

A. Purpose of a Legal Citation

The purpose of a legal citation is to identify the source of a legal rule, the source of a legal quotation, the source of a court's reasoning, the source of policy, in short—to identify the source of any legal proposition or rationale introduced into a legal argument. It is the heart of what Richard Neumann calls “rule-proof.”

A legal citation should answer these four questions:

1. What is the authority being cited?

E.g., a case by name (Bluebook Rules B5.1.1, R10.2.1 & R10.2.2).

M.A. Mortenson Co. v. Timberline Software Corp.,

2. Where can the reader find the authority being cited?

E.g., volume 998 of the Pacific Reporter at starting page 305 with a pinpoint citation to page 308 (Bluebook Rule B5.1.2).

M.A. Mortenson Co. v. Timberline Software Corp.,
998 P.2d 305, 308

3. What legal institution is the creator of the authority being cited?

E.g., Supreme Court of Washington (Bluebook Rule B5.1.3).

M.A. Mortenson Co. v. Timberline Software Corp.,
998 P.2d 305, 308 (Wash.)

4. When was the authority being cited decided or codified or created?

E.g., in the year 2000 (Bluebook Rule B5.1.3).

M.A. Mortenson Co. v. Timberline Software Corp.,
998 P.2d 305, 308 (Wash. 2000).

B. Parts of a Case Citation

Case citations are generally made up of the following elements:

1. the name of the case (usually the litigants)
2. the volume number of the reporter containing the case
3. the abbreviation for that reporter
4. the page number in that reporter on which the case begins
5. the "pinpoint" page for specific information in that case
6. the abbreviation for the court that decided the case
7. the year the case was decided

C. Some Common Abbreviations for Case-Reporters:

| <u>Abbreviation</u> | <u>Reporter</u> |
|---------------------|---|
| A. | West's Atlantic Reporter |
| A.2d | West's Atlantic Reporter, 2d Series |
| F. | West's Federal Reporter |
| F.2d | West's Federal Reporter, 2d Series |
| F.3d | West's Federal Reporter, 3d Series |
| F. Supp. | West's Federal Supplement |
| F. Supp. 2d | West's Federal Supplement, 2d Series |
| L. Ed. 2d | U.S. Sup. Court Decisions, Lawyers' Ed, 2d Series |
| N.E. | West's Northeastern Reporter |
| N.E.2d | West's Northeastern Reporter, 2d Series |
| N.W. | West's Northwestern Reporter |
| N.W.2d | West's Northwestern Reporter, 2d Series |
| P. | West's Pacific Reporter |
| P.2d | West's Pacific Reporter, 2d Series |
| P.3d | West's Pacific Reporter, 3d Series |
| S. Ct. | West's Supreme Court Reporter |
| S.E. | West's Southeastern Reporter |
| S.E.2d. | West's Southeastern Reporter, 2d Series |
| So. | West's Southern Reporter |
| So. 2d. | West's Southern Reporter, 2d Series |
| S.W. | West's Southwestern Reporter |
| S.W.2d | West's Southwestern Reporter, 2d Series |
| U.S. | United States Reports |

D. Parts of a Statutory Citation

A statutory citation generally contains the following elements:

1. the title of the code (often included in the section numbering)
2. the abbreviation for the name of the code
3. the section symbol and section number being cited
4. the year of the current code volume

Below is a citation to the United States Code in proper Bluebook form for section 102 of Title 17. (Look at Table 1 on page 196 of the 18th edition of the Bluebook.)

17 U.S.C. § 102 (2000)

Here is a proper Bluebook citation to section 62A.2-204 of the Revised Code of Washington. (Look at Table 1 on page 238 of the 18th edition of the Bluebook.)

Wash. Rev. Code § 62A.2-204 (2006)

E. Some Common Abbreviations for Codes

| <u>Abbreviation</u> | <u>Code</u> |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Ohio Rev. Code Ann. | Ohio Revised Code Annotated |
| Wash. Rev. Code | Revised Code of Washington |
| U.S.C. | United States Code |
| U.S.C.A. | United States Code Annotated |

Review Table 1 in the Bluebook for other abbreviations for the various states' codes.

F. Some Common Citation Errors Made by First-Year Students

1. Do not capitalize all of the letters in a case name.
(Bluebook Rules B5.1.1 & R10.2)
2. Underline or italicize case names in textual sentences.
(Bluebook Rule B5.1.1 & R10.2)

3. Do not use a capital "C" in the word "court" unless you are referring to the U.S. Supreme Court, writing out the whole name of a court as a proper noun, or referring to the court to which the specific document will be submitted.
(Bluebook Rules B10.6.1 & R8)
4. Provide a pinpoint cite for every legal assertion.
(Bluebook Rules B5.1.2 & R3.2(a))
5. Use a "full citation" when you first introduce an authority.
(Bluebook Rule B5.1, R10.1, & R12.1, etc.)
6. Use a "short-form" citation after the first full citation for each authority.
(Bluebook Rules B5.2 & R4.1)
7. Use id. as the short-form only when there has been no intervening citation.
(Bluebook Rule B5.2 & R4.1)
8. Do not use supra or infra with primary authority.
(Bluebook Rule R4.2)
9. Quotations of 50 or more words must be single-spaced, indented, and justified on both left and right sides. Do not include quotation marks in such "block quotes." When citing to the source of the block quote, skip a line and put the cite at the left margin.
(Bluebook Rule R5.1)
10. Use brackets when altering a quotation to fit your sentence.
(Bluebook Rule R5.2)
11. Do not use an ellipsis at the beginning of a quotation.
(Bluebook Rule R5.3)
12. Close up free-standing capital letters (and 2d & 3d) in citations.
(Bluebook Rule R6.1(a))
13. Use the section symbol in citations but not as the first "word" in a citation sentence.
(Bluebook Rules R3.3 & R6.2(c))

14. Abbreviate case names correctly--first in textual sentences and then further in citations. [Read these rules!!]
(Bluebook Rules R10.2.1 & R10.2.2)
15. Include the court and jurisdiction in a full case citation except where the court has been unambiguously conveyed by other abbreviations.
(Bluebook Rule R10.4)
16. Include the date (year) of decision in a case citation.
(Bluebook Rule R10.5)
17. Always give the required subsequent history of a case in the first full citation to that case.
(Bluebook Rule 10.7)
18. Cite to statutes in the current code.
(Bluebook Rule R12.2.1)
19. Include the date (year) of the current code volume in the first full citation to a code section.
(Bluebook Rule R12.3.2)
20. Cite to administrative materials in the current administrative code.
(Bluebook Rule R14.2)
21. "The Bluebook requires the use and citation of traditional printed sources unless (1) the information cited is unavailable in a traditional printed source; or (2) a copy of the source cannot be located because it is so obscure that it is practically unavailable."
(Bluebook Rule R18 (emphasis omitted))

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