NOTE: Video is not available for this session. The slides and accompanying Word file are available at gtlwriteon.org

GEORGETOWN LAW
Write On: How to Write a Case Comment
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>> Max: Thank you, everybody, virtually for coming out to this information session. We hope it’s going to be insightful, helpful, lower anxiety, and make it clear what to expect in this process. For quick introduction, I'm Max Lesser, editor in chief of the Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics. And Erielle will introduce herself.

>> Erielle: I'm editor of the Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy. I'm a second year student, evening student, although I did do 1L full-time, so I can empathize with both camps. I'm excited to give you an overview of something that can be very stressful, but we hope to help simplify it and lay some of your anxieties.

>> Anna Selden: First, I want to thank everyone for coming. Those of you who listened to my spiel yesterday, I'm Anna, and I'm the director of OJA. Just here to see if there's any questions that perhaps I can answer for you guys that you guys can't.

Thank you guys for turning out. We really appreciate it.

>> Max: Definitely.

With that said, just a little bit of acknowledgement. Anybody who heard my talk yesterday, we just wanted to recognize that your class in particular has just shown tremendous resilience and flexibility and adaptability in completely unprecedented circumstances. It’s worth acknowledging that from the get-go. The editors in chief this year have been really deliberate to make the Write On process as accommodating and reasonable as possible. We'll overview a lot of changes being made to this year’s competition. Because everybody has a lot going on. Some people have been hit extremely hard and are kind of at their wit's end in the middle of this pandemic. We want to acknowledge that, that we hear you, and we're going to really try to explain how this process has changed to meet people where you're at. Hopefully the breakdown will
clarify expectations and show you that this is doable. And we really are here to support you.

Erielle, did you want to add anything?

>> Erielle: I second everything Max said. We've been at numerous round tables with all of the EICs together. As well as with OJA. There's a lot of thoughtfulness in particular put into this Write On period because we recognize how difficult and extraordinary the times are right now.

We know simultaneously as well that people’s motivations might be elsewhere, or you might be distracted. We totally empathize with that. So we tried to make this process even more straightforward than it already was.

And we hope that, you know, this is something that was told to me when I was in your shoes last year.

You've gone through 1L. You're totally prepared to do this.

I'm sure you've heard that already. Maybe you haven't. Everything that you've done in law school up to this point, especially your legal writing class, has prepared you to be able to handle this. And it might seem like we're throwing a lot of information at you at once, but you will have access to the slideshow after. So don't feel pressured to take notes.

Max made a good point last night. He said we really want tonight to crystallize for you the big takeaways to keep in mind through this. Max and I will not be judging the case comments. Our board members will be. The EICs don't have a role in that. That's something to keep in mind. But we've been through this process before. And any tips and tricks we can share with you, we'll definitely do that as we go through this. And you'll have access to all these presentation materials. Feel free to use them during the Write On as a step by step guide, like baking a cake. It's very much a recipe with some creativity thrown in. It's very much doable.

>> Max: I can't bake if my life depended on it!

(Laughter.)

>> Erielle: I can't either. Hopefully I'm a better writer than baker.

>> Max: So we've done introductions. In terms of what we'll cover today, we'll talk about what the Write On competition is. Reading the packet and packet procedures. Crafting a case requirement. Formal requirements. Timeline, resources and Q and A. We'll definitely be overviewing how the competition has changed this year. The case packet will be significantly less than it was historically. You guys will have three weeks rather than two weeks. You'll also have a flexible two month period in which to do the
competition. I want to get that out upfront. We'll unpack exactly what you can expect as we move on.

Like I said, we'll wrap up with a little bit of Q and A.

What is the Write On? Write On is the only way to get onto journal. In terms of the time frame, as I mentioned, it will get started on May 15th at 9:00 a.m., and at that point you will have a three week window to complete the competition.

That window will go from May 15th -- correct me if I'm wrong, Anna -- to July 27th?

>> Anna Selden: 22nd.

>> Max: July 22nd. So you guys have a lot of time. Traditionally, as you heard, Write On would go immediately after finals happened, you were really burned out and had to push through. We wanted to make sure you had some flexibility at the end of an unprecedented semester. So you'll have that time to find a period that works for you to complete this competition.

Another accommodation that we built in is that the cost of Write On has been reduced to $20. I don't remember exactly what it was last time.

>> Erielle: I think it was $40. Last time.

>> Max: Which is great. And in terms of what's included in the Write On packet, you'll have a case comment, which is the bulk of this presentation, which is comment on a case that you'll be provided.

