



Writing Matters

By Robert S. Pearson

As a lawyer, your time is precious. You must decide which aspects of your practice deserve your time and attention. If you're already overworked, you might think that you don't have time to pay attention to the details of your writing – details like organization, headings, word choice, syntax, style, document design, typography, citations, gendered language, tone, punctuation, issue-framing, split infinitives, syllogistic structure, and usage (e.g., can I begin a sentence with *But* or *And*?). But neglecting the quality of your writing, even in a time crunch, is a mistake. And here are three reasons why paying closer attention to your writing – or learning to write well for the first time – is worthwhile.

You'll be a better advocate. Your effectiveness as an advocate depends largely on your ability to persuade. And your persuasiveness as a writer depends on how well you preserve your two most valuable resources: (1) your readers' attention, and (2) your own credibility. A statement of facts, for example, that's littered with stuffy legalese, irrelevant dates, or unnecessarily defined terms is difficult for any reader to compre-

hend. Not only will your readers' attention wane as they sort the clutter, but they'll also resent you for having to work harder than necessary to understand your point. Similarly, an argument section that misstates the law, has sloppy citations and typos, or uses adverbs like *clearly* or *obviously* detracts from the writer's credibility. Readers – especially judicial ones – think, "If this lawyer can't get the citations right, how can I rely on what the lawyer says in the rest of the brief?" Or, "If this case is so obvious and clear, why am I being asked to decide it?" Attentive writing avoids these pitfalls.

You can get the jobs you want. Learning to write well has tangible benefits too. Law firms value writing ability more than just about any other skill. So if you can write – and I mean really write – doors will open for you that otherwise remain closed to mediocre writers. As a writing standout, you'll be better situated to get (and keep) the jobs you want. And you'll be more likely to get promoted within your current job.

You'll look cool. I know I'm appealing to

your vanity here, but consider this: your writing exposes you. Every time you write something, your reader is sizing you up as a thinker and as a lawyer. If you write well, you will look cool in two ways. First, because clear writing reflects clear thinking, your writing will show that what's at work in you is a clear, analytical mind (and yes, this makes you look cool as a lawyer; we lawyers use a different standard of coolness). Second, good writing exudes professionalism. Write well, and others will think of you as a true professional – someone who is careful, mature, and dedicated.

Writing takes effort. But if you do it well, you will be – with all your persuasiveness, career opportunities, and lawyer coolness – a source of good in the world!

About the author: Robert S. Pearson is an associate with Harlow Spanier & Heckeles, PLLC, and a self-proclaimed Bryan A. Garner disciple. Robert practices primarily in civil and commercial litigation, and he also consults on trial and appellate court brief-writing. Robert can be reached at rsp@reallawtucson.com.



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