bearings can be meaningfully different from the same numerical bearing described relative to a different basis, and a reader unaware of which basis applies cannot reliably reconstruct the described boundary.

Monument calls, references to physical evidence found or set at specific points along the boundary, provide an important layer of reliability beyond the purely mathematical courses and distances. A description that calls for a found iron pipe, a set concrete monument, or another physical marker at key boundary points gives a future surveyor physical evidence to locate and verify against the mathematical description, and discrepancies between the mathematical closure and the physical monument locations, when they arise, are generally resolved in favor of the monument (unless clearly disturbed) under long established principles of boundary law that treat monuments as more reliable evidence of original intent than computed distances and bearings. A description that omits available monument calls, relying purely on courses and distances even when physical evidence exists at the relevant points, discards valuable evidence that could help resolve a future dispute or ambiguity.

Mathematical closure, meaning that the sequence of courses and distances, computed as vectors, returns exactly or within an acceptable tolerance to the point of beginning, is a fundamental requirement of a defensible metes and bounds description. A description that fails to close indicates either a computational error in preparing the description or an underlying error in the field measurements the description was based on, and a surveyor should never finalize and deliver a description that has not been independently verified to close before it leaves the office. Modern computer aided drafting and legal description software performs this closure check automatically, but a surveyor relying

entirely on software output without understanding what the check actually verifies risks missing a closure failure caused by a data entry error that the software cannot detect on its own.

The description must also state the parcel's area (not always applicable on Lot/Block descriptions), typically expressed in acres or square feet depending on local convention, computed from the same course and distance data used to establish closure. The stated area should be verified independently from the closure check, since an error in the underlying data could, in some circumstances, produce a description that appears to close while still generating an incorrect area calculation, and a careful surveyor treats area verification as a distinct check rather than assuming that a closing description automatically produces a correct area.

Finally, a defensible description concludes with language that clearly indicates the description has returned to the point of beginning and is therefore complete, along with the stated area, and any necessary references to the source of the boundary information, such as the survey or deed the description was prepared from. This concluding language, though often treated as boilerplate, serves the important function of confirming to a reader that the description is complete and self contained, rather than leaving open the question of whether an additional course or reference was inadvertently omitted.

The units and precision used throughout a description deserve specific attention as a defensibility issue in their own right, separate from the underlying accuracy of the measurements themselves. A description should state distances and areas using units and a level of precision consistent with the actual accuracy of the underlying survey, and a description that reports a distance to a level of precision the underlying measurement does not actually support creates a false impression of exactness that can mislead a future reader about how reliable a particular course actually is. Consistency in units throughout a single description also matters, since a description that mixes feet and meters, or that changes the number of decimal places reported without explanation partway through the courses, invites confusion about whether the change reflects a genuine difference in the underlying data or simply an inconsistency introduced during drafting.

Bearing notation itself deserves a brief note, since more than one convention exists for expressing bearings, including quadrant based notation and azimuth based notation, and a description should use a single consistent convention throughout rather than mixing the two, which can create genuine confusion for a reader unfamiliar with both systems or uncertain which one governs a specific course. Whichever convention is used, the description should state it clearly, ideally in the basis of bearings statement (if

required for clarity) discussed earlier in this section, so that a future reader has no doubt about how to interpret the bearing values that follow.

Finally, a defensible description should be internally self sufficient, meaning that a reader equipped only with the description itself, without access to the underlying field notes, computation files, or the surveyor's personal knowledge of the project, can fully reconstruct the described boundary. A description that depends on unstated assumptions, whether about which direction a curve turns, which of several possible reference points a call is measured from, or how a term used inconsistently elsewhere in the document should be resolved, has failed this self sufficiency test regardless of how accurate the underlying survey work actually was.

The relationship between a description's stated distances and the actual field measurements they represent deserves a further word regarding grid versus ground distances. On projects using a state plane or other map projection coordinate system, a computed grid distance can differ meaningfully from the actual ground distance a chain (historical) or a total station would measure directly, particularly on larger projects or projects at higher elevations where the combined effect of the projection's scale factor and the elevation factor becomes significant. Ideally a solid description should clearly state whether the reported distances are grid distances, ground distances, or ground distances derived through a stated combined scale factor, since a future surveyor attempting to verify the description in the field, working directly with ground measurements, needs to know which basis governs in order to compare their own measurements against the recorded description accurately.

The treatment of angle versus bearing based courses presents a related consistency issue worth addressing directly. Some descriptions express each course as a deflection angle from the previous course rather than as an independent bearing referenced to a fixed basis, a format sometimes encountered in older descriptions or in descriptions prepared for certain linear projects such as roadway alignments. While this format can be internally valid, it carries a specific risk, since a single error in an early angle propagates forward through every subsequent course in the description, whereas an error in one bearing within a bearing based description generally affects only that single course. A surveyor drafting a new description has the choice to use either format and should generally prefer independent bearings over cumulative deflection angles specifically because of this error propagation risk, reserving deflection angle format for the specific situations, such as certain roadway descriptions, where it is the established local convention.

The relationship between a legal description and the survey plat prepared to accompany it deserves further attention beyond the general consistency point raised earlier in this section. A well coordinated description and plat pair uses matching labels

for monuments, matching course numbering or lettering where the description references specific segments by number, and a matching north arrow orientation and scale representation that allows a reader to move fluidly between the narrative description and the graphical depiction without confusion. Some jurisdictions and some client types, particularly title insurance companies, place significant weight on this kind of visual and textual coordination, treating a well coordinated pair as a positive indicator of overall work quality even before examining the specific technical content in detail.

