

## VII. HOW TO READ LEGAL CITATIONS

When legal writers make assertions about the law, or quote or paraphrase published sources, they must support each statement with a reference to the original material. This legal *citation* or *cite* may be to a particular court opinion, a statute, an administrative opinion, a regulation, or a secondary authority such as a treatise or a law review article. The purpose of a legal citation is the same as the purpose of a footnote in other types of writing.

As a general rule, each citation will answer an established set of questions: What? Where? When? And Who? The citation will reveal what is cited, where the reader can go to find that information, when that information came into existence, and perhaps who wrote or who was responsible for the information.

Citations to court decisions generally begin with the name of the case, which is usually in the form of PLAINTIFF V. DEFENDANT, for example SMITH V. JONES. The first number to appear will be a reference to a volume number. Following the first number is an abbreviation for a court reporter. Lists of these abbreviations and the titles for which they stand are included as appendices in many legal research texts. A good reference for abbreviations is *Bieber's Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations* (see the list of print sources below). Following the reporter abbreviation a series number may appear, such as *2d*. Many reporters are numbered up to a certain point, then begin again with volume one of a second series. Following the series number, if there is one, will be a number indicating the page on which the decision begins. A second page number may indicate a specific page reference within a particular case. Many citations will also include a parallel cite, which leads to the same case in a different set of reporters. Finally, the citation may end with the date of the decision enclosed in parentheses.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court adopted a new, slightly different citation format for Wisconsin decisions in 2000. In Wisconsin, cases are now also identified by a public domain citation that includes a sequential number assigned by the clerk of court, and a paragraph number that indicates where in the decision the cited information is located. An illustration of various case citations is given below.

For

<b>State v. Head, 2002 WI 99, 648 N.W.2d 413, 255 Wis.2d 194 (2002)</b>			
<u>case name</u>	<u>public domain cite</u>	<u>parallel cites to official reporters</u>	<u>year</u>
<b>2002 WI 99, ¶ 4</b>	Year 2002, Wisconsin Supreme Court, case 99, paragraph 4		
<b>648 N.W.2d 413</b>	volume 648, North Western Reporter Second, page 413		
<b>255 Wis.2d 194</b>	volume 255, Wisconsin Reports Second, page 194		

☞ *AALL Universal Citation Guide*, American Association of Law Libraries,  
<http://www.aallnet.org/committee/citation/ucg/index.html>.

For a thorough citation primer, see also ☞ *Introduction to Basic Legal Citation (2000-2001 ed.)*, Peter W. Martin, <http://www.law.cornell.edu/citation/citation.table.html>.

Consult the following print sources for answers to legal citation questions:

*Bieber's Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations: a Reference Guide for Attorneys, Legal Secretaries, Paralegals, and Law Students* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed). Buffalo, N.Y.: W.S. Hein, 2000.

Sample entry: **Wis. L. Rev.** Wisconsin Law Review

*Bieber's Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations Reversed: A Dictionary of Terms and Titles with Their Abbreviations*. Buffalo, N.Y. : W.S. Hein, 1994.

Sample entry: **Wisconsin Law Review** (1920 -)

Wi. L.R., Wisconsin L. Rev., Wis. L. Rev., W.L.R.

*Prince's Bieber Dictionary of Legal Citations*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Buffalo, N.Y. : W.S. Hein, 2001.

Sample entry: **Wisconsin Law Review**

Ab: Wis. L. Rev.

Ex.: Ann Althouse, *Saying What Rights Are - In and Out of Context*, 1991 Wis. L. Rev. 929.- Article Citation.

*The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation*. 17<sup>th</sup> Ed. Cambridge : Harvard Law Review Association, 1991 –

This definitive guide to American citation of legal authorities includes several useful features that make it easier to use. The detailed index at the back of the book contains a thorough listing of topics and sources that refer the user to specific pages. The tables near the back of the book list the sources for the cases, statutes, and administrative law of every state in the United States and of the federal government. Basic principles of legal citation are explained in an introductory section, and there is a practitioner's section on general standards of citation and style to be used in legal composition.

*Wisconsin Guide to Citation*. 5th ed. Madison, Wis. : State Bar of Wisconsin CLE Books,

2001.

This guide is a complement to *The BlueBook*; it provides detailed instructions for citing to all Wisconsin authorities. The guide also includes examples of the public domain citations used when citing Wisconsin appellate court opinions.

*The ALWD Citation Manual: A Professional System of Citation*. Association of Legal Writing Directors. Gaithersburg [Md.] : Aspen Law and Business, c2000.

A guide to legal citation created by the Association of Legal Writing Directors in response to charges that *The Bluebook* (see above) is too difficult to understand and follow. The ALWD manual offers a simple, logical approach to legal citation.