



INTRODUCTION TO BLUEBOOKING: SOME BASIC BUT CONFUSING RULES*

© 2016 The Writing Center at GULC. All Rights Reserved.

Legal citation is different from any other type of academic citation you have likely encountered before! The Bluebook can be confusing, frustrating, time-consuming, and thus intimidating. Consider these basic practitioner’s tips to help conquer those Bluebook fears. Not only are the rules below the most common, they are also the most commonly misused.

Consult the Bluebook in conjunction with these tips; many caveats that are not set out below may apply to each rule. These tips are based on the 20th edition of the Bluebook.

1. Spacing (Rule 6.1)

Close up all adjacent single capitals. Do not close up single capitals followed by longer abbreviations. Numbers, both ordinal and cardinal, are treated as single capitals.

Wrong

F. 2d W.D.Pa. F.Supp. S.Ct. Cal.App.3d

Right

F.2d W.D. Pa. F. Supp. S. Ct. Cal. App. 3d

2. Capitalization (Rule 8) (B.8)

In headings, capitalize the initial word, any word that immediately follows a colon, and all other words except articles, conjunctions, and prepositions of four or fewer letters.

In the rest of the text, capitalize nouns referring to people or groups only when they refer to specific persons, offices, or bodies. The same applies to words such as “act,” or “circuit”: capitalize them only when they refer to a specific act, circuit, or when referring to a circuit by name or number (i.e. “Seventh Circuit”). Finally, capitalize URLs and words in an Internet main page in accordance with the actual capitalization of the source.

* By Alie Kolbe & Karl Bock. Contributed to by Karin Scherner-Kim, Andrea Battaglini, Eumi Lee, and Julie Teperow, revised by Martha Mora & Mindy Barry. Additional revisions in 2011 by Eric Nitz.

Right

We adhere to the Second Circuit’s ruling, rather than follow other circuits’ ambiguous precedent.

With respect to the word “court,” capitalize when naming any court in full, or when referring to the U.S. Supreme Court. You should also capitalize “Court” in a court document when referring to the court that will be receiving that document.

Right

Defendant’s reliance on the state court’s holding concerning the lack of prior notice was misplaced because the New York Court of Appeals held that prior notice was not required.

3. Order of Authorities Within Each Signal (Rule 1.4) (B1.2)

Rule 1.4 states the hierarchical order in which different authorities should be listed within one signal. For example, constitutions are listed before statutes, which are listed before cases, and so forth. Additionally, within each class of authority, Rule 1.4 indicates how different subclasses should be ordered: (i.e. the U.S. Constitution before state constitutions, federal cases before state cases, etc.).

Note that Rule 1.4 gives you flexibility: it specifically allows you to break the indicated order of authorities if one authority is considerably more helpful than the other or if you have some other substance-related reason to break the Rule’s order. Therefore, if you find an older state case that is much more helpful to your point than a more recent one, you can list the older case first, notwithstanding Rule 1.4(d).

Always cite to the cases for each set of courts in reverse chronological order (i.e. the most recent first).

4. No Signal (Rule 1.2) (B1.2)

No signal is necessary before a citation that (1) directly states the propositions; (2) identifies the source of a quotation; or (3) identifies the authority referred to in the text.

5. Order of Signals (Rule 1.3) (B1.2)

When you use more than one signal in a citation string, the signals should be listed in the order in which they appear in Rule 1.2. For example, the signal *see* would precede *see also*. Additionally, signals of the same type (e.g., all signals indicating support, comparison, contradiction, or the provision of background information) should be strung together in a single citation sentence, using semicolons to separate them. However, different types of signals (e.g., contradictory authority cited after supporting authority) must be grouped in separate citation

sentences. Note, however, that if you are using signals in a citation clause, you may string together signals of different types in one citation clause.

Right

See Smith v. California, 479 U.S. 121 (1990); cf. Jackson v. Herrick, 59 F. Supp. 853 (1978). But see Rand v. Olympia, 588 U.S. 43 (1994).

6. Pages (Rule 3.2)

When citing material that spans more than one page, give the inclusive page numbers, separated by an en dash (–) or hyphen (-). Always keep the last two digits, but drop other repetitious digits.

Cite nonconsecutive pages by giving the individual page separated by commas.

Right

100 U.S. 101, 111–12 (1999).

100 U.S. 1090, 1099–101 (1999).

100 U.S. 43, 44–45 (1999).

17 U.S.C. §§ 1924–1999.

7. Short Citations for Cases (Rules 4, 10.9) (B4, B10.2)

There is a range of acceptable short-form citations. The most important part of using them is ensuring your reader knows the case to which you are referring. The following are acceptable short citations for page 100 of Palsgraf v. Long Island Railroad Co., 162 N.E. 99 (N.Y. 1928) (Cardozo, J.):

Palsgraf, 162 N.E. at 100

162 N.E. at 100 (if the name of the case is identified in the text)

Id. at 100 (if Palsgraf is the immediately preceding cite)