A description's treatment of found versus set monuments deserves its own explicit attention, since these two categories carry different evidentiary weight and should never be conflated in the drafting. A found monument represents physical evidence encountered during the survey that predates the current work, carrying independent evidentiary value regarding where a boundary was previously established, while a set monument represents evidence the current surveyor is creating for the first time, valuable for future reference but not itself independent evidence of where the boundary was originally intended to fall. A description should clearly distinguish between these two categories at each point where a monument is called, typically through explicit language such as found or set preceding the monument description, since blurring this distinction can mislead a future reader about how much independent corroborating weight a particular monument call actually carries.

The description of the parcel's frontage along a public road or right of way deserves particular attention, since this boundary segment often carries practical significance beyond its role in the mathematical closure, affecting matters such as zoning frontage requirements, access rights, and the parcel's relationship to any future road widening or right of way acquisition. A description should clearly indicate whether the described boundary along a road follows the current physical edge of pavement, a platted right of way line, or a centerline offset, since these three references frequently do not coincide exactly, and treating them interchangeably in the drafting can create genuine confusion about where the parcel's actual legal boundary lies relative to the traveled roadway.

Adjoining owner identification, while not strictly a mathematical element of the description, contributes meaningfully to a description's overall defensibility when it is included accurately. A description that references adjoining owners by name or preferably by reference to their own recorded deeds at key boundary points provides an additional layer of cross referenceable information that can help a future researcher confirm the description against the broader neighborhood context, though this information should always be treated as supplementary to, rather than a substitute for, the precise course and distance information that actually defines the boundary itself. Surveyors should exercise care to keep this kind of adjoining owner information current, since ownership changes over time and outdated ownership references, left

uncorrected in a template based description, can themselves become a source of the kind of copy and paste confusion examined earlier in this course.

Section 4 -- Common Errors and Ambiguities

Despite the availability of computer aided drafting tools that automate much of the mathematical checking involved in preparing a legal description, the same categories of error and ambiguity recur across the profession with remarkable overlap. This section examines the patterns most worth watching for, since recognizing a familiar error pattern is often the fastest way to catch it during review.

Transposition and transcription errors, where a digit or a direction is entered incorrectly during the drafting process, remain among the most common sources of description defects despite decades of software assistance, because the underlying field or computed data still has to be entered into the description drafting process by a person at some point, and that entry point remains vulnerable to simple human error. A bearing entered with a transposed digit, a distance entered with a misplaced decimal point, or a direction quadrant entered incorrectly can each produce a description that closes mathematically, if the error happens to be internally consistent with the rest of the erroneous entry, while still describing a boundary that does not match the actual survey. This is a particularly dangerous category of error precisely because mathematical closure alone will not catch it, and independent verification against the original field data or plat is necessary to catch an error of this kind.

Ambiguous point of beginning language represents a second major error category. A point of beginning tied to a feature that could refer to more than one location, such as an unspecified corner of a section when multiple corners exist nearby, or a tie to a monument type common enough that more than one might exist in the vicinity, leaves room for a future reader to reasonably locate the described parcel in more than one place. A well drafted point of beginning eliminates this kind of ambiguity through specific, unambiguous reference language, ideally including a tie course and distance to a clearly identified reference monument rather than a general description alone.

Inconsistency between the written description and an accompanying plat or survey drawing creates a distinct category of ambiguity that arises specifically because most legal descriptions are prepared alongside a graphical representation of the same parcel. When the written description and the drawing disagree, whether due to a drafting error in one document or the other, or because one document was updated after a late change while the other was not, the resulting inconsistency creates genuine uncertainty about which version accurately reflects the actual survey, and resolving that uncertainty after the fact can be considerably more difficult and costly than preventing the

inconsistency from occurring in the first place through careful cross checking before both documents are finalized.

Overlapping or gapped boundaries between adjoining descriptions represent an error category that is often invisible within a single description considered in isolation but that becomes apparent, sometimes only years later, when the adjoining parcel is also surveyed. A description that is technically correct and closes properly can still create an overlap or a gap with a neighboring parcel if the two descriptions were not prepared with reference to each other or to a common, verified boundary line. This risk is particularly significant when a surveyor is preparing a description for a newly divided parcel without independently verifying the boundary description of the parent parcel or the adjoining parcels the new boundary will need to align with.

Descriptions drafted from outdated or superseded source material present a further recurring problem, arising when a description is prepared or revised based on an earlier survey, an old deed, or a previous description without confirming that the source material accurately reflects current conditions and the most recent reliable survey information available. Reusing language from a decades old description without independent verification can perpetuate an error that existed in the original document, sometimes an error that has already caused problems for prior owners of the property without the current surveyor ever becoming aware of that history, simply because the flawed language was copied forward without a fresh, independent check against current field evidence.

Vague or undefined terms used in place of precise measurements or references create a further common ambiguity, particularly in older descriptions but occasionally in modern ones as well. Terms such as a reference to a boundary running along an existing fence, without stating whether the fence itself is the boundary or merely evidence of it, or a reference to a right of way without specifying the described width, leaves room for genuinely different interpretations that a more precisely drafted description would have foreclosed. A surveyor reviewing or drafting a description should be alert to this kind of imprecise language and should resolve it with more specific terminology whenever the underlying facts allow.

Errors introduced through automated conversion between coordinate systems or datums represent an increasingly common problem as survey work relies more heavily on software that performs these conversions automatically, sometimes without the operator fully understanding what transformation is actually being applied. A description prepared from coordinates that were converted between datums or projections using an incorrect parameter, an outdated conversion grid, or a simple software misconfiguration can produce courses and distances that appear entirely reasonable in isolation while actually describing a boundary shifted somewhat from its true location. Because this

kind of error often still produces a description that closes mathematically, since the internal relationship between the courses may remain consistent even though the whole figure is shifted, it can be particularly difficult to catch without comparing the final output against an independent source, such as a known physical monument location or a previously established control point.

