Succinct Review of The Blue Book: A Uniform System of Citation

The purpose of citation is to give attribution to the author of material used in written documents, to give readers all the information necessary to locate the source of the idea for which the citation is provided, and to give readers the information they need to evaluate the weight of the cited source to determine how binding or persuasive the legal information is. Every idea must be attributed to the proper source whether one uses the direct words or paraphrases the information.

The 19th edition of the Blue Book is the latest. It is divided into three sections:

**Blue pages** - printed on light blue paper. This is the “how-to-cite” guide for basic legal citation requirements.

**White Pages** - printed on white paper. These pages are divided into two sections: Rules 1 - 9, dealing with general standards of citation and style, and Rules 10 - 21, dealing with citation rules for specific types of authorities.

**Tables** - printed on white paper with a blue border. The tables show citation formats for domestic and international laws, legal abbreviations, inter alia.

On the inside of the front cover is a reference on citation for general law review footnotes. On the inside of the back cover is a reference for court documents and legal memoranda. On the back cover is a comprehensive Index.

**Basic case citation format**


E.g., **Thomas v. Jones, 452 Mass. 351 (2009).**
- Name of the case, underlined or italicized, followed by a comma. Comma is not underlined or italicized.
- Volume number of the published source of the case.
- The published source of the case; official listed first, unofficial listed next.
- The page number on which the case begins in the published source; a pinpoint cite if appropriate.
- A parenthetical with the year the source was decided followed by a period (if in its own cite sentence).
- With multiple parties, only the first party on each side is cited.
- Name/Party abbreviations are found in Tables at the end of the Blue Book.

**Parallel Citations**

Unless there is a jurisdictional preference to the contrary, documents that are submitted to state courts generally contain parallel citations. That is, cases contained therein are cited to both the state’s official and unofficial regional reporters, with the state citation appearing first.

E.g., **Thomas v. Jones, 452 Mass. 351, 644 N.E.2d 233 (2009).**

Documents submitted to a federal court cite to the regional reporter with the state of origin in the parenthetical.

E.g., **Thomas v. Jones, 644 N.E.2d 233 (Mass. 2009).**

**Short Citations (Cases)**

**Full cite:** Gagnon v. Adamson, 264 P.2d 31, 33 (Cal. 1953).

**Acceptable short cites:**
- Gagnon, 264 P.2d at 33.
- Adamson, 264 P.2d at 33.
- 264 P.2d at 33.
- **Id.** (provided no other source is between the full and short cite). When using Id, the period is also italicized or underlined.
In short citation formats that include a state, the United States, a governmental agency, or branch of the government as a party, use the name of the private party, not the governmental name.


Acceptable short cite:  *Roach*, 772 A.2d at 400.

In using a short form with a case that has a parallel citation, the first page the case appears on in each reporter and the court and date parenthetical are dropped, but included is the relevant page information for each reporter preceded by the word, “at.”


Acceptable short cite:  *Roach*, 167 N.J. at 600, 772 A.2d at 400.

Note: In official and unofficial reporters, if the cited source is abbreviated with single letters, there is no space between them.


**Citing to the Internet, Electronic Media, and Other Nonprint Resources**

Blue Book Rule 18 covers citation of information found on the Internet, widely used commercial databases, CD-ROMs, microforms, films, broadcasts, and noncommercial video-tapes, and audio recordings.

**Commercial Electronic Databases**  18.3 - Because of the reliability and authoritativeness of LEXIS, Westlaw and other similar databases, cite such sources, if available, in preference to the other sources covered by rule 18.

When a case is unreported but available on a widely used electronic database, it may be cited to that database. Provide the case name, docket number, database identifier, court name, and full date of the most recent major disposition of the case. If the database contains codes or numbers that uniquely identify the case (as LEXIS and Westlaw do), these must be given. Screen or page numbers, if assigned, should be preceded by an asterisk; paragraph numbers, if assigned, should be preceded by a paragraph symbol:


Citations to cases that have not been assigned unique database identifiers should include all relevant information, such as the specific collection within the database in which the case can be found:


**Short Cites (Commercial electronic databases)**


