

BLACK, BLUE, AND RED: A REVIEW OF *THE REDBOOK*: A MANUAL ON LEGAL STYLE

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A lawyer's trade is centered on effective writing.² The lawyer should be equipped with the tools to convey his messages directly, efficiently, and clearly. Therefore, the need arises for lawyers to have a manual to inform and structure their writing to adequately meet these goals. Chief among these manuals has been the *Texas Law Review: Manual on Usage & Style*, commonly referred to as the "*Texas Style Manual*." The *Texas Style Manual* provides a concise, but thorough, overview of common grammatical, punctuation, and spelling problems from which we all suffer. However, *The Redbook: A Manual on Legal Style*³ ("*The Redbook*") provides a more comprehensive, organized, and detailed guide to provide the necessary instruction for practitioners to produce the best possible legal writing.

The Redbook is written by Bryan A. Garner,⁴ who is also the Editor in Chief of *Black's Law Dictionary*, and as he indicates in the Introduction, he sought to create an "exhaustive guide" to instruct and guide legal writing.⁵ He has done so successfully, providing a manual that every lawyer should have within reach, right next to his copy of *The Bluebook*, which, judging by the title, was just Mr. Garner's intention. *The Redbook* is arranged into three broad parts, from the most fundamental to the most general: "Mechanics," "Grammar and Usage," and "Preparing Legal Documents." *The Redbook* further breaks down these three broad parts into individually focused categories. For instance, within "Mechanics," the writers have placed "Punctuation"; "Capitalization"; "Italics, Boldface, and Underlining"; "Document Design";

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² See generally Debra R. Cohen, *Competent Legal Writing—A Lawyer's Professional Responsibility*, 67 U. CIN. L. REV. 491 (1999).

³ BRYAN A. GARNER, JEFF NEWMAN, & TIGER JACKSON, *THE REDBOOK: A MANUAL ON LEGAL STYLE* (West 2002).

⁴ Garner, a graduate of the University of Texas School of Law, has written extensively on the subject of legal writing, including *THE ELEMENTS OF LEGAL STYLE* and *A DICTIONARY OF MODERN LEGAL USAGE*. See *About Bryan A. Garner*, at http://www.lawprose.org/about_bryan_a.htm.

⁵ GARNER, *supra* note 3, at *ix*.

“Numbers”; “Typographic Symbols”; “Spelling”; “Citations”; and “Footnotes.” Formatted and arranged similarly to *The Bluebook*, each individually focused section provides boldfaced general rules followed by explanations of how the rule should be applied and examples of the rule in use. The expanded explanations represent an improvement over the *Texas Style Manual*, which is far more succinct in format, insofar as *The Redbook’s* explanations allow the user to know why certain punctuation or stylistic rules are more applicable to a given situation than others.

Also improving on the *Texas Style Manual*, *The Redbook* has an expansive review of grammar, providing guidance on the usage of all major structural elements of sentences. For example, *The Redbook* defines “adjective” and explains what an adjective is and how it is used in a sentence. Then, *The Redbook* explains how an adjective should be used in relation to other elements of a sentence and provides remedies for common problems in the usage of adjectives. In an attempt to remedy the use of “pompous”⁶ legal terms, *The Redbook* contains a comprehensive list of suspect terms and provides suggestions for alternate words or phrases, thus furthering the ideal of plain, clear use of language. Also promoting clear and correct use of language, *The Redbook* provides a list of troublesome words, identifying those words most likely to be misused and giving advice on how to correctly use them. As opposed to the *Texas Style Manual’s* brief coverage of misused words and word choice, *The Redbook* is far more thorough both in its identification of grammatical faults and suggested remedies.

In a section not even touched by the *Texas Style Manual*, *The Redbook* has an entire part dedicated to “Preparing Legal Documents.” In an effort to show how to apply the rest of the manual, the authors have provided general rules for drafting legal memoranda and court documents and examples of well-drafted documents, including letters, memoranda, pleadings, motions, briefs, and contracts. The general rules inform the reader of the goals and target audience of each type of writing, and the writers have provided examples of pitfalls to avoid when drafting each type of writing, allowing readers to develop their document in anticipation of common mistakes.

Additionally, the authors have provide cues to follow in logically structuring each kind of document, including headings and organizational techniques to best convey the message in the document. By including legal writing samples, *The Redbook* effectively pulls together the rules contained within it and provides concrete examples to inform its target audience, lawyers, on how the rules are best applied. Finally, drawing on a strength of *The Bluebook*, *The Redbook* contains both a Word

⁶ *Id.* at 157.

Index and a comprehensive General Index, allowing readers to quickly and efficiently find the rule sought without searching the entire manual.

Through logical organization, explanations, and examples, *The Redbook* has effectively catalogued the grammatical and stylistic rules necessary for strong legal writing. By filling the profession's need for a comprehensive legal writing manual, *The Redbook* should be regarded as a fundamental informational tool for any well-informed lawyer. *The Redbook* has therefore expanded the lawyer's color palate by taking its place alongside *Black's Law Dictionary* and *The Bluebook*.