# H(App)y Holidays: Apps for Legal Writers

**Last year at this time,** I recommended some books and podcasts for people seeking to improve their legal writing. This year, my gift to you is this list of intriguing apps for legal writers. Although no book, podcast, or app will single-handedly make you a better legal writer, some of these tools can remind you of best practices, serve as references, or just make the life of a busy lawyer a little bit easier. Any of these apps makes a worthy addition to your virtual bookshelf.

## Legal-Writing Apps

Kathleen Vinson, a legal-writing professor at Suffolk University Law School in Boston, has created **iWrite Legal**, an app designed to help you improve your legal-writing skills. It includes legal-writing checklists and advice, as well as links to Internet resources from Suffolk's Legal Skills program (like the program's Twitter feed, YouTube videos, and podcasts). Each tip loads on a single screen, and Vinson provides short paragraphs of advice on a variety of topics, from cutting surplus words to beating writer's block to incorporating themes into your persuasive legal writing.

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The Legal Writing Checklists cover all stages of writing, from initial brainstorming to revision and proofreading. They cue you to consider, for example, the purpose of your document, whether you've clearly asked for the specific relief you seek, or whether you've scanned your work for unjustifiable passive voice. You check off each task with a touch of your finger as you complete it. Critics complain the design could be more user-friendly, but the content is top-notch. The good: You can download iWrite Legal on iTunes for free. The bad: It's only for the iPod Touch, iPhone, or iPad.

## General Writing Apps

If you overuse adverbs, complex sentences, jargon, or the passive voice, the arrestingly titled **Hemingway** can help. Hemingway uses different-colored highlighting to flag common barriers to effective writing. Adverbs are highlighted in blue, passive voice in green, and complex words or phrases in purple. Sentences marked in yellow are hard to read; sentences marked in red are very hard to read. The mere fact that Hemingway highlights a word, phrase, or sentence doesn't mean that you should change it without considering the matter further; but the highlighting function can supplement your revision checklist and help you make your writing more readable.

I think the focused scope makes Hemingway more useful than the grammar-check function on your word-processing program, but, like many grammar and style apps, it has its limitations, and it works best when the user exercises independent judgment. Hemingway is now available as both a web app and a desktop app (for both Windows and Mac) at www.hemingwayapp.com.

**Phraseology** does something similar for iPad users. Its "Inspect" feature highlights readability issues as well as potential spelling and grammar errors. It's available for $2.99 on iTunes.

## Citation Apps

The **Rulebook** app for iPad and iPhone may make our old nemesis *The Bluebook* as user-friendly as it's ever going to be. Rulebook itself is a free app; *Bluebook* is a $39.99 in-app purchase. The app includes the entire text of *The Bluebook*, including the practitioner-focused Bluepages, the rules in the Whitepages, and all the tables. Although the Bluepages and Whitepages allow you to search text, the tables do not; you cannot use the search function to see how to abbreviate "engineering" in a case name, for example, or to see whether there's a space between "F." and "Supp." But you can bookmark tables that you use frequently for quick reference.

Hyperlinks make the app even more useful; when one *Bluebook* rule refers to another, the first rule hyperlinks to the other. The searchable index also hyperlinks to relevant sections of the text. If you're starting to need reading glasses (as I am), you can even increase the size of the font. When *The Bluebook*'s editors release a new edition in 2015, you will need to pay for the update, but all of your bookmarks and other notations will transfer to the new text; no word yet on whether the update will cost as much as the original download. I prefer the clearer *ALWD Guide* (now in a new edition that generates *Bluebook*-identical citations!) to *The Bluebook* in its hard-copy form, but the hyperlinks and searchable text in the app version make the Rulebook *Bluebook* more tempting.

No app or book will make you a better writer or lawyer, but carrying a library of references on your tablet or smartphone makes it easier to draft and cite-check more reliably at home or on the road. AZ

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