



New Blue: Key Changes to *The Bluebook*

The compilers of *The Bluebook* issue a new edition like clockwork every five years.¹ The Nineteenth Edition debuted in 2010, so a bouncing baby blue² Twentieth Edition entered our world in the summer of 2015. With each edition come changes—good or bad,³ big or small—and this occasion is no different. Many of the revisions will have little day-to-day impact on the citation practices of the average practitioner, but the compilers made a few tweaks that may interest you.

Revised Practitioners' Notes

In the promotional materials for the text, the compilers tout “considerably overhauled” Bluepages. The Bluepages, added in the Eighteenth Edition in 2000, are the starting point for practitioners in *The Bluebook* and set forth the rules for non-academic citation. (The vast majority of *The Bluebook*—the Whitepages—sets forth the rules for academic citation.) The rule numbering in the Bluepages now tracks that of the rules in the Whitepages; for example, rule 4 in the Whitepages addresses short citation forms, so rule B4 in the Bluepages addresses the same topic. In fact, the Bluepages now provide a corresponding practitioner’s rule for every major Whitepages rule, which somewhat diminishes the need to flip back and forth between the Bluepages and Whitepages to compose a citation.

Changes to Case Citation

In past editions, the Bluepages preferred underlining, rather than italicizing, case names. Although the current edition nods to the “tradition” of underscoring case names, Rule B2 now lists italics as the first option, with the underscoring option relegated to a parenthetical.

In general, citation rules dictate the briefest citations feasible. Your case names will become even briefer with amended Rule 10.2.1(f), which now requires omitting all geographical designations that follow a comma.

The compilers also made a few sneaky changes to the designated abbreviations for words in case names. “Advertising” is now “Advert.” instead of “Adver.,” for example, and “County” is now “Cty.” instead of “Cnty.”⁴ They also added some abbreviations, such as “Dig.” for “Digital” and “Comput.” for “Computer.”⁵


Changes to Statute Citation

The biggest change to statute citation relates to typeface. For years, new attorneys who had cut their citation teeth on law review crafted incorrect citations for practice by using small and large caps, which *Bluebook* prescribed for academic citation but prohibited for practice citation. That prohibition, which seems to date to the days when only academic publications had access to the type of formatting we all now take for granted in this age of omnipresent word-processing tools, no longer makes sense. So *Bluebook* now permits—but does not require—practitioners to use large and small caps “for stylistic purposes.” This suggests that where the Whitepages require the use of small and large caps for a citation, as is the case for many statutes and secondary sources, the Bluepages now permit it. Thus, for example, one may cite to the Arizona Revised Statutes either as Ariz. Rev. Stat. or as ARIZ. REV. STAT.⁶ Either

form is now correct. Choose one option, and be consistent.

Changes to Citations for Internet Sources

Bluebook’s editors have liberalized and clarified the rules for citing to Internet sources. Check updated Rule 18: It now provides additional guidance on citing to social-media posts, items on blogs hosted on a broader website, and items that are available both in print and online.

Overall, the changes in the new edition are far from earth-shattering, and many of them—changes to abbreviations of legal sources from foreign jurisdictions or changes to how you construct the abbreviated name for a law review,⁷ for example—will rarely affect the average practitioner. 

endnotes

1. Or at least they have since the twelfth edition in 1976.
2. Actually, it’s more of a royal blue. Aside from a brief flirtation with white, the editors haven’t significantly changed the cover color since the 1930s, when they changed it from a greenish brown to a more “patriotic” blue to avoid unfortunate comparisons to Hitler’s Brownshirts. I do not lie. See A. Darby Dickerson, *An Un-Uniform System of Citation: Surviving with the New Bluebook*, 26 STETSON L. REV. 53, 58-60 (1996).
3. Get me started on the Sixteenth Edition sometime. Seriously. It will be fun.
4. I can guess why they made that change.
5. See the tables in the back of the Bluebook, especially T.6, for more examples. This seems a transparent tactic to undermine *Bluebook*’s chief competitor, *The ALWD Guide*, which is much easier to use and—until this change—generated citations identical to *Bluebook*’s.
6. When writing to an Arizona state court, you also may follow the suggestion of the Arizona Revised Statutes themselves and cite to them as “A.R.S.” *The Bluebook*’s rules are designed to apply uniformly in courts across the nation. Because you would not want a federal district court in another state to think that you were citing the Arkansas Revised Statutes instead of the Arizona Revised Statutes, *Bluebook* prescribes the longer, clearer abbreviation.
7. For more on this, see amended Table 13.





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