

Effective Lawyering

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A Checklist Approach
to Legal Writing
and Oral Argument

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CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Parrish, Austen L.

Effective lawyering : a checklist approach to legal writing and oral argument / by Austen L. Parrish, Dennis T. Yokoyama.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-59460-348-8 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-59460-348-0 (alk. paper)

1. Legal composition. 2. Law--United States--Methodology. 3. Oral pleading--United States. 4. Briefs--United States. I. Yokoyama, Dennis T. II. Title.

KF250.P37 2007

808'.06634--dc22

2007008478

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

700 Kent Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919) 493-5668
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America

for Leslie, Natalie, and Amelie
AP

for Janis and Denise
DY

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful to those who read and commented on this book during its many drafts, and for the support of Southwestern Law School and our colleagues in the Legal Analysis, Writing and Skills Program. Special thanks to Ron Aronovsky, Anahid Gharakhanian, Michael Frost, Russell Miller, Lillian Aponte Miranda, Ashley Parrish, Byron Stier, Tara Walters, and Janis Yokoyama for their good ideas and encouragement. We are also indebted to Joshua Kane and John Stephenson for their research assistance. Finally, we thank our students from whom we have learned much.

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Introduction

This book takes a unique approach to legal writing and oral advocacy. Many excellent legal writing books exhaustively detail how to write effectively. Those books—many of which are several hundred pages long, and contain numerous examples and exercises—meticulously explain the dos and don'ts of effective advocacy. This is not one of those books. This book assumes the reader has learned or is learning the basics of legal writing, and at most needs only reminding of what they are. It also assumes that most practitioners (and, for that matter, law students) have neither the time, nor the inclination, to read a lengthy discussion of all the subtleties of legal method. Busy lawyers and law students need a book that gets to the point quickly—a book that will be useful even if they only have time to skim it.

For these reasons, we have designed this book to be a concise, easy-to-use reference—not a book to be read cover to cover. We intend it to provide concrete advice, and to serve as a day-to-day reference. Because many people find it difficult to improve their legal writing, the book has adopted a methodical approach. In our experience, practitioners and students alike can improve their advocacy by following carefully crafted checklists. Checklists force writers to focus on specific problems and help them improve incrementally and systematically. The checklists in this book have evolved from our experiences as former litigators and professors of legal writing.

So who should use this book? This book is suited for busy attorneys and law students of all stripes. The book concisely describes useful, yet often neglected, writing techniques. It has pithy discussions of: (1) ways to avoid recurring, yet frequently overlooked, writing problems; (2) sensible approaches to writing common legal docu-

ments; and (3) methods for preparing an oral argument. In addition, it provides the reader with a series of checklists to turn to when undertaking a writing project or preparing for oral argument. In sum, this book, by itself, is not for the novice who requires a comprehensive guide, although the book can be used to supplement more exhaustive texts. Nor is it for the sophisticated writing expert, looking for nuanced discussions about topics not commonly covered in legal writing books. But it is for practitioners and students who want to be refreshed on the fundamentals of effective lawyering.