THE GUIDEBOOK

Citation, Style, and Usage at the Supreme Court of North Carolina

SECOND EDITION
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ABOUT THE GUIDEBOOK

Edition
This is the Second Edition of The Guidebook. Notable changes in this edition are to “1.2. Decisions of State Courts,” which accommodate the Court’s new universal citation format, and to “1.7. Quotations,” which suggest the use of “cleaned-up” quotations in accord with Section 8.5 of Bryan A. Garner’s The Redbook.

Authorship
The Supreme Court of North Carolina’s Office of Administrative Counsel is the author and editor of The Guidebook.

Authoritativeness
The Supreme Court of North Carolina approved this version of The Guidebook in conference on 23 September 2020.

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FOREWORD

Welcome to The Guidebook: Citation, Style, and Usage at the Supreme Court of North Carolina.

As its name implies, The Guidebook will guide you as you edit judicial opinions for the Supreme Court of North Carolina. But a guide is all that it is. Where The Guidebook is unclear, silent, or impossible to apply, you should contact the Office of Administrative Counsel for assistance. Of course, final authority over the text of an opinion belongs to the justice who writes it.

The Court generally follows the Uniform System of Citation that is described in The Bluebook and the style and usage conventions found in the Texas Law Review’s Manual on Usage & Style. Instead of reproducing this material, The Guidebook focuses on the Court’s deviations from these two reference books. The Guidebook is therefore purposefully concise.

Use of The Guidebook promotes two goals: (1) consistency within an opinion, and (2) consistency between opinions. While variations in citation, style, and usage will inevitably occur, the variations should not occur because of a lack of guidance on the subject.

Accordingly, we present The Guidebook.

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Citation

1.1 Adherence to the Uniform System of Citation

Unless *The Guidebook* recommends a different citation convention for a particular source, the Supreme Court of North Carolina follows the Uniform System of Citation that is described in *The Bluebook*, which is currently in its twenty-first edition. (*The Indigo Book*, which is in the public domain, describes this system ably as well.)

**Comment.** The Uniform System of Citation that is described in *The Bluebook* is ubiquitous in American legal writing. When drafting legal citations for the Court, use the current edition of *The Bluebook*.

1.2 Decisions of State Courts

Cite to the state’s official reporter (if one exists), followed by a universal citation (if one exists).

A universal citation for decisions of the North Carolina Appellate Courts is formatted like this: [year]-[court abbreviation]-[opinion number], [pinpoint paragraph number, if applicable].

- *In re Universal Citation*, 377 N.C. 999, 2021-NCSC-500, ¶ 14.

If a case has a universal citation, do not include a pinpoint citation to the print page.

- *In re Universal Citation*, 377 N.C. 999, 2021-NCSC-500, ¶ 14.
- NOT *In re Universal Citation*, 377 N.C. 999, 1003, 2021-NCSC-500, ¶ 14.

The use of placeholder citations should be avoided.

- e.g., *State v. Defendant*, 2021-NCSC-425, ¶ 5.

Cite to an unofficial source only as a last resort.


**Comment.** The Supreme Court of North Carolina has adopted a universal-citation format for its decisions and for the decisions of the North Carolina Court of Appeals. Only those decisions filed on or after 1 January 2021 will have a universal citation.

1.3 Statutory Compilations of North Carolina

Cite to the General Statutes of North Carolina using the abbreviation “N.C.G.S.”

- e.g., N.C.G.S. § 7A-39 (2019).

Cite to statutory compilations that predate the General Statutes of North Carolina based on the following examples:

- e.g., 1 N.C. Revised Stat. of 1837, ch. 14, § 1.
- NOT *Citation to Volume 1, Chapter 14, Section 1, of the Revised Statutes of 1837.*
- *Citation to Chapter 4, Section 3, of the Revised Code of 1854.*
- *Citation to Section 492 of the Code of Civil Procedure of 1868.*
2 N.C. Code of 1883, § 2500.
▶ Citation to Volume II, Section 2500, of the Code of 1883.

1 N.C. Revisal of 1905, § 207.
▶ Citation to Volume I, Section 207, of the Revisal of 1905.

▶ Citation to Volume II, Section 5266, of the Consolidated Statutes of 1919.

1.4 Session Laws of the State of North Carolina

In citations to session laws enacted after the General Assembly's 1998 Extra Session, the session law number replaces the chapter number.

e.g., An Act to Update the Charter of the City of Greensboro Consistent with State Law, ch. 807, § 9, 1986 N.C. Sess. Laws 44, 45.
▶ Before the General Assembly's 1998 Extra Session.

▶ After the General Assembly's 1998 Extra Session.

If a session law has not yet been published in the bound volumes, then cite to the PDF version of the session law located on the General Assembly’s website.


Comment. Prior to the General Assembly’s 1998 Extra Session, session laws were published with chapter numbers. Like a session law number, a chapter number indicates a law's chronological number for a given legislative session.

1.5 North Carolina Administrative Code

When citing to the North Carolina Administrative Code, prepend the chapter or subchapter number to the rule number without an intervening space.

▶ Citation to Subchapter 48C, Rule .0101.

When citing to a cumulative supplement of the North Carolina Administrative Code, the format of the date parenthetical is: “([Supp. [Abbreviated Month and Year of Supplement]].”


Comment. Prior to the June 2012 codification of the North Carolina Administrative Code, the Office of Administrative Hearings issued both supplements and partial recodifications. When citing an administrative rule that appears in a pre-2012 codification, ask the Supreme Court Librarian for assistance.

1.6 No "Supra" or "Infra"

Do not use “supra” to refer to material that has already been cited in an opinion. Instead, use “hereinafter” in accordance with Bluebook Rule 4.2.


