

## Don't Overlook the Legal Style Manual

"A lawyer's time and advice are his (her) stock in trade." —Abraham Lincoln

Nearly every catalog that sells lawyer merchandise offers a plaque or print of that quotation from our 16th president.

What Abe failed to mention, however, is that in today's legal practice, much of the lawyer's time is spent putting that advice in writing.

To make good use of that time and produce effective legal documents, consider adding a legal style manual to your writer's library. These books are dedicated primarily to enhancing the clarity, conciseness, precision and effectiveness of legal writing. They give accurate answers to a range of legal writing questions—from those about basic punctuation to more sophisticated matters such as techniques for eloquent writing.

The style manual that will be most useful to you is a matter of personal preference. Though there are many good manuals that can meet the needs of most writers, consider one of these for your desk.

### ***Plain English for Lawyers* by Richard C. Wydick Carolina Academic Press, 4th ed. 1998, \$14**

This bare-bones style manual focuses on core legal writing techniques that can make the biggest improvement in the clarity of your writing. Written, not surprisingly, in a straightforward manner, this manual is a quick read; in about an hour you can "brush up" on forgotten techniques such as how to spot and omit surplus words, avoid confusing language quirks, structure sentences for better readability, and punctuate properly and carefully. If you like extra practice or examples, *Plain English* is full of exercises with answer keys. Partnered with a good grammar guide, *Plain English* is an excellent desk reference for clear and concise writing.

### ***Legal Writing: Form and Function* by Jane N. Richmond NITA, 2002, \$59.95**

Drawing on her 20-plus years as Director of the Writing Program in an international law firm, Richmond has put together a practical style manual that deals with typical style issues that lawyers face. *Legal Writing* covers the basics such as sentence structure, awkwardness and verbosity, and it dedicates space to discussing less-often addressed matters such as persuasive writing techniques and "writing with flair" (e.g., keys for using literary and historical references in legal writing). *Legal Writing* includes a great section on the writing process. This manual is sensible in its advice, has a detailed table of contents and index, and is full of examples of good and bad style. Although a bit pricey, *Legal Writing* is a useful writing resource for both new and more experienced lawyers.

### ***The Redbook: A Manual on Legal Style* by Bryan A. Garner West, 2002, \$29.95**

For those looking for a comprehensive desk reference on the mechanics of legal writing, this is the manual for you. Not only does *The Redbook* thoroughly and crisply cover punctuation and grammar rules, it includes sections on capitalization, num-


bers, typographic symbols, spelling, citation and footnotes. It discusses "legalese" and other troublesome words and provides a thorough list of "plain English" substitutes for "stuffy words," a detailed glossary of often misused words and an alphabetical list of correct prepositional pairings (conform to? conform with?). Particularly good for the new lawyer, *The Redbook* gives significant attention to properly using citations, instructions on editing and proofreading and examples of commonly written documents, such as demand letters, pleadings, motions, briefs and contracts. Experienced writers will find its index and attention to detail a plus.

### ***Just Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Style for the Legal Writer***

**by Anne Enquist and  
Laurel Currie Oates**

**Aspen Law and Business, 2001, \$39.95**

As experienced legal writing professors, Enquist and Oates take a textbook approach to style matters. *Just Writing* gives detailed guidance on organizational techniques that can improve understandability, such as how to organize and connect sentences and paragraphs effectively. The book debunks legal writing myths (e.g., never start a sentence with "and") and has a chapter devoted to the common features of eloquent writing. And *Just Writing* includes a 43-page guide to legal writing for English-as-a-Second-Language writers. It is a solid style manual with great examples. Litigators also may wish to get its companion text, *Just Briefs* (\$38.95), which covers in detail how to write trial and appellate briefs and has a section that covers the basics of oral advocacy.

Nothing takes the place of sound legal analysis. But legal style manuals like these can improve the quality of that analysis by helping you express it more effectively. 

1. The *Oxford Dictionary of American Legal Quotations* includes this quotation but notes, "A study of Lincoln's accredited writings fails to produce this aphorism. [It] apparently came to life in a plaque produced by the Allen Smith Company in Indianapolis."

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