Errors arising from failure to update a description after a late field revision represent a further common and avoidable problem. A surveyor who discovers a discrepancy during a final field check, after an initial draft description has already been prepared, and who corrects the affected course in the drafting software but fails to verify that the correction propagated correctly through the entire description, including the closure computation, the area calculation, and any narrative language referencing the corrected course, risks delivering a description that is internally inconsistent, technically correct in the corrected course itself but still closing or computing area based on the outdated data elsewhere in the document. A disciplined practice of regenerating the entire description, including a fresh closure and area check, after any late revision, rather than attempting to make a targeted correction to only the affected portion, substantially reduces this risk.

Finally, a description that fails to account for a known senior right, an existing easement, or another recorded interest affecting the parcel, simply because that interest was not identified during title research, represents an error of omission rather than a drafting mistake in the narrower technical sense, but it undermines the defensibility of the description just as thoroughly as a transposed bearing would. A description prepared without adequate title research may be mathematically flawless while still failing to accurately represent the full legal picture of the parcel being conveyed, which is a reminder that description drafting does not occur in isolation from the broader research and investigation obligations examined elsewhere in this course series.

Copy and paste errors deserve specific mention as a distinct subcategory of transcription error, since modern description drafting frequently begins from a template or a prior similar description that is then modified for the current project. A surveyor working from a template risks carrying forward language, a party name, a reference to a different subdivision, or even an entire unmodified course, that was appropriate to the original document the template was drawn from but that does not apply to the current parcel at all. This kind of error is particularly easy to overlook precisely because the surrounding language reads fluently and professionally, having been drafted carefully for its original purpose, which can lull a reviewer into a false sense of confidence that the entire document has received the same level of care the surrounding, correctly adapted language displays.

A further error pattern involves internal inconsistency in how a single feature or boundary is referred to across different parts of the same description or the same set of

project documents. A boundary referred to as the north line in one part of a description and as the rear line in another, without making clear that these terms refer to the same boundary, creates unnecessary interpretive work for a future reader and introduces the possibility, however remote in a given case, that the two terms might be read as referring to two different lines. Consistent terminology throughout a description, and ideally throughout the full set of documents prepared for a single project, reduces this kind of ambiguity and makes the description considerably easier to follow for anyone encountering it without the surveyor's own familiarity with the project.

Errors arising from inadequate field verification of record information present a further recurring pattern, occurring when a description is drafted based entirely on record research, deed calls, and prior plats, without adequate field verification confirming that the physical evidence on the ground actually corresponds to what the records indicate. Record information, however carefully researched, reflects what was documented at some point in the past, and physical conditions can change, monuments can be disturbed or destroyed, and prior surveys occasionally contain their own uncorrected errors that a purely record based description would simply perpetuate. A description drafted without adequate field verification carries an elevated risk of describing a boundary that no longer matches, or never actually matched, the physical reality of the parcel, and the degree of field verification appropriate for a given project should reflect the stakes involved and the age and reliability of the available record information.

A related error pattern involves failing to reconcile a genuine discrepancy discovered between record information and field evidence, rather than actually resolving it before finalizing the description. A surveyor who discovers that a found monument does not match the position a strict mathematical application of the record calls would predict faces a professional obligation to investigate and document this discrepancy, applying the established principles of boundary evidence and monument priority examined elsewhere, rather than simply selecting whichever value is more convenient or silently averaging the two without explanation. A description that resolves this kind of discrepancy without any explanation in the survey report or supporting documentation leaves a future reader unable to understand why a particular value was chosen, which undermines confidence in the description even when the underlying resolution was actually correct.

Errors arising from misapplication of the applicable rules for resolving conflicting record elements represent a further, more subtle category worth distinguishing from the simpler transcription and drafting errors examined earlier. When a surveyor's own preparation of a description must reconcile conflicting information from different source documents, such as a deed call that disagrees with a referenced plat, the surveyor is applying the same hierarchy of evidence principles that govern boundary retracement generally, and a description drafted without correctly applying that hierarchy, whether by favoring a

distance over a conflicting monument call or by favoring an older, superseded plat over more recent and more reliable survey evidence, embeds a substantive legal error into the description even though every individual number in the final document may be internally consistent and the description may close perfectly. This category of error is more difficult to catch through the review procedures examined in the next section, since it does not necessarily manifest as an obvious inconsistency, and it underscores why the surveyor preparing a description needs genuine command of the underlying evidentiary principles, not merely facility with the drafting software. Surveyors must be diligent to apply solid distinguishing principles to contend with these types of discrepancies.

Finally, errors involving the improper description of party names, grantor and grantee identification, or other transactional details that fall outside the boundary description itself, while not strictly a surveying error in the technical sense, nonetheless fall within a surveyor's practical review responsibility when a firm is producing the complete document rather than only the boundary language for insertion into a document prepared by others. A surveyor who notices an inconsistency in how a party's name is spelled across different sections of a document being prepared, or a reference to the wrong recording information for a related instrument, should raise the issue even though resolving it may ultimately be the responsibility of the client's attorney or the title company, since catching this kind of error early, before the document is finalized and recorded, is considerably easier than correcting it afterward.

