Preface

What are the similarities or differences between

- taking the stand and taking a stand?
- a bill, a statute, legislation, a law, and an act?
- a level of government and a branch of government?
- a top court, a high court, a federal court of last resort, and a state court of last resort?
- treaties and treatises?

What are

- partisanship, bipartisanship, and nonpartisanship?
- political gridlock?
- transparency?
- decisions on the merits?

_Essential Legal English in Context_ answers these and many other questions while introducing the US legal system and its terminology. Designed especially for international lawyers and students who are not familiar with the US legal system and its vocabulary, _Essential Legal English in Context_ illustrates how legal language relates to the structure of the US government.

This book provides a valuable self-study tool to use before entering a US law school, studying US law or government, or working as a seconded attorney to a US law firm and has the following goals:

- To explain basic concepts related to federal, state, and local levels and branches of government
- To define law-related vocabulary in the context of the US Constitution and the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government
- To prepare to read US judicial decisions by unpacking concepts embedded in these decisions, such as the sources that courts interpret—constitutional provisions, statutes from the legislature, executive orders from the executive, and common law rules from the judiciary
- To introduce selected current political issues and legal topics, including an overview of how the lawmaking process works in today’s US society
- To illustrate how the US constitutional separation of powers and checks and balances come into play when courts interpret the law
Throughout the book there are

- **Exercises**, which allow readers to apply and extend their knowledge
- **Word studies**, which explain similarities and differences in related, or similarly spelled, legal terminology and concepts
- **Research updates**, which signal certain areas to research in order to determine the current status of that subject area.

This book is aimed at providing general information to international lawyers and students, newly admitted law students, and others who are unfamiliar with the US legal system and its vocabulary. It is not intended to give legal advice or to address with specificity any legal issue or legal topic. Rather, it is intended to provide a broad overview of questions that are likely to be encountered by those who are new to the US legal system. Readers should keep in mind that many concepts have been admittedly oversimplified and the legal terms and institutions discussed in this book have been distilled in order to provide a simple and basic understanding of legal vocabulary. The definition of legal terms in the United States often varies significantly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In addition, the terminology included in the book may have other meanings in different contexts. For ease of understanding, this book describes legal terminology in what the author believes is the most commonly understood context.