
Rules of Citation for Law Reviews

Legal citation formats were not standardized until law review editors at Columbia, Harvard, University of Pennsylvania and Yale law schools together published The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation. The manual has been widely adopted today by courts and law reviews, but many courts have their own citation rules, which are usually available on the court websites. The so-called Bluebook “rules” change with each new edition. Older citations in print and online may not reflect these changes and should not be used as guides to current usage.

Rules of Citation for Practitioners—the blue pages and the inside back cover

The Bluebook has at the beginning, on blue colored pages, a shorter and simpler citation guide and tables of abbreviations and style guides, for attorneys to use in court documents. It differs in typeface as well. Use the blue pages for preparing briefs and memoranda of law.

Inside Covers -- Quick Reference Guides

A “Quick Reference” guide is on the inside covers of The Bluebook: front – law review format; back -- practitioner format. Also read the Preface. For more complex citation questions, use the Index and Bluebook text.

Understanding The Bluebook Rules

The Bluebook does not explain its rules. For insights into the rules, see Cornell Law School Professor Peter W. Martin’s online, annotated presentation of the rules titled Introduction to Basic Legal Citation (LII 2010 ed.), at http://www.law.cornell.edu/citation/front.htm.

Competing Rules of Citation

Acceptance of The Bluebook “rules” has not been entirely universal. Many courts, for example, require their own citation rules. And both the University of Chicago (the “Maroon” book) and the Association of Legal Writing Directors have prepared alternate guides that are either more standardized than The Bluebook or more flexible. Follow usage in your jurisdiction.

Abbreviations

There are several ways to decipher abbreviations or figure out how to construct an abbreviation:

1. Find the abbreviation in The Bluebook tables (pages with blue edges, abbreviated, e.g., T.1):

   BT1, Court Documents, BT2, Jurisdiction-Specific Citation Rules and Style Guides, T.1 U.S. Jurisdictions, T.2 Foreign Jurisdictions, T.3 Intergovernmental Organizations, T.4 Treaty Sources, T.5 Arbitral Reporters, T.6 Case Names, T.7 Court Names, T.8 Explanatory Phrases, T.9 Legislative Documents, T.10 Geographical Terms, T.11 Judges and Officials, T.12 Months, T.13 Periodicals, T.14 Publishing Terms, T.15 Services, and T.16 Subdivisions.

2. Use a dictionary of abbreviations or citations, such as Mary Miles Prince, Bieber’s Dictionary of Legal Citations (5th ed. 1997) Ref. KF 246 .P73. and Mary Miles Prince, Prince’s Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations (7th ed. 2006), Ref. KF 246 .B46. Note: they are not current with the The Bluebook’s 19th edition.

3. Create a new abbreviation by using an abbreviation or a part of an abbreviation from any of the tables of abbreviations listed above or combining abbreviations found in The Bluebook. Before you do this, do a periodicals literature search to see if there is already a citation in use.

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