Errors introduced through miscommunication between field crews and the office staff responsible for drafting the final description represent a further practical error source worth naming directly. A field crew that identifies a discrepancy, a displaced monument, or an unusual condition during fieldwork, but that does not clearly and completely communicate that observation to whoever prepares the final description back in the office, creates a gap between what was actually observed on the ground and what the finished description ultimately reflects. This risk grows with the size of a firm and the number of people involved in a given project, since each additional handoff between the person who gathered the original information and the person who ultimately drafts the description introduces another opportunity for a detail to be lost, simplified inaccurately, or misunderstood. Firms handling larger or more complex projects benefit from a structured field to office communication process, such as a standardized field note format or a debrief conversation between the crew chief and the drafter, specifically designed to ensure that observations bearing on the description's accuracy are not lost in the transition from the field to the finished document.

A surveyor should also recognize that error patterns are not static across a career or across a firm's history, and periodically revisiting the specific categories of error examined throughout this section, in light of a firm's own actual experience with

description related problems, helps keep the review process focused on the risks that matter most for that particular practice. A firm that has experienced repeated problems in one specific area, such as descriptions involving curves or descriptions prepared from older, or less reliable record sources, benefits from directing additional review attention specifically toward that recurring weak point, rather than applying a generic, evenly distributed level of scrutiny across every category of potential error regardless of the firm's own demonstrated risk profile.

Maintaining this kind of internal awareness requires deliberate effort, since the natural tendency in a busy practice is to move on quickly from a resolved problem rather than pausing to extract and record the broader lesson it offers. A brief, informal record of significant description errors caught during review or discovered after delivery, noting the nature of the error and how it was identified, builds over time into a genuinely useful internal reference that new staff can learn from and that helps a firm's leadership recognize patterns that might not be obvious from any single incident considered in isolation.

This kind of internal record also proves valuable during new employee training, giving a new surveyor or technician concrete, firm specific examples of the error patterns this course has examined in general terms, grounded in the particular history and experience of the practice they are now joining, which tends to make the lessons considerably more memorable and more immediately relevant than the same principles presented only in the abstract.

Description review, ultimately, functions best when it is treated as an integral part of the survey production process rather than a final gate positioned awkwardly at the end of it. A firm that builds review checkpoints throughout a project, rather than concentrating all quality control into a single review immediately before delivery, catches problems earlier, when they are typically easier and less costly to correct, and avoids the particular risk that a single, rushed final review under deadline pressure represents. Integrating review at natural project milestones, such as after field data is first reduced, after an initial draft description is prepared, and again after any late revision, distributes the review burden more evenly across the life of a project and reduces the likelihood that schedule pressure at the very end of a project compromises the thoroughness of the final check. This distributed approach also tends to improve staff morale around the review process itself, since a series of smaller, well timed checks generally feels less burdensome to the people performing them than a single, exhaustive review compressed into the final hours before a delivery deadline. A firm that adopts this distributed approach consistently, across every project regardless of size or perceived complexity, builds a durable quality habit that persists even during the firm's busiest periods, precisely when the temptation to compress or skip review steps tends to be strongest and the consequences of doing so tend to be most costly.

Section 5 -- Reviewing and Checking Descriptions Before Delivery

A legal description that leaves a surveyor's office without a thorough, systematic review is exposed to every one of the error categories examined in the previous section, regardless of how skilled the individual who drafted it happens to be, simply because careful drafting and careful review are distinct activities that catch different kinds of mistakes. This section addresses the review process itself as a defined professional practice deserving the same structured attention this course series has applied to quality assurance topics generally.

An effective description review begins with an independent mathematical check, distinct from whatever automated closure verification the drafting software performed during preparation. This independent check should be performed by someone other than the original drafter whenever a firm's staffing allows it, since a second reviewer approaches the description without the drafter's assumptions about what the data should show, making that reviewer more likely to notice an error the original drafter's own mental model of the parcel would cause them to overlook. The independent check should verify not only that the description closes, but that the stated area matches an independent computation, and that the bearings and distances in the written description match the source data exactly, catching any transcription error introduced during the drafting process itself.

Beyond the mathematical check, a thorough review compares the written description against the accompanying plat or survey drawing line by line, confirming that every course, monument call, and reference in the written description corresponds exactly to what the drawing depicts, and that no course or reference appears in one document without a corresponding entry in the other. This comparison is tedious, particularly for a complex parcel with many courses, but it is one of the more reliable ways to catch the kind of drawing versus description inconsistency examined in the previous section before the documents are finalized and delivered.

A review should also specifically verify the point of beginning language against the underlying field or research data, confirming that the described tie point and tie course accurately and unambiguously identify a single specific location, and that any referenced monument was actually found or set as described. This step matters particularly when a description has been revised after an initial draft, since a change to the point of beginning made during revision can sometimes leave inconsistent or outdated tie information elsewhere in the description if the revision was not carried through completely and carefully.

When a description is being prepared for a parcel adjoining previously surveyed or described property, a thorough review includes a comparison against the adjoining descriptions to check for overlaps or gaps, rather than relying solely on the new description's internal mathematical closure. This comparison requires access to the adjoining parcel's recorded description or survey, and a surveyor who cannot readily obtain this information should document the limitation clearly, including a caveat in the survey deliverable about the extent to which adjoining boundaries were or were not independently verified.

A final review step, easy to treat as a formality but genuinely valuable in practice, involves reading the finished description aloud, or having a colleague read it aloud, as a plain narrative rather than reviewing it purely as a set of numbers to check. This kind of narrative read often catches drafting problems that a purely numerical review misses, including awkward or genuinely ambiguous phrasing, an inconsistent basis of bearings statement, or language that a reader unfamiliar with the specific parcel would find confusing even though every individual number in the description is technically correct. A description that reads clearly and unambiguously as a narrative, in addition to closing correctly as a mathematical figure, is considerably more defensible than one that satisfies only the numerical check.