A blue book. An editing test. We'll unpack what to expect there.

And then in terms of the Write On competition, this depends on journal, but a lot of journals include a personal statement component. That's actually something that's going to be available to you, I think very soon. Probably the next few days. So if you want to get the ball rolling, you can certainly kind of get started on outlining and approaching those personal statements.

I'm going to keep track of the slides in my head, because I can't see them!

>> Erielle: That was slide 2. Next is 3.

>> Max: Feel free to jump in!

(Laughter.)

>> Erielle: Okay.

>> Max: The results of the Write On competition. OJA will match you with a journal based on the results of the competition and your preferences. We'll unpack that quite a
bit. There are two components there. How did you perform, and how did you rank journals?

Once you're offered membership on a journal, you may not decline. That's it. So be intentional in how you rank journals. And you'll be notified of placement in late August.

**OJA NOTE: You may decline membership but you cannot be placed on another journal.**

Now we'll get into the meat and potatoes: Reading the packet and packet procedures.

In terms of preparing, first step, great job, attend the case comment workshop, you've done that piece! Also, on the Write On website, there's also a set of exemplars. I used to be a high school teacher, and I think that's helpful for learning how to approach things. I definitely recommend checking that out.

And procedures. In terms of packet purchase, again, the price has been decreased. Preferencing will be open through July 22nd.

Again, you'll have that three week window. So you have to turn in at the end of that window. Again, carefully read the instructions. In terms of the content, you're going to have a few different components, and I think there will be future slides unpacking this in even more detail. But there's a main case you'll be analyzing. Circuit court cases that are probably split on that question and give you different arguments and perspectives. There will also be secondary sources, in terms of law reviews and news articles. Just as a personal strategy, I found it helpful to start with those, because it framed my analysis, like, this is what it's actually about, rather than digging first into case law.

Remember to complete and upload the blue book test. Again, we'll do strategies later on. Some people like to knock the blue book out right away. Some people like more time. We'll get into the strategy. Okay. Go for it.

>> Erielle: Okay, so, I guess we should probably go into an overview of how the case comment works in particular. Essentially, what Max went into is this idea of the packet. What you're essentially going to have is a primary case, like a Supreme Court case, and then you'll have a web of decisions that sort of stem from that case. You'll end up probably seeing a break in circuits. You'll probably see how different federal district courts have dealt with this particular question of law. What you'll end up doing is making a determination, really just commenting on what you think is the best approach to dealing with this question of law.

After reading this packet, and again, it will be much shorter than it's been in prior years, you'll basically make a determination about if you agree with how the law has been decided.

What we'll do is show you what those decisions -- what that thesis could look like. Basically your entire case comment will be roughly 7 pages. I think there's a hard stop at 7 pages. Then you have 3 pages of end notes available to you. So as most your comment can be 10 pages double spaced.
We’ll show you examples of what your thesis could be.

Essentially your case comment is going to be on that -- the main case that's in question, where all the other ones stem from. You'll make a determination. You're going to say, this case was decided incorrectly because...

This is the most common approach. What Max said prior, where we give you secondary sources, those secondary sources will be very useful in terms of giving you arguing points for going forward with these types of theses.

So those secondary sources are going to give you a framework for analysis. They actually tell you what to look for in the main case as well as the other web of decisions that you're going to be reading.

But in your case comment, you should talk about, for the first example, why the court's analysis is incorrect. But you want to make sure that you're not just arguing what the dissent argues in any particular given case. You want to engage in a thoughtful aggregation and maybe take the next step in analysis as well, and recall points from the secondary sources.

Another thesis option you could take is: The court is correct, but for the wrong reasons. In that, you actually veer away from the majority reasoning. So you'll arrive at the same conclusion, but with different reasoning.

Make sure you distinguish from the majority opinion. You don't want to just rehash it. The reason the prior one that I just went over is the most commonly chosen one is because it saves you from this trap of going into re writing what the majority has written. That's not to discourage you from using this approach. But you want to put bumpers up to make sure that you don't just end up rewriting the same reasoning that the majority has come up with. Although you certainly should include it.

And I also, the other point you want to make: The court missed the point. Maybe you think that they're just not even getting -- maybe the question of law that's being debated is not even really what should be debated.

This is a little bit of a meta -- a little bit higher-level meta approach. Again, definitely doable. But it requires a little bit more outside the box thinking, and it's a little bit more of a risk-taking approach.