Do not use “infra” to refer to material that appears later in an opinion.

1.7 Quotations

Quote from an official publication, if possible.

Avoid quoting misquotes of something else (e.g., a quote to Case A includes a purported quote to Case B but, in fact, misquotes Case B). Instead, paraphrase or quote the original source.
Consider a “cleaned-up” quotation in accord with Section 8.5 of Garner’s *The Redbook* when quoting something with an embedded quotation, especially if doing so would markedly improve the readability of the quoted content.

**Comment.** A quotation is “cleaned up” when extraneous items that appear in an embedded quote — such as brackets, ellipses, quotation marks, and internal citations — are removed to improve the readability of the quoted content. Citations to a cleaned-up quotation must include the parenthetical “(cleaned up).” When ordering parentheticals within a citation, apply Bluebook Rule 1.5(b) as if “(cleaned up)” appears in the list immediately after “(per curiam).”

### 1.8 Temporary Citations to the Case File

The Court rarely supports a factual assertion made in an opinion by citing to petitions, motions, briefs, or record materials — even if the material being cited is quoted. But a draft opinion should include a temporary citation to these materials, where appropriate, while the draft opinion is in circulation. These citations should be in bold and enclosed with curly brackets to make the citations conspicuous.

- e.g., {R. at 7} — Printed Record, page 7.
- {T p 101} — Transcript, page 101.
- {R S p 34} — Record Supplement, page 34.
- {Def.’s Br. at 12} — Defendant’s Brief, page 12.

**Comment.** Temporary citations to the case file allow the justices and other court personnel to substantiate factual assertions made in a draft opinion. Because these temporary citations are removed before the opinion is finalized, accuracy, not technical precision, is paramount.

### Style and Usage

#### 2.1 Adherence to the Texas Law Review’s *Manual on Usage & Style*

Unless *The Guidebook* recommends a different usage or style convention, the Supreme Court of North Carolina follows the usage and style conventions described in the Texas Law Review’s *Manual on Usage & Style*, which is currently in its fifteenth edition.

**Comment.** Although the *Manual on Usage & Style* is surprisingly comprehensive for a pocket-sized writing guide, it does not cover the field. For a comprehensive treatment of legal usage and style, we recommend Bryan A. Garner’s *The Redbook* and Garner’s *Dictionary of Legal Usage*.

#### 2.2 Appellations for Parties

Do not refer to a party as “appellant” or “appellee,” even in a compound noun (e.g., plaintiff-appellant).

Refer to the State of North Carolina in criminal cases as “the State.”

Do not capitalize “plaintiff,” “defendant,” “petitioner,” “respondent,” or other party-identifiers unless they are the first word in a sentence.

**Comment.** “Appellant” and “appellee” may introduce unnecessary confusion to the reader if the procedural posture of the case changes from the Court of Appeals to the Supreme Court.
2.3 Capitalization of “court”
Capitalize “court” in reference to the Supreme Court of North Carolina and the Supreme Court of the United States, and when “court” is used in a full title.

e.g., The Supreme Court of North Carolina held in State v. Jones that . . . .
The Court reasoned . . . .
The North Carolina Court of Appeals has also reviewed this issue. Without exception, that court has indicated . . . .

2.4 Collective Nouns
Collective nouns should take singular verbs. When a pronoun takes the place of a collective noun, the pronoun should be singular.

e.g., The jury is deliberating. It should reach a verdict soon.
Jurors are fact-finders. They determine whether the witness is credible.

2.5 Trial Court qua Court
Refer to the trial court as such, rather than to a specific judge.

e.g., The trial court ordered the defendant to appear . . . .
NOT The trial judge entered her order in this matter on . . . .

2.6 Appellate Courts “Hold” or “Conclude,” Not “Find”
Avoid the verb “find” when describing the decision-making process of an appellate court. Instead, use “hold” or “conclude.”

e.g., The Court of Appeals held that . . . .
NOT The Court of Appeals found that . . . .

2.7 Spaces
Use a blank space between consecutive quotation marks and between consecutive brackets.

e.g., “text” and []
NOT “text” or []

Use a hard (nonbreaking) space to avoid breaking lines at inappropriate places. Follow Rule 4.13 of Garner’s The Redbook on this topic.

Comment. A hard space is created in Microsoft Word using this command: [control+shift+space].

2.8 Dashes
Use an en dash in the text of an opinion and in citations according to Rule 1.28 of the Texas Law Review’s Manual on Usage & Style. Do not follow the dash rule in Bluebook Rule 3.2, which permits the use of a hyphen to indicate page ranges in citations.


Hyphenate the names of crimes that are modified by the word “degree,” regardless of how they appear in the General Statutes of North Carolina.

e.g., first-degree murder

Consult Black’s Law Dictionary to determine whether a dash belongs in a compound noun or compound modifier, or after a prefix.
2.9 Statutory References in Text
A reference to a statute in the text of an opinion may use the section symbol (“§”), but do not begin a sentence with a section symbol or other abbreviation.

  e.g., Section 15A-2000 of the North Carolina General Statutes states . . . .
  But, section 15A-2000 does not . . . .
  OR As indicated in N.C.G.S. § 15A-2000, the defendant should . . . .
  NOT § 15A-2000 states . . . .

2.10 Dates
Use the form “[day] [month] [year]” for dates that appear in the text of an opinion but follow The Bluebook’s prescribed form “[abbreviated month] [day], [year]” in citations.

  e.g., On 3 January 2019, the Carolina Hurricanes defeated . . . .

Additional Resources

The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation (Columbia Law Review Ass’n et al. eds., 21st ed. 2020).


See also:


For additional information about the Supreme Court of North Carolina, please visit www.NCcourts.gov/SupremeCourt.

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