Firms that handle a significant volume of legal description work benefit from a written checklist covering each of these review steps, ensuring that the same thorough process applies consistently regardless of which staff member happens to be preparing a given description or how much schedule pressure exists on a particular project. A checklist of this kind does not replace professional judgment, but it provides a structured baseline that helps prevent the kind of review shortcuts that schedule pressure tends to encourage, consistent with the broader principle, examined elsewhere in this course series, that structured processes tend to produce more consistent quality outcomes than reliance on individual diligence alone.

The timing of review within a project's overall schedule affects how effective that review can actually be. A review performed under significant time pressure, squeezed into the final hours before a closing deadline, is inherently less reliable than the same review performed with adequate time available, simply because careful, line by line comparison work is exactly the kind of task that degrades most under time pressure, as a reviewer begins to skim rather than genuinely check each element. Firms benefit from building description review time into project schedules as a distinct, protected task rather than treating it as a step that happens whenever time allows after all other project work is complete, since a review conducted as an afterthought is unlikely to receive the genuine attention a thorough check requires.

A surveyor should also maintain a clear record of what was actually checked during a review, rather than relying on an informal, undocumented process that leaves no trail if a question later arises about whether a particular element was verified. A simple review log, noting the date of review, the reviewer's identity, and the specific checks performed, creates a record that protects the firm and demonstrates a consistent quality process if the description is ever challenged, in addition to serving the more immediate purpose of ensuring that every review actually covers the full set of checks this section has described rather than an inconsistent subset that happens to vary from one project to the next.

When a description review reveals an error, the correction process itself deserves the same care as the original drafting. A correction made hastily, without regenerating the closure and area computations and without re verifying the corrected language against the accompanying drawing, risks introducing a new error while fixing the original one, effectively trading one defect for another rather than actually improving the description's overall reliability. The most reliable practice treats any post review correction as triggering a fresh, complete review cycle for the corrected description, rather than assuming that a targeted fix to the specific identified problem is sufficient on its own.

Peer review of legal descriptions benefits from a degree of formality beyond a simple informal glance from a colleague, particularly for complex or high value projects. A structured peer review, in which the reviewing surveyor independently reconstructs key elements of the description, such as plotting the courses and distances independently rather than simply reading through the drafter's own plot, provides a considerably more rigorous check than a review limited to reading the numbers and confirming they look reasonable. This kind of independent reconstruction is more time consuming than a simple read through, which is precisely why it tends to be reserved for higher stakes projects, but it catches a category of error, an internally consistent but substantively wrong course, that a read through review is poorly positioned to catch on its own.

Client and title company feedback, received after a description has already been delivered, provides a further review opportunity that a surveyor should treat as valuable rather than as an unwelcome intrusion on completed work. A title examiner who raises a question about a specific course or reference, even one that ultimately turns out to be correct, is providing exactly the kind of fresh, independent scrutiny this section has emphasized throughout, and a surveyor who dismisses this kind of question reflexively, without genuinely reconsidering the flagged element, forfeits a valuable opportunity to catch a genuine error before the description becomes a permanent part of the recorded chain of title. Treating this kind of external feedback as a routine and expected part of the description delivery process, rather than as a sign that something went wrong with the original work, supports the same quality culture this course series has examined in other contexts.

Software assisted checking tools, including automated closure calculators and description parsing utilities that flag internal inconsistencies, deserve a place in a firm's review process, but they should supplement rather than replace the human review steps this section has described. Automated tools excel at certain narrow tasks, such as confirming mathematical closure or checking for basic formatting consistency, but they generally cannot evaluate whether a point of beginning is genuinely unambiguous, whether the described boundary matches the actual field evidence, or whether the narrative language would be clear to a reader unfamiliar with the project, all of which require human judgment informed by the specific facts of the parcel. A firm that relies entirely on automated checking, treating a clean software report as equivalent to a genuine professional review, has substituted a partial check for a complete one, and the gap between what the software actually verifies and what a defensible description actually requires can create a false sense of security that a more skeptical, manually engaged review would not produce.

The review process also benefits from periodic retrospective analysis, looking back at descriptions that generated problems after delivery, whether through a title company query, a boundary dispute, or a client complaint, and examining what the review process at the time missed and why. This kind of retrospective analysis, sometimes uncomfortable because it involves scrutinizing a firm's own past work product, provides some of the most valuable information available for improving a review process going forward, since it identifies the specific gaps in a firm's actual practice rather than the theoretical gaps a generic checklist might address. A firm that treats every post delivery description problem as an isolated, unfortunate incident, without extracting the broader lesson available from examining how the problem arose and why the existing review process did not catch it, forfeits an opportunity to improve that a more deliberately reflective practice would capture.

The specific reviewer's qualifications and familiarity with the applicable local practices deserve brief mention as a final practical consideration. An effective description reviewer should possess genuine familiarity with the description drafting conventions, monument types, and common record patterns typical of the specific geographic area involved, since local knowledge of this kind often allows a reviewer to recognize when something looks unusual or inconsistent with typical local practice, a form of pattern recognition that a reviewer without local familiarity would not be positioned to apply. Firms operating across multiple jurisdictions should be attentive to this consideration when assigning review responsibilities, recognizing that a reviewer highly experienced in one region's typical description conventions may not automatically bring the same depth of pattern recognition to a project in an unfamiliar area, even if their general technical competence is not in question. Firms expanding into a new geographic area for the first time should consider this gap explicitly, potentially arranging for a locally

experienced reviewer, even on a limited consulting basis, until in house staff develop the same depth of local familiarity that supports genuinely effective review in the firm's more established markets.