I, I think when I did this, I ended up doing the first approach. I can't recall now, actually. Or maybe the second one that I just went over. I don't remember. But I do think that this one is a little bit more outside the box. But if you're someone that enjoys thinking a little bit differently or approaching problems in innovative ways, this might be something you enjoy writing.

The case comment, at least Max might be able to attest to this, the writing process shouldn't feel -- I actually found it to be very satisfying and enjoyable ultimately. When I
knew what I was writing, I found it to be enjoyable. So choose an approach you think you would actually enjoy writing about.

This one is, again, sort of has a similar -- presents similar challenge to the second point -- the court is correct. You don't want to just rehash the majority. But you will think about the things that the majority may not have considered and write them down. Maybe there are valuable counterarguments that the majority wasn't aware of, that crop up in your secondary source, and you can almost pen -- I won't say a new majority decision -- but you can pen a new argument for the majority going forward with all the counterarguments, and saying why none of them are actually correct.

And the last one. The whole area of law is a mess, and suggest an alternative approach.

This is similar to the response that you're debating the wrong question. It's possible that there's a mess because we're not debating the question correctly. So there's overlap between these two approaches. But this is the most "burn it down". It's like, nothing is working here, and here's why nothing is working.

This is the toughest approach. But that's not to discourage you. It's just to say it's going to require a little more unconventional thinking. It's a little less formulaic than the other approaches are. But it can reap a lot of rewards and at times be more fun to write, perhaps.

>> Max: Yeah. I would just add one point on this approach. Just to maybe be careful of not getting... overly meta and just writing like a philosophy piece. You want to make sure that your case comment is legally grounded. Even if you're taking a bold new-thinking approach, just make sure you're engaged in the legal analysis regardless. Because I know for me, I would love to just write a philosophy piece. Gotta watch out.

>> Erielle: It's also it you because you've limited to the secondary sources that you have. A lot of times when you have wackier legal theories that you want to test out, you're like, let me see if there's any law review articles that have been written on this topic. You don't have that luxury here. So your ability to get philosophical is sort of contained or cabined by that. That's something else to keep in mind.

Obvious this is the last approach: Some creative dynamic idea of your own. Something you come up with yourself. This is something, again, that you could mix two approaches together. If you find a way that works for you and you can still maintain an organized argument, you can do that. But it's a little less formulaic so it requires you to be extra diligent about your organization. Because there's really no template for it, because you're creating the argument.

Max, did you want to add to that?

>> Max: Yeah, I'll add quickly to that, and jump in on the next one. Yeah, Erielle makes a good point that there's way to merge approaches. For myself, the case comment was
on the challenges of coercive rehabilitation, like judges sentencing someone to get drug treatment. I very much critiqued the premise but also got into what a better approach could look like. Not just at the legal level, but public policy. So there are ways to get creative. We don't want to discourage that. Just make sure you build your analysis out of the sources.

How to craft a thesis statement...

--

>> Erielle: Is that you or me? It's you, right?

>> Max: Yeah, it's me this time. I'm getting flashbacks of teaching high school English.

(Laughter.)

So how to craft a thesis statement. I think a theme you'll see in this presentation is that we're not hiding the ball. You don't need to get insanely creative. Stick to the basics. With a thesis statement, you want to get to your point, be concise, be clear, be direct, and build off that point...

How does that work? I think first it's about deciding what your thesis is going to be. I think a lot of this is just kind of gut instinct, that as you're reading the secondary sources and unpacking the cases, what stands out to you? What feels off? What feels wrong? Just drawing on that instinct. This is a time-sensitive competition. We don't want you to think you have to write the greatest piece of all time that's going to change all of law. You just have to have a good clear thesis statement, build out your organization, and take next steps.

In line with that, you want to work smarter, not harder. I think part of what that means is really just saying organized with how you unpack the sources. For myself, that meant really outlining, copy and pasting quotes and excerpts that I found interesting and could later utilize, so hopefully after you take the notes on the source you don't have to look at the original again. You've gotten what you need from it.

>> Erielle: I would add, Max, when you read all the cases, don't feel like you have to use every case. You're going to get a ton of cases. There are going to be some decisions that really resonate with you. Feel free to use the ones that really resonate with you. We want to cast -- we want you to cast a wide net in your case comment, obviously, but don't feel compelled to cite every single case. That's just not possible, and frankly it's going to send you on a wild goose chase of trying to fit it all in. You have a 7 page limitation, not 25, and we know that. So feel free to pick the cases on the district and appellate level that really resonate with you.

>> Max: Totally.

