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Lawmanac-Another Tool for the Shed or Your Computer Desktop

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THE SCRIVENER: MODERN LEGAL WRITING

Lawmanac—Another Tool for the Shed or Your Computer Desktop

by K.K. DuVivier

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Next to my kitchen sink hangs a set of shears. Not only do I use these shears for snipping vegetables or cutting slices of pizza, but they also come in handy for trimming a loose thread off a jacket or clipping a flower in the garden. These shears cannot replace a chainsaw for heavy cutting jobs, but they are a convenient and a frequently used tool.

Last year, I introduced readers of this column to one of the new power tools for legal writing: *The Redbook, A Manual of Legal Style*.¹ *The Redbook*² attempts to be as comprehensive about legal style as *The Bluebook*³ is comprehensive about legal citation. It contains approximately 300 pages of advice on mechanics and grammar and another 100 pages of sample legal documents.

“Clickable Help” from Lawmanac

This column addresses another recently released tool to help legal writers: *Lawmanac*.⁴ *Lawmanac* is not a book; it is software you load onto your computer hard drive to provide “clickable help for legal writers.”⁵ *Lawmanac* includes seven types of “clickable help”: (1) a 4,700-word legal dictionary; (2) a list of 2,800 abbreviations of legal sources, with website links; (3) tables for state and federal authorities, with website links; (4) advice on punctuation, capitalization, and typeface conventions; (5) a twenty-lesson course for learning and perfecting legal citation style and form; (6) lists of examples illustrating proper punctuation and form for citations; and (7) full-text versions of six of the most-used federal sources: the U.S. Constitution, the federal rules of evidence, civil and criminal rules of procedure, and appellate and bankruptcy practice rules.

Jurisdictional Tables Feature

The “State & Federal Tables” feature may be one of the most useful for practitioners. Much like the jurisdictional tables in

section T.1 of *The Bluebook*,⁶ these *Lawmanac* pages list legal authorities by jurisdiction. However, when I compared the *Lawmanac* page for Colorado with the comparable page of *The Bluebook*,⁷ I found the *Lawmanac* page much more informative. First, *Lawmanac* explains the reporter abbreviations and court parenthetical information, showing both *The Bluebook* and *ALWD Citation Manual*⁸ form. Second, *Lawmanac* explicitly shows the dates of coverage and which reporters are official and which are unofficial. Finally, and best of all, *Lawmanac* includes links to free websites that contain: (1) reports of many state appellate court decisions; (2) full-text copies of the Colorado statutes, with annotations; (3) Colorado Rules of Court; (4) Colorado Session Laws; and (5) the Colorado Code of Regulations.

Grammar Help Feature

Next, the *Lawmanac* section on “Punctuation—Capitalization—Typeface” is helpful in answering bothersome mechanical questions with just a few mouse clicks. I checked *Lawmanac* for answers to questions I addressed in recent columns relating to punctuation and capitalization.⁹ Not only did I find the index a quick way to get to the answers, but in some instances, I found the *Lawmanac* explanations more helpful than those in *The Redbook*. For example, *The Redbook* states, on its own authority, that writers should cut out a final comma in a date that is used as an adjective.¹⁰ *The Redbook* acknowledges that other style guides call for this “otherwise-mandatory comma,” but it cites no alternative authorities and presents its position as the rule, simply stating that this comma interrupts the flow

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT LEGAL WRITING?

K.K. DuVivier will be happy to address them through the *Scrivener* column. Send your questions to: kkduvivier@law.du.edu or call her at (303) 871-6281.



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of a sentence.¹¹ In contrast, *Lawmanac* explains how various authorities have addressed this unwritten rule and notes that *The Redbook's* position on the elimination of this comma is not consistent with other authorities. Then, to illustrate its point, *Lawmanac* quotes the following example from the front page of the March 5, 2003, edition of *The Washington Post*:

"One of the men captured . . . served as paymaster to the September 11, 2001, terrorists. . . ."¹²

Other Lawmanac Features

The remaining features of *Lawmanac* also are handy. Although *The Bluebook* lists abbreviations in Tables T.5 through T.16,¹³ *Lawmanac* more conveniently lists all abbreviations in one table. Furthermore, the *Lawmanac* abbreviation table also provides links to law review and court sites, which makes finding materials or contacting the courts more convenient. The *Lawmanac* dictionary is useful because it "seek[s] to inform, not to be quoted,"¹⁴ and the definitions are set out in straightforward, informal language. The legal citation exercises and examples make it easy to specifically see how to cite the most commonly used authorities. Finally, although the full-text versions of federal authorities can be found in other sources, it is helpful to have them all together on the desktop of your computer.

Conclusion

Lawmanac addresses some of the most common questions encountered on a daily basis by legal writers. It is a handy, fre-

quent-use tool. You might want to have it hanging next to your kitchen sink, or on your computer desktop.

NOTES

1. DuVivier, "You Can Judge a Book by its Cover: *The Redbook*," 31 *The Colorado Lawyer* 51 (Sept. 2002).
2. Garner, *The Redbook, A Manual on Legal Style* (Eagan, MN: West Group, 2002).
3. The Harvard Law Review Association, *The Bluebook, A Uniform System of Citation*, 17th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Gannett House, 2000).
4. *Lawmanac* is the trademark for the original text, computer coding, and computer files copyrighted in 2003 by Grammar.com. For downloading free sample files or for information on licenses, visit <http://www.Grammar.com>.
5. "Clickable Help for Legal Writers" also bears the Grammar.com trademark symbol.
6. *The Bluebook*, *supra*, note 3 at 164-228.
7. *Id.* at 175-76.
8. Association of Legal Writing Directors and Darby Dickerson, *ALWD Citation Manual* (New York, NY: Aspen L. & Bus., 2000).
9. DuVivier, "Questions from Readers: Redbook Responses—Part I," 31 *The Colorado Lawyer* 53 (Nov. 2002); DuVivier, "Questions from Readers: Redbook Responses—Part II," 31 *The Colorado Lawyer* 53 (Jan. 2003).
10. *The Redbook*, *supra*, note 2 at § 10.36(a).
11. *Id.*
12. Dictionary Section, *Lawmanac*, Grammar.com.
13. *The Bluebook*, *supra*, note 3 at 284-325.
14. *Lawmanac*, *supra*, note 4 at Punctuation Section, subsection on Commas, Dates, Month-Day-Year, Inevitable Disagreement. ■

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