

# The Scribes Manual for Law Review Editors



# The Scribes Manual for Law Review Editors

Darby Dickerson  
Brooke J. Bowman

**EDITORS**



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# Introduction

We admit it. We're law review nerds. We were both editors on our respective reviews during law school, and we've gone on to serve as editors for several other academic journals.

We both loved the sense of community that came from being on law review—and especially on an editorial board. We thrived in a setting where we worked collaboratively with our peers; it was a less-isolating experience than preparing for classes and examinations. We were excited by being part of an enterprise with a common purpose: to help promote interesting ideas that might literally change the law and society. We appreciated working with other talented students and having the opportunity to interact with authors who were leaders in their fields. We dove into our own scholarly research and writing. And we even loved mastering a citation manual, so much so that one of us went on to write one, and both of us have focused our scholarly energies on improving legal citation and helping others to grasp the intricacies and mysteries of the cite-checking process.

But we also faced challenges as student-editors. We had to grapple with peers not meeting deadlines and submitting subpar work. We experienced the pain of “losing” edits that someone had spent significant time preparing—or discovering that new mistakes had crept into an article late in the process. We made grand plans for changes—only to learn that the law review didn't have the authority to implement those changes without faculty approval. We had to learn how to reach consensus when the board split on important matters. We endured some people not talking to others for a while—usually over something relatively petty. We worked long hours to balance our law review responsibilities, course work, and jobs. And for at least part of the time, we suffered from imposter syndrome: How did we get here? And when will people discover that we don't really know what we're doing?

But on balance, our law review experiences were the most significant of our law school careers. We walked away from our student-editor experiences

with new and improved skills ranging from editing and communicating with authors to developing and sticking to a complex timeline and managing a staff. We've used these skills throughout our practice and academic careers—including our stints as senior academic administrators. We also gained confidence in our editing, writing, research, analytical, and leadership abilities. And the editor credential opened doors