And that builds nicely to getting to the point here.
Again, having a clear and concise thesis statement, it doesn't have to be super complicated or overly vague. Just make your point. What's your position on the circuit split? What's your position on the law?

Frankly you'll have a lot of people reading this, and they want to have clarity when they read it. They want to know your position.

I think this is my last slide...

Examples. This comment argues that the 4th circuit should have relied on Virginia state law to dispose of the publicity element. And this comment argues that the 8th circuit should have applied a balancing test in analyzing the endorsement clause.

Both of those examples are clear and direct. And the roadmap can unpack your specific reasons.

>> Erielle: All right. This goes back to what Max was saying before where you just want your thesis to be super direct. We're not hoping that you hide the ball or, you know, have sort of flowery language. Although you can. That's artistic license. But obviously legal writing is very different than traditional writing. We want you to feel like you have the ability to be as direct and forth right as possible. What we judge you on is not just your writing style, but also your ability to be clear and concise and argue your points thoughtfully.

I guess we'll go into what the roadmap is, sorry. We'll go to the next slide.

This goes to what I said earlier. Your case comment has two parts. You have the seven page, which is a hard stop at 7 pages. Again, it's a little bit shorter than what you might expect from a traditional case comment. But it really just forces you to be as concise as possible and as direct as possible.

And then you do have 3 pages for end notes. If you're someone who tends to write a little bit more, be more verbose, I encourage you to put nonessential items in the end notes. If you're comfortable doing that and you feel like you have some flexibility with end notes. Feel free to put information there. You do have up to 3 pages in the end notes. If you're feeling cramped on page space, feel free to put the nonessential info, or information that you feel like would be okay in the end note, feel free to put it there.

As opposed to footnotes. That's a big thing. End notes are different than footnotes. I made that mistake on mine at first and fixed it before I turned it in.

Make sure you read the instructions on the packet carefully. Because the formatting is very precise and specific. These are small -- your job on a journal is very detail-oriented. So even if it seems like these are throwaway things, the formatting is actually very important. Because it indicates your level of precision and your ability to pay attention to detail. A lot of this job on journal involves paying attention to detail.
In sort of smaller, more -- what you would traditionally think of as not important, it's actually very important.

So make sure to follow what the instructions say in terms of layout.

You want your end notes to be single spaced, which actually works well for you if you have bulkier end notes. Your comment itself will be 7 pages double spaced. And you want to make sure to include that title page at the beginning. That does not count toward the 7 page limit. That title page just sort of gives us information about your packet. Do not put your name, right, Anna? No name on the title page, correct?

> Anna Selden: Correct. Just your packet number.

> Erielle: Everything is a blind review. We don't want your name on any of this stuff. And we want it submitted in PDF so it's easy for us to collect them and print them out all at once.

This goes into the nuts and bolts of the case comment.

You'll have the introduction. That will be about 2-3 pages.

Then you'll have a roadmap. If you remember from legal writing, your roadmap is often one of the first things you write, but it's crucial for giving your reader an overview of what to expect. It also creates those artificial bumpers where it kind of contains your argument. Makes sure your argument always goes back to the main points you made in the roadmap.

And the analysis where you make the argument should be 3-4 pages long.

Then half a page for conclusion.

I tend to overwrite. So I cut my conclusion a little bit. I think it was only 2 or 3 sentences maybe. I'm not saying that's necessarily what I would encourage. But there is some flexibility in these -- in how you allocate your 7 pages depending on what you want to emphasize. Maybe your facts, procedural history, and holding will only be 2 pages because you want the analysis to be a little bit longer. That's totally fine. We won't necessarily be grading you own if you stick to these. These are suggested page numbers, page limits. But we want you to feel like you have a little bit of wiggle room with those amounts.

It says at the bottom, when editing for length, avoid sacrificing the actual analysis. So if you have to cut from somewhere, personally I would start with the conclusion and then go to the introduction. I would try to leave your analysis as intact as possible. Because that's where the meat of your essay really is -- - I mean, case comment.

>> Max: I agree.

>> Erielle: Is it me still or you?

>> Max: I think it's me now.
(Laughter.)

I should just do tally marks.

>> Erielle: I don't even remember. Oh, it's you, right.

>> Max: In terms of layout, all citations are in end notes. There's three kind of approaches: Direct citations, you're directly referencing information of the materials. Supportive citations, when you're making a legal contention that's supported by the information in the materials. And ancillary points, again, these all have kind of their own signals. This can be more of a see, generally. And end notes must be used when citing authority or when necessary to back up a proposition. I would lean on the conservative end with that. It tends to be better to overcite than undertcite. Any time you have a legal assertion, you want to make sure that that's cited. So make sure you're referring to the blue book. But again, lean on the side of citing.