Time allocated for review should scale with the complexity of the underlying parcel, and firms benefit from resisting the temptation to apply a uniform, fixed review time regardless of whether a given description involves a simple rectangular lot or a complex parcel with numerous courses, multiple exceptions, and curved boundary segments. A review process that allocates the same fixed time to every description regardless of complexity effectively under reviews the more complex projects, precisely the projects where the risk of an undetected error is highest, while potentially over allocating review time to simpler projects where the marginal value of additional scrutiny is considerably lower.

Section 6 -- Special Situations: Exceptions, Curves, and Complex Parcels

The principles examined so far in this course apply most directly to a straightforward parcel described entirely by straight line courses and a single continuous boundary. Many real parcels are not this simple, and this final main section addresses several categories of complexity that require additional care beyond the fundamentals already covered.

A description involving an exception, where a smaller parcel is excluded from a larger described tract, requires particular precision to avoid creating an ambiguous or indeterminate remainder. A well drafted exception description first describes the larger parent tract completely, then separately and completely describes the excepted portion, using the same standards of precision, closure, and monument reference that would apply to any standalone description, before stating clearly that the excepted parcel is not included in the conveyance. A common and serious drafting error in this category involves describing the excepted parcel incompletely, relying on a general reference rather than a full metes and bounds or other complete description, which can leave genuine ambiguity about the exact boundary of the exclusion and, by extension, genuine ambiguity about the exact boundary of what remains after the exception is applied.

A related situation involves a reservation, where the grantor conveys the full parcel but reserves a specific right, such as an easement or a mineral interest, rather than excluding a portion of the land itself from the conveyance. Reservation language should be clearly distinguished from exception language in the drafting, since the two accomplish different legal results, an exception removing land from the conveyance entirely and a reservation retaining a specific right while still conveying the underlying

land, and conflating the two in imprecise drafting can create genuine uncertainty about what was actually intended.

Curved boundaries introduce a distinct set of technical requirements beyond the straight line courses that dominate most descriptions. A description including a curve must state, at minimum, the radius of the curve, the length of the arc or the central angle, and the direction of curvature, along with either the chord bearing and distance or sufficient additional information to allow the curve to be reconstructed unambiguously. Omitting any of these elements, such as stating a curve's length without its radius, or stating a radius without indicating whether the curve turns to the left or the right relative to the direction of travel along the boundary, leaves the curve indeterminate and undermines the mathematical closure of the entire description, since a curve missing an essential element cannot be definitively placed within the closure computation.

Parcels bordering a water feature present a further category of complexity, since the boundary along the water may be subject to the doctrines of accretion, erosion, and avulsion that can cause a water boundary to shift gradually over time in ways a fixed metes and bounds description cannot fully anticipate. A description for a parcel with a water boundary often describes the upland portion of the parcel with ordinary metes and bounds precision while describing the water boundary itself by reference to the water body or a defined line such as the ordinary high water mark, acknowledging implicitly that this portion of the boundary may not remain fixed in the same way the upland courses do. Drafting this kind of description well requires understanding, at least at a general level, how the applicable law treats water boundaries, since a description drafted without this awareness may inadvertently create more precision than the underlying legal boundary actually possesses, or may fail to address the water boundary in a way that creates unnecessary ambiguity.

Parcels with multiple disconnected areas, sometimes conveyed together in a single transaction despite not being physically contiguous, require a description structured to make clear that more than one distinct parcel is being described, typically through separately labeled and separately closing metes and bounds descriptions for each disconnected area, along with clear language establishing that the areas, while conveyed together, remain legally and physically distinct. A description that attempts to describe disconnected parcels as though they were a single continuous boundary, or that fails to clearly separate the closure computations for each distinct area, creates confusion that a future reader may have real difficulty resolving.

Across all of these special situations, the underlying principle remains consistent with everything else this course has covered. Additional complexity in the underlying parcel calls for additional precision and additional care in the drafting, not a relaxation of the standards that apply to more straightforward parcels. A surveyor who recognizes early

that a particular parcel involves one or more of these complicating factors is better positioned to apply the appropriate additional rigor from the outset, rather than discovering the complexity partway through drafting and having to retrofit the necessary precision into a description that was not originally structured to accommodate it.

Descriptions involving a right of way or easement being conveyed or dedicated alongside a fee parcel present a further layered situation, requiring the surveyor to clearly distinguish between the portion of the document describing the fee conveyance and the portion addressing the easement or right of way, since these are legally distinct interests even when they appear in the same recorded instrument and even when they share common boundary lines. A description that blends fee and easement language without clear separation risks creating ambiguity about which specific interest is being conveyed along which specific boundary, an ambiguity that can have significant consequences given how differently fee ownership and easement rights are treated under the law.

Parcels affected by a roadway realignment or vacation present a specialized situation worth brief mention, since the description of a parcel that gained or lost area due to a public road vacation, or that was reconfigured due to a roadway realignment project, needs to clearly reference the specific vacation or realignment instrument and needs to accurately reflect the parcel's current configuration rather than perpetuating a pre vacation or pre realignment description that no longer matches the parcel's actual current boundary. A surveyor working on a parcel with this kind of history should specifically research whether any road vacation or realignment has affected the property, since this history is sometimes recorded separately from the parcel's own chain of title and can be easy to overlook without a deliberate check. A surveyor who identifies this kind of history during title research, but who does not carry it through into the current description accurately, effectively perpetuates a form of the copy and paste risk examined earlier in this section, producing a description that fails to reflect a change the record itself, once fully researched, would have revealed.

