Basic Bluebook Citation

Concord Law School at Purdue University Global has adopted the current edition *A Uniform System of Citation* (Bluebook) as our citation system. The Bluebook is easily the dominant legal citation system throughout the country and is accepted by California courts.

**What is the purpose of a citation?** It allows the reader to both understand what the source of the support for your proposition is and to look it up to review it for themselves. It further serves to give credit to the original author, especially in the case of an article or other secondary source.

*Each legal and factual allegation in your writing needs a source to back it up.*

**Why should you care about citation?** You have an ethical duty to disclose controlling law to the court and citation is part of doing so adequately. Persuasion in the law starts with legal authority such as cases, statutes, constitutions, and regulations. Without an accurate citation, the credibility of your authority is harmed. A judge or opposing attorney may choose to not attempt to decipher a poorly constructed, inaccurate, or incomplete citation. Even if your citation allows the reader to find the source, if it is poorly constructed it will impact the reader’s assessment of the credibility of your work. You wouldn’t hand in a brief with coffee stains, nor should you hand in a brief with poor citations. Finally, citation is part of academic honesty. It gives credit where credit is due. Poor citation, even if unintentional, can result in a charge of plagiarism.

**When do I need to get the Bluebook?** Typically, when you take Legal Research and Legal Analysis and Writing.

**Where can I obtain a copy of the Bluebook?** You can order it from our bookstore or you can get an online version at [http://www.legalbluebook.com/](http://www.legalbluebook.com/) for a one or more year subscription.

**Where does the citation go?** You typically place the citation at the end of the sentence. Most legal writing uses in text citation, although law review articles and some classes with academic papers may use footnotes.

**What if I need to use the same citation more than once in a row in a paragraph?** You can use *Id.* to refer readers to the prior citation within the same paragraph. If it’s a different pinpoint citation, you can still use *Id.*, but add the page #: Example: *Id.* at 52.

**What if I am using a case citation where I cannot use Id. or it would be easier for the reader if I refer to the case name?** If you have already provided a full case citation, you can use a “short form” reference to the case subsequently in the document in the place of a full
citation. You can use one party name if it will be clear – example from citation below: Rosenberg or, if it would help to include the full title: Rosenberg v. Son, Inc.

Example Case Citation #1:

Rosenberg v. Son, Inc., 491 N.W.2d 71 (N.D. 1992)

Title: The first part of the citation is the title. This contains the party names. A natural person typically only has their last name in the citation. The Rosenbergs are suing as persons, so they only have their last name in the title. Son, Inc. is a corporation, so the full name can be used, subject to abbreviations listed in the Bluebook. Note the title is underlined. A title to a case will always be either underlined or italicized. Check with your professor on which they expect for the course if it’s not spelled out in the course materials.

Reporter: The next part is the location of the case. It is sometimes called the “book cite,” but by itself is not a proper citation. In this instance, 491 N.W.2d 71 stands for volume 491 of the Northwestern Reporter 2d and page 71. If you pulled volume 491 off the shelf of the Northwest Reporter 2d and looked at page 71, that would be the first page of Rosenberg. The reporter abbreviations may be found in the Bluebook.

Court Abbreviation & Year: At the right end of the citation, you will find parenthesis with the court abbreviation and year. The court abbreviation can be found in the Bluebook, but normally follows a particular pattern. The supreme court of a state will have the postal abbreviation. This case is from the North Dakota Supreme Court, so the abbreviation is N.D. If it was from the North Dakota Court of Appeals, it would be N.D. Ct. App. The date is the year of decision, not the year of filing or when it was argued. You do not need to put the court abbreviation in the parenthesis if the reporter only covers one court. An example is the U.S. reporter only covers U.S. Supreme Court cases.

Example Case Citation #2:

Castle Rock Entm't, Inc. v. Carol Publ. Group, 150 F.3d 132, 145-46 (2d Cir. 1998)

This is an example of a federal case. The abbreviation 2d Cir. stands for the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. F.3d is the reporter name – Federal Report 3d. Federal cases, with the exception of the U.S. Supreme Court, will usually have an “F” in the name of the reporter such as F. Supp. for U.S. District Court cases,
or F., F.2d, and F3d for circuit court cases. (Note the abbreviation for Entertainment in the Castle Rock case above. This is taken from the Bluebook.)

**Pinpoint citation:** Note there are additional page numbers. We must do this if we are quoting or using a close paraphrase from the cited source, or citing a particular proposition from the case. This makes it easy for the reader to look up the information, thus making your assertion that much more persuasive.

**Quotations:** On a related note, remember you MUST provide quotation marks for any materials you are taking from a source verbatim.

**Block Quotes:** If you are quoting 50 or more words from a source in a single quotation, then you do not use quotation marks; rather, you would indent the entire quote and make it single space.

**String Citations:** If you have several citations together, separate them by semicolons. The order of citations is determined by Rule 1.4.

**Pro Tip:** Don’t underline, bold, highlight, or italicize your citations except as required by the rules. For example, if you underline an entire citation, your professor cannot give you credit for properly underlining the title, as there’s no way to tell if that’s what you did.

**Example Statutory Citation #1:**

Minn. Stat. Ann. § 169.06 (West 2016)

This is a Minnesota State Statute. Minnesota uses a numbering scheme, so unless you know their scheme, it isn’t readily apparent this statute has to do with traffic law. You would look in the Bluebook for the format, though similar states will follow this pattern. The publisher is in parentheses on the right end of the citation.

**Pro Tip:** You can set up a shortcut to create the section symbol to save time. In Windows, go to Insert > Special Characters – find the section symbol and then set a shortcut key you’ll remember such as ALT+S.

**Example Statutory Citation #2:**

Cal. Veh. Code § 21453 (West 2016)

California is what they call a “code” state, which means their statutes are cited by named codes. In this case, the code is the Vehicle Code.
Example Court Rule #1:
Fed. R. Civ. P. 11
Rule 11 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure

Example Court Rule #2:
Minn. R. Crim. P. 11

Example Rules of Professional Conduct #1:
Cal. Rules of Prof'l Conduct R. 3-300

Example Rules of Professional Conduct #2:
Model Rules of Prof'l Conduct R. 1.7 (Am. Bar Ass'n 2014)

Example Secondary Source – Journal Article

Example Secondary Source – Magazine Article
Robin M. Wolpert, A Bar for Everyone, with No One Left Out, Bench & B. Minn., July 2016, at 7

Example Secondary Source – Black’s Law Dictionary
In Pari Materia, Black’s Law Dictionary (10th ed. 2014)

Example Online Source – Online Only

Bluebook citation can be challenging, but start with the basics. If your citation doesn’t look like the example at all, you’re probably on the wrong track. It will take a while to learn the rules. Use the index and the table of contents to find answers in the Bluebook.

Never assume a citation you find somewhere else is correct. Always check for yourself.