In terms of the actual layout, again, Erielle talked about this. End notes are different than footnotes. There's a reason, in this competition, we want to focus on your writing, not just going footnote by footnote. We can do that at the end for formatting purposes and verification. But we want to read your analysis. So all your citations will be at the very end of the piece.

In terms of just, you know, being prepared, I think something that's -- you know -- in your power to do ahead of the competition is just refresh on the blue book. Look at rules 1.1, 1.2, through 1.5 on signals. That's something we do on the case comments. Are you using the right signals? Something that's close? Something that makes no sense? You want to be smart and diligent in really referencing those rules. That goes, too, for supra and infra on cross references. Make sure that you brush up on those. And hereinafter, if you use a shorter form for referencing a case.

What happened??? (Flipping through the slides.) Man, this thing just went -- okay. Sorry about that.

So, structure.

In terms of the introduction, traditionally the way that's unpacked is you have a statement of the facts and procedural history. You'll talk about the holding of the case in question. You will give your thesis and roadmap it. Then your analysis, and then conclusion.

Some people like to start with the holding and go back to the facts. Personally I like to have a little bit of context and framing. But that's stylistic.

So, unpacking those components. The statement of facts -- again, just relaying the facts that are interesting and essential to your argument, again, you do not have to belabor the point. You don't have to explain everything that possibly happened in this case. But you're giving context. This goes throughout. Maintaining objective academic tone, even
if you think the case is the worst, most terribly decided case of all time, keep it analytical
and academic.

Erielle, do you want to pick up?

> Erielle: Yup.

> Max: I'm sorry, this presentation is delaying a little bit. It's weird... there we go. Gotta
keep skipping... sorry about that.

> Erielle: You're good.

So the holding, you can spend half a page to a page on this part. You're basically just
giving sort of an overview or a sampling of what you're going to be arguing for or
against. Obviously because you're going to have a main case, and you'll be told what
the main case is, that's the case that will be the holding that you'll be expounding upon.
That will be the case you either agree with, disagree with, think it's a mess, think all the
law is a mess.

I didn't mention this before, but the case is usually of a particular circuit. You're going to
want to look for circuit breaks. So you'll see that this particular circuit might differ from
another circuit, and who's been more faithful to SCOTUS's interpretation of the law.
These are all things you'll have to think about when writing this case comment.

Next slide, Max.

This goes back to your legal writing class. So all of this should feel a little bit like a
review. What makes an effective roadmap? Well, you want to explain why people
should care about this issue. And you're going to sort of, obviously, give your thesis at
the end of the road map, or at the beginning, and say how you're going to expound on
that thesis. It gives a people a heads-up as to what to expect in your analysis. This is
how I used to test my road maps: Can I find every point I made in my roadmap in my
analysis? Oftentimes you'll find that your roadmap actually gives you the headings you
might use within your analysis. Again, you have a lot of freedom in how you want to
organize this. If you want multiple types of headings, feel free to do that. If that helps
you keep organized.

I know when I did it -- you'll see in the example case comment -- I know when I did it, I
really took advantage of those headings as a way to eliminate excess words that I might
use for transitions. Not to say that you shouldn't have transitions. But sometimes it helps
to put it front and center. It eliminates some of the extra explaining you’d have to do
otherwise.

Components of an effective analysis. Your organization should correspond to the
roadmap. Your analysis should link up with what you said in your roadmap. And
obviously you want a close connection between your thesis and analysis. And you want
to make sure you don't go off onto some tangent. You'll find, a lot of times, I know that
OJA is really thoughtful in the topics that they pick. And they tend to purposely pick
interesting topics. I thought me and Max, our year's topic was really interesting. So you might be tempting to start writing about something sort of related to it tangentially. Don't do that. It's going to be the -- the temptation will be there. But try to condense it. If there's an interesting connection, try to save it for the conclusion to leave your reader with an interesting thought. But really try to keep your analysis tight since you have such limited pages.

Conclusion. From what you remember from legal writing, this should be a restatement of your roadmap as much as you can, depending on how much space you have. If you want to leave the reader with an interesting thought, you can. But the most basic conclusion will be a restatement of the roadmap and a quick -- which will be condensed in your roadmap, but -- a statement of what you argued in your piece, your case comment.

Timelines and resources. Is this you, Max, or me?

>> Max: I think I'm picking up now.