Finally, a description for a parcel created through a boundary line adjustment between two previously separate parcels requires particular attention to ensure that both the gaining and the losing parcel receive complete, updated, and mutually consistent descriptions, rather than only updating the description for one of the two affected parcels while leaving the other's description technically outdated and inconsistent with the new boundary location. A boundary line adjustment that updates only one side of the shifted line creates exactly the kind of overlap or gap risk examined earlier in this course, and a surveyor handling this kind of project should treat both affected descriptions as requiring the same full drafting and review process this course has described, rather than treating the adjustment as a minor edit to a single existing document.

Descriptions affected by a scrivener's error in a previously recorded document present a situation a surveyor encounters with some regularity, arising when an earlier deed contains an obvious clerical mistake, such as a bearing entered with an incorrect direction or a distance that clearly does not match the plat prepared alongside it. Correcting this kind of error typically requires a correction or scrivener's affidavit or a corrective deed, prepared and recorded specifically to address the identified mistake, and a surveyor asked to assist with this kind of correction should prepare a clear, well documented explanation of the identified discrepancy, including a comparison between the erroneous language and the corrected language, sufficient to support the corrective instrument the client's attorney will typically prepare and record. A surveyor should recognize the limits of this role, providing the technical documentation that supports a correction rather than attempting to determine independently whether the correction is legally sufficient or properly executed, which remains a legal question for the client's attorney to address.

Descriptions for parcels affected by a name change, such as a subdivision that has been renamed or a road that has been renamed since the original recording, benefit from including both the current and the original reference where practical, since a future title examiner working through the chain of title benefits from being able to connect the current description to the historical records using the name in effect at the time of the earlier recording. Omitting this kind of cross reference does not necessarily create a legal defect, but it can make future title research more difficult than it needs to be, and a small amount of additional care in this area produces a meaningfully more useful document for anyone who has to work with it in the future.

Across every special situation examined in this section, from exceptions and curves to condemnation remainders and scrivener's error corrections, the surveyor's core task remains constant: translating a specific, sometimes legally complex set of facts into language precise enough that a stranger, working from nothing but the written description decades in the future, can reconstruct exactly what was intended. The complexity of the underlying situation changes what that translation requires, but it never changes the fundamental standard the description must meet.

Descriptions involving a spiral or transition curve, common in modern roadway alignment work but rare in ordinary boundary practice, present a further technical complexity worth brief acknowledgment. Unlike a simple circular curve, a spiral curve's radius changes continuously along its length, and describing this kind of curve requires additional parameters beyond those used for a simple circular curve, typically including the spiral length and a reference to the specific spiral function or standard being applied. A surveyor without regular experience preparing this kind of description should approach it with the same heightened caution recommended elsewhere in this course series for unfamiliar technical territory, verifying the specific conventions and required

parameters against current design standards and software documentation rather than assuming that general familiarity with simple circular curve descriptions transfers automatically to the more complex spiral case.

Descriptions prepared in connection with a boundary dispute settlement present a final specialized situation, arising when neighboring landowners resolve a disputed boundary through a negotiated agreement rather than litigation, and a surveyor is asked to prepare a description reflecting the agreed line. This kind of description carries particular importance because it is often intended specifically to replace and supersede whatever ambiguity or conflict existed in the prior record, and a surveyor preparing it should draft with unusual care to ensure the agreed line is described with complete clarity and precision, since the entire purpose of the settlement is undermined if the description meant to resolve the dispute introduces new ambiguity of its own.

Coordination with the attorneys representing both parties to confirm that the technical description accurately reflects the terms of the settlement they have negotiated is an important and often overlooked step in this kind of engagement, ensuring that the legal agreement and the technical description remain fully aligned with one another.

Descriptions prepared for parcels subject to a recorded plat vacation, where a previously recorded subdivision plat is formally vacated and the affected lots revert to a different configuration, present a situation requiring careful attention to which description regime actually governs the parcel after the vacation takes effect. A lot that existed within a now vacated plat can no longer be reliably described purely by lot and block reference, since the underlying plat no longer defines valid, currently recognized lot boundaries in the way it did before vacation, and a surveyor preparing a description for property affected by a plat vacation should prepare a metes and bounds description reflecting the parcel's actual current legal configuration, while researching and clearly documenting the vacation instrument that changed the description regime applicable to the property.

A final specialized situation worth addressing involves descriptions for parcels where a portion of the originally described area has been lost to a public taking, a natural process such as significant erosion, or a boundary determination in litigation that reduced the parcel from its previously recorded extent. A description prepared after this kind of area reducing event should reflect the parcel's current, reduced configuration accurately, and should generally avoid simply restating the original, larger description with a note that a portion has been lost, since this approach leaves the actual current boundary of the remaining parcel effectively undefined by anything more precise than a general reference to what was taken. Coordinating with any available survey or plat documenting the specific taking, erosion extent, or litigated line, where such documentation exists, gives the fresh description a solid evidentiary foundation rather than requiring the surveyor to reconstruct the current boundary from first principles

alone. A fresh, complete description of the parcel's actual current boundary, prepared with the same rigor this course has applied throughout, serves the property owner and every future party far better than an outdated description accompanied by an incomplete explanation of what has changed since it was originally prepared.

Section 7 -- Closing Summary

A legal description carries a weight disproportionate to the relatively small amount of text it usually occupies on a page. It is the single document that will outlive the survey that produced it, the surveyor who drafted it, and often the immediate transaction it was prepared to support, continuing to define a parcel's legal identity for as long as that parcel exists in its current form. This course has examined what makes a legal description defensible against that long horizon of future scrutiny.

