



Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we are talking about bluebooking as part of our “Quick Tips” series. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that’s me. We’re here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so you’ll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We’re the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [The Girl’s Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don’t hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolBox.com, and we’d love to hear from you. And with that, let’s get started.

Lee Burgess: Welcome back! Bluebooking is something you probably either love or hate. Today we’re going to talk about why it’s important, and what steps you can take to make it a bit less painful. Our Bluebook references in this episode pertain to the 21st edition, which is currently the most recent version.

Lee Burgess: So, what is bluebooking and why does it matter? The Bluebook is a book of rules for how to cite cases and other legal authorities. After law school, the cites you put into a brief that gets filed with a court need to be correct. Why? Because citations are how the judge and opposing counsel find the authorities you’re referencing. If your citations are incorrect, it can be very frustrating for those reading your brief – whether that is your boss or opposing counsel. Plus, sloppy cites look unprofessional and can put you on a judge’s bad side, which is obviously not a place you want to be.

Lee Burgess: What about in law school, though? Bluebooking has probably come up in your [Legal Writing](#) class – although some Legal Writing professors use other citation manuals, such as [ALWD](#), instead. Since the Bluebook is much more common in law school, and definitely the go-to source for practicing attorneys, we are going to focus today’s episode on that. So, all the rules I’m about to reference are to the actual Bluebook, but the general advice in this episode applies to any citation manual.

Lee Burgess: The other area in law school where the Bluebook comes in handy is Law Review, or any other journal you may elect to be part of. The technical accuracy of published articles is similarly important, because journal articles and comments are often cited in academic work, and even in judge’s opinions, which means the people reading need to know where to find your references.

Lee Burgess: So, how do you bluebook? What does that even mean? Well, generally, you have some basic formats that you always follow when you reference common sources like cases and statutes. There are also particular rules to follow when



citing other sources, such as websites, journal articles, or even the Constitution. Basically, if you can imagine it, there's a Bluebook rule for how to cite it.

Lee Burgess: To make sense of all those rules, you should first orient yourself to the Bluebook and how it is laid out. You will see things like "Rules" versus "Blue Pages" versus "White Pages" versus "Tables". They all serve a different purpose. Make sure you have a general idea of how the Bluebook is set up, and it will be easier to find what you need later.

Lee Burgess: Now, let's get to five tips that will help you bluebook like a pro:

Lee Burgess: First, you've heard me say it before on our blog, but you should definitely tab your Bluebook. That means exactly what it sounds like: You take sticky paper or plastic tabs and put them on the most important pages of your citation manual, so you can find them later. Tab the pages you will keep coming back to. For example, you may want to put a tab on the page that tells you how to cite the most common types of cases – you can find those under Rule 10. Go ahead and put another tab on statutes – which you can find under Rule 12. Then, a third on the table of abbreviations that you will need to check for almost every single case name you write. You can find those abbreviations in Table 6 or "T6" under "Case Names and Institutional Authors". You may also want to tab the section that tells you how to format quotations – you can find that in Rule 5. Furthermore, since citations are notoriously easy to lose points on in Legal Writing classes, pay very close attention to any cites your professor mentions either in class or on take-home assignments. You will often see similar citations called for on graded midterm and final exams. If your professor ever refers to some type of citation that you've never heard of, and you can't figure out how to format something like that using your Bluebook, go ask in office hours – then be sure to mark or tab that page. Often the cites called for on exams are not new; they come directly from things you've seen before in class. So, you want to make sure you know how to handle those before you're under exam conditions and no longer allowed to ask for advice.