So, timeline. We mentioned a little bit at the beginning, the competition is going to run from May 15th to July 22. You'll be picking a three week window that meets your needs. This was an intentional reform to accommodate all the challenges that have come with the semester. Again, traditionally, Write On just started immediately after finals, two weeks, and that was it. Now there's going to be a two month window where you can pick what works for you and have that extended period with the additional week, and a shorter case packet.

Again, budgeting time is going to be important. You can definitely talk to second-years and third-years about the approach they did, in terms of doing blue book first or doing case comment first, or, you know, going back and forth. That's really up to you. The only suggestion I can make is not to cram the blue book test. You don't necessarily want to leave that to the last minute. We'll go more into estimating how much time that will take.

So. We're going right into that.

A lot of students like to start off with the blue book and editing exam first. I think there's a lot of merit to that in terms of just getting it out of the way, and it's something that you can actually start preparing for now or the day before. You can refresh your blue books, be ready, knock it out, and know you only have one thing left to do. There's certainly merit to that.

Reading as early as possible. Like I said, the best advice I can give is read intentionally and collect what is going to be useful for you, so you don't have to look at that source again. I'm someone who likes to print out copies. I made an effort to have a paper copy and highlight and play around with it.

Getting a draft done as soon as possible, I think, is key. You know, you want to have the opportunity where you have something -- and I'm kind of like Erielle, I tend to be
verbose and write a ton and have to shave it down, make it clear, make it tight. So I would definitely recommend getting something done, and then improving it, rather than finishing your last word a minute before the competition. Right? This is common sense. But, reiterating.

And again, leaving time to edit. Fresh eyes are critical on this. I'm writing a note right now, and I just noticed a missing "the". There are things you just won't notice if you're staring constantly at the case comment. Fresh eyes are critical. So leave time for yourself.

(Laughing) get rest before Write On. For sure. And you have time flexibility, so take advantage of that.

Reading the packet early is important. You don't want to cram the writing time, so it's important to be expeditious with your reading.

For reference, OJA believes that this process from start to finish should take 5 days. Part of the reason that we wanted that 3-week period is, I'm an evening student, and so is Erielle. For evening students, the weekend, like, that's your time. So under this structure, if you're an evening student, you really have six full weekend days. That was intentional. So even if it's not doable during the week you have kids, the job is too demanding, whatever, we built in the weekend so you have that time. And it really should take five days. So you have a lot of time.

Again, leaving time to review, edit, and proofread.

I think I have one more slide...

Is it going to work? Oh, my lord. That's what you get for putting a caveman like me in charge of the...

(Laughter.)

Is this where it is?

>> Erielle: You're through there. Then the next one.

>> Max: Okay. Other resources. Interesting.

(Laughter.)

Disclaimer. You cannot consult these resources or anything else after the Write On competition begins. You use what's in the case comment packet, and that's it. No Wikipedia, no YouTube, no nothing. I think? Am I right?

>> Erielle: You're right. Anna, clarify, the materials on the website that OJA has for how to write a case comment, are those materials accessible to the students during Write On?
Anna Selden: Absolutely, the sample comment, the how-to stuff, all that's accessible. And we'll list in the instructions. But obviously a legal dictionary, and a regular dictionary, that's all fine. We'll outline it for you.

Erielle: I was panicked during the last Write On because I was like, nothing, that means nothing, nothing on the OJA website. And my friend was like, you're completely incorrect. So I wanted to reiterate for those of you who are rule based, you can use the material on the Write On website like "how to write a case comment". And the instructions in the packet will clarify that for you so you're not confused.

Max: Cool. That's it. Any questions?

Erielle: That's everything! Okay.

Feel free to ask us questions, and if you have any concerns, or you're just curious about some more specifics, Max and I are happy to answer them.

Max: Yes. And, yeah, I guess we'll -- somebody's got their mic on, as a heads up. It happens. It's Zoom. So we'll check out chat questions, and if you prefer to raise your hand, you can also do that.

Okay. What did we miss?

Erielle: We have one hand. Damian? Did you have a question?

Yes. I was just curious on how the preferencing works. I'm still confused on what determinations are made based on preference versus scores, and how, I guess, to come up with a strategy for that.

>> Erielle: So, I can chime in and Max can too, and then Anna will probably circle up with us as well.

Preferencing, you're going to have the ability to rank which journal you want to be on. And someone said to me or asked me last night in the town hall, is there strategy involved to your preferencing? I don't think you should strategize about preferencing. I think your number one preference should be the journal that's your number one choice to be at. The reason I say that is because you're going to have late night evenings where you're working on journal. And you hope that the material you're reading is interesting to you, that you feel some attachment to the product that you're putting out. That attachment only comes if it's the journal you actually want to be at.