The course began with classification, distinguishing metes and bounds, lot and block, and rectangular survey system descriptions, and establishing when each type is the appropriate choice for a given parcel. It then examined the specific elements that make a metes and bounds description defensible, including a precisely tied point of beginning, consistent course formatting, appropriate monument calls, verified mathematical closure, and accurate area computation. The course then turned to the errors and ambiguities that recur across the profession, from simple transcription mistakes to the more subtle risk of overlaps and gaps between adjoining parcels, before addressing the systematic review process that catches these errors before a description leaves the office. The course closed with an examination of special situations, including exceptions, reservations, curves, water boundaries, and disconnected parcels, each of which demands additional precision beyond what a straightforward rectangular parcel requires.

A recurring theme throughout this course has been the distinction between technical correctness and genuine defensibility. A description can be mathematically accurate, closing perfectly to the specified tolerance, and still fail to be defensible if its language is ambiguous, if it omits available monument evidence, or if it was never independently reviewed against the source data and the accompanying drawing. Defensibility depends as much on clear, careful writing as it does on accurate measurement, and a surveyor who treats legal description drafting purely as a mathematical exercise, without equal attention to the clarity and precision of the language itself, has not fully accounted for what actually makes a description reliable decades into the future. What this course has aimed to provide is the working knowledge that allows a surveyor to draft with that long horizon in mind from the outset, rather than treating description writing as a final administrative step that happens after the real work of surveying is already complete. A description written with genuine care, checked systematically, and reviewed with the

specific error patterns this course has examined in mind, is far more likely to serve its purpose reliably for as long as the parcel it describes continues to exist.

As with the other legal topics addressed in this course series, the material presented here is a general framework rather than a substitute for jurisdiction specific guidance on recording requirements or the legal consequences of a defective description. What this course has aimed to provide is the practical, working knowledge that allows a surveyor to draft a description carefully the first time, to recognize the error patterns that most commonly undermine descriptions in practice, and to apply a systematic review process that catches problems before they become permanent parts of the public record.

Section 8 -- Review Questions

The following ten questions are based on the course content presented in Sections 1 through 7. Each question has four answer choices. The correct answer is identified and referenced to the section of the course where the supporting material appears.

Question 1

According to the course, when is a lot and block description generally the most appropriate and defensible choice?

- A. When the parcel does not correspond to any previously recorded plat.
- B. When the parcel corresponds exactly to a previously platted lot.
- C. When the parcel involves a curved boundary.
- D. When the parcel is described using the rectangular survey system.

Question 2

According to the course, what tradeoff comes with using a lot and block description?

- A. It cannot be used for parcels within a recorded subdivision.
- B. It requires a full metes and bounds description to be recordable.
- C. It is only as reliable as the underlying recorded plat, and any defect in that plat is inherited by every description referencing it.
- D. It cannot include a stated area for the parcel.

Question 3

According to the course, what makes a point of beginning defensible?

- A. A general reference to a physical feature likely to change over time.

- B. Language precise enough that a future surveyor could locate the same point independently, such as a tie to a found or set monument.
- C. A statement that the point of beginning is approximate.
- D. Reliance on the drafter's personal knowledge of the parcel.

Question 4

According to the course, when a discrepancy arises between a mathematical closure and a called monument location, how is it generally resolved?

- A. In favor of the monument, under long established principles treating monuments as more reliable evidence of original intent.
- B. In favor of the mathematical closure in every instance.
- C. By automatically voiding the entire description.
- D. By defaulting to the stated area rather than either the monument or the closure.

Question 5

According to the course, why are transposition and transcription errors particularly dangerous in legal descriptions?

- A. They always cause the description to fail to close, making them easy to detect.
- B. They only occur in descriptions prepared without computer assistance.
- C. A description can still close mathematically even when this kind of error is present, so closure checks alone will not catch it.
- D. They are limited to errors in the stated area rather than the courses themselves.

Question 6

According to the course, what risk arises specifically from reusing language from an older description without independent verification?

- A. The new description will automatically fail to close.
- B. It eliminates the need for a point of beginning.
- C. It automatically creates an overlap with an adjoining parcel.
- D. It can perpetuate an error that existed in the original document without the current surveyor becoming aware of it.

Question 7

According to the course, why should an independent description review, where staffing allows, be performed by someone other than the original drafter?

- A. Because a second reviewer approaches the description without the drafter's assumptions, making them more likely to notice an overlooked error.
- B. Because the original drafter is not permitted to review their own work under any circumstances.
- C. Because only a second reviewer can verify the stated area.
- D. Because the original drafter cannot legally certify the description.

Question 8

According to the course, what value does reading a finished description aloud provide during review?

- A. It replaces the need for a mathematical closure check.
- B. It is required by recording statutes in every jurisdiction.
- C. It is only useful for descriptions involving curves.
- D. It often catches drafting problems, such as ambiguous phrasing, that a purely numerical review misses.

Question 9

According to the course, what is the key drafting distinction between an exception and a reservation?

- A. An exception removes land from the conveyance entirely, while a reservation retains a specific right while still conveying the underlying land.
- B. A reservation always involves a larger area than an exception.
- C. An exception can never be described with a metes and bounds description.
- D. A reservation removes land from the conveyance, while an exception retains a right.

Question 10

According to the course, what must a description including a curve state, at minimum, to avoid leaving the curve indeterminate?

- A. Only the chord bearing and distance.
- B. Only the length of the arc.

- C. Only the central angle and the direction of curvature.
- D. The radius, the arc length or central angle, and the direction of curvature, along with the chord bearing and distance or equivalent information.

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