Lee Burgess: Second, you should be aware that an [online version of the Bluebook](#) exists. You can pay for access to log in and search the same exact Bluebook in an electronic format. If you have a hardcopy Bluebook, you probably don't even need the online version since the information is exactly the same. I mention this only because an online subscription can be very useful if you're editing for a journal. Why? Because you will see cites to source types you've never seen before, and it can be much faster to search the Bluebook using the Search bar, rather than flipping through pages. If you're considering a position on the Law Review board, for example, like Tech Editor, or if you're taking on a journal position that requires editing lots and lots of citations, an online Bluebook may be a good



option for you. Keep in mind though, if what you're working on is a school-sponsored journal, such as the Law Review, the library or even the journal itself probably has a login you can use without having to pay for your own subscription, so ask about that.

Lee Burgess: Third, be careful with editions. Your professor will tell you which edition of the Bluebook to use for your class, so make sure you're not using something different, since that can affect the accuracy of your citations on your exams and in-class work. Not a lot has changed over the years, but as we'll discuss in a minute, even the tiniest details can make a difference. So, don't lose points because you bought the wrong book.

Lee Burgess: Fourth, try making a citation cheat sheet. If you're doing a graded Legal Writing assignment for class, or writing onto the Law Review, the technical accuracy of your citations matters. So, consider finding all cites you're planning to use – an easy job if it's a closed universe assignment – then paste those citations into a blank Word document. Bluebook those cites, then check them again. Then check them one more time.

Lee Burgess: Bluebook a "long cite" and a "short cite" version for each case and statute. Not sure what a "short cite" is? Look it up – you will need that for both cases and statutes. Also, format your "Id." cites – you can find those in Rule 4.1. If you're not sure what an "Id." cite is, look that up as well, because you'll probably use it a lot. Format your "introductory signal" cites – those are things like "see e.g." or "see also", and you can find those under Rule 1.2.

Lee Burgess: Why should you do all this extra work? Basically, your risk of error will go down if you're just copying and pasting your cites from the same document you've already triple-checked for accuracy. So, instead of losing points on some small one-off typographical error, like accidentally italicizing the comma after a case name, you will just paste in the perfect cite you already have, and know that it's already 100% correct.

Lee Burgess: Fifth, try blowing up your screen. As you've learned by now, even the smallest details can affect the accuracy of your citations, so you want to make sure you can see everything clearly. If you zoom in at about 200%, you can very clearly tell if something is italicized when it shouldn't be. And, you can see details, like the font of question marks. Side note: I bet you never thought you'd care whether the font of just one quotation mark looked slightly different! Well, did you know that when you paste a quote with a citation from Westlaw or Lexis into Word, the font can actually change just slightly for some parts of the pasted text?



Lee Burgess: If you've pasted a quote from somewhere else, check out your quotation marks and make sure they're in the exact same font as the rest of your text. Think Times New Roman as opposed to just regular Times. Here's an example: Imagine the kind of single quotation mark you see sometimes that looks like the "prime symbol" in math – in other words, a straight little line as compared to a more curly-looking quote mark you're probably used to seeing. Getting this curly versus straight thing wrong can actually cost you a point on a Legal Writing exam. I know, it sounds crazy! But I've seen students lose points for missing this level of detail. While you're at it, double-check the font and text size of the page number in the footer of the document you're turning in. Did you know Word doesn't always change it to match your body text? You can also lose a point for that!

Lee Burgess: Suffice to say: Details matter when it comes to legal citations. Hopefully with these tips, you can make the Bluebook a friend rather than an enemy.

Lee Burgess: And with that, we're out of time! If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolBox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

RESOURCES:

[The Bluebook Online](#)

[ALWD Guide to Legal Citation](#)

[Podcast Episode 11: Legal Writing 101](#)

[Podcast Episode 170: Let's Talk About the Bluebook!](#)

[Podcast Episode 304: Introduction to the Bluebook](#)

[Podcast Episode 374: How To Be a Great Law Journal Member](#)

[Bluebook 101 – Tips on Efficiently Navigating the Bluebook](#)

[Buying the Bluebook: Spiral-Bound or Online?](#)

[How to Get Answers from the Bluebook](#)

[Bluebook Oddities: 10 Unlikely Citations](#)