So I think we do have a clause, essentially, where everyone is considered for main journal unless they don't want to be. For instance, I knew that I wanted to be at GJLPP. So I actually opted out and did not want to be considered for main journal. I put GJLPP as my number one choice. I was very happy with it. I knew I wanted to be there.

So I encourage you to talk to as many people from the journals as you can. And research. Look at the journals. See if the content they're producing is what you're
interested in. As a staff editor, you'll be reading a lot of these articles. It makes the editing process way more enjoyable if you actually enjoy what you're reading.

Another thing to think about is your alumni network. A lot of times these journals, we make connections with people in relative fields. So it's helpful. If you're interested in international law, the international law journal might make sense, or the national security law journal. They have great alumni networks that specifically leans into those fields.

So it's definitely worth preferencing the journals you actually want to be at. I let Max chime in too.

>> Max: Yeah. Is the feedback me? Man, I'm screwing up everything.

I would echo everything Erielle said. That was perfectly put. The reality is, yeah, journal is a real commitment. You want to be part of a team and a community and a publication that reflects your passion and your interests. I think a lot of law school, we do a lot of this, like, the ends justify the means thinking. Like, hey, here's something that's going to be terrible, but it's good for me, so I should do it. There's merit to that for sure. But with a journal, this is a big commitment. You really want to do a journal that you care about. You'll be reading tons of articles. You'll be steeped in the subject matter. So I think that really matters. I would maybe caution a little against choosing one because, people talk about, whatever, I think you get where I'm going...

Yeah. Any other -- looks like we have a chat question?

>> Erielle: Is main journal more impressive to employers and others?

Obviously I think the main journal is the most prestigious. But it's a double-edged sword. Because at the smaller journals there's more opportunity for leadership positions because they're smaller. So you can rise the ranks faster because it's a smaller group of people. I also think that the time commitment at main journal, if I'm not mistaken, is fairly significant, and at times can be much more than the smaller journals or the secondary journals, as we call ourselves. I think that's something to keep in mind. If you are someone who has a full-time job, or you have other commitments that you are invested in on campus, it might not really be possible for you to do main journal, or at least keep your sanity at the same time.

For me, when I was looking at journals, I knew I wanted to do journal, but I wasn't as preoccupied with the prestige element. I was interested in constitutional law. And I wanted to do a clerkship. I'll be doing a clerkship graduation. I was grateful to be on GJLPP because we're the only journal devoted to constitutional law. So it was a perfect fit. There are a lot of factors beyond prestige that will go into this. I will say in clerkship interviews, my journal credentials have been nothing but a booster, and something for me to talk about experience wise. I never felt like there was any disappointment with the fact that I was on GJLPP instead of main journal. In fact, being editor in chief is something that carries its own prestige. So I wouldn't be as necessarily concerned with
that, because if you’re really invested in journal, you’ll rise in the ranks on a secondary journal. And that carries a tremendous amount of clout.

Max?

>> Max: Those are great points. I would echo all of them.

I think something to recognize, just upfront, is the fact that any journal at Georgetown is going to be prestigious, right? All the journals are extremely highly ranked in their own fields. My journal, the Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics, is the top ranked in the country. Erielle’s journal is cited by Supreme Court justices. That's not to dismiss main journal at all. I'm friends with the editors and they're super highly ranked and great overall. But that's an important premise to reinforce.

Another point in general about journal and why it’s valuable, there's the personal aspect that you get to build the community, you get closer with people, it provides real leadership opportunities. In transparency, as Erielle was mentioning, those are more present for journals with a smaller membership in terms of the possibility of being EIC or serving on the executive board. That's all really valuable.

On the back end, when I was considering should I do journal, should I not, and I heard different feedback. A friend of mine said, and there’s something to this, when employers see that you're on a journal, it's almost an insurance policy. They're saying, okay, this person really knows how to blue book. This person is going to be diligent in terms of reviewing legal writing. This person has been tested. I think that's a big part of the advantages. Obviously there’s the prestige. But from a legal employer's perspective, your membership on a journal is kind of proof that you can handle legal writing responsibilities. And I think that's just incredibly valuable. Hopefully that answered your question.

Any other questions? Feel free to chat, raise a hand. We've got a bit more time. So, happy to unpack.

It could be anything. It doesn't have to be technical competition. What worked for you? What do you like? Really open-ended... if not, we'll just ramble until that thing pops up...

(Laughter.)

Maybe, Erielle want to do overall advice for the competition?

>> Erielle: When I was doing the competition I was doing an originalism boot camp for the Center on Constitution. So I was working all day, very tired at night. So I'm empathetic to those of you who have stuff going on during the day. It's all doable. I can't emphasize that enough. When I was doing Write On, I had a lot of self-doubt and was very nervous about it, and felt like once I started, I realized, okay, I can do this. This is very doable. I said this in the town hall yesterday if you were with me. It's like driving a car, where you get all this instruction in driver's ed and you get behind the wheel and see how different it is, but you also see that you can do it.
It's the same with case comment. We've thrown a lot of information at you, but hopefully when you get behind the wheel you'll know what's going on. Definitely use the materials to show you the ropes. Don't feel like you have to give us a treatise. Do something straightforward, thoughtful, and concise.

>> Max: Totally agree. Don't make the perfect the enemy of the good. Do your best in this competition. Finish it. I think there are maybe people who psych themselves out midway, like, oh, maybe I shouldn't do it. Trust me. You are plenty capable. Do your best, and you will end up on a journal in some form or capacity, and they'll be lucky to have you.

In terms of concrete strategy, I think, you know, just get as much done upfront as possible. Try to read over the blue book before the blue book test to save yourself time. Have an organized setup for how you unpack the sources, know what you actually want to utilize in your case comment. Create a structure and outline and unpack things. And then, you know, just get it down. Don't procrastinate. Chip away at it one bite at a time, and leave yourself a little time to review and reflect with fresh eyes, not fatigued eyes. We've aught got those at this point in the semester. Hopefully you get to rejuvenate a little bit before you do the competition.

Again, we know this is such a crazy period. We know the thought of doing even one more thing after finals, for some of you, it's like, is this too much? But we've tried to give you flexibility, to allow you to do this on your own time. It's not the worst thing in the world. I promise. It can even be kind of fun, especially if there's a good topic. I hope we're delivering on that.

(Laughter.)

Yeah. So, make the best of it.

And we can't... correct me if I'm wrong, we can't talk to you during the competition. But before May 15th, if you want to reach out to either of our journals with questions, I will put my e-mail in the chat function, and... happy to speak.

Anna, you want to add anything?

>> Anna Selden: Yeah. Just a couple things. As you know, if you have questions during the competition, our e-mail address is lawwriteon@georgetown.edu. Please don't hesitate to reach out.

One of the big things we see, is like Max and Erielle said, give yourself time at the end of the competition so you're not in a panic situation when you're uploading stuff. That's honestly when the wheels come off the bus. You want to give yourself time to re download and make sure you uploaded the right stuff. And like Max and Erielle said, a lot went into rethinking the competition this year. We want as many of you to participate as possible. That's the thought behind the changes.
We wish you luck. It's been a difficult first year. But as we told everyone at the end of the town hall last night, we're very proud of all of you for making it to the end of the first year. You should be proud of yourselves, it's a huge accomplishment. Please don't hesitate to reach out. If you have individual questions for editors during the competition, if you send them to Write On, we'll get them out for you. So certainly don't hesitate to reach out.

>> Max: Cool. Good luck with finals, do whatever you need to take care you yourself, fill your bucket, and then come back and do this.

>> Erielle: You can do this. You've been preparing for this all year, unbeknownst to yourselves. So it's totally doable.

>> Max: Absolutely. Cool. Talk to you guys later, good luck.

>> Erielle: Talk to you later. Bye.

(The workshop ended at 5:30 p.m.)

QUESTIONS FROM THE CHAT

00:36:50 Andy Y: Would preference be given to those who submit their material earlier than others? Kind of like a rolling admissions process?
00:37:10 Erielle Davidson: No. No preference for turning in early.
00:48:41 Ezer Smith: Quick clarifying question about the bluebook exam: is it a timed exam, or do we have the full 3 weeks to complete it?
00:49:48 Anna Selden: Three full weeks to take the bluebook exam. It's due with your case comment and any personal statements/resumes at the end of your 3 week window,
00:50:56 DruCorbeille: is main journal more impressive to employers than the others?
00:54:00 DruCorbeille: Thanks!
00:56:14 DruCorbeille: yes it did!
00:59:54 Erielle Davidson: Erielle Davidson, erd26@georgetown.edu
00:59:57 Erielle Davidson: GJLPP
01:00:26 Max Lesser: Max Lesser, Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics, mgl78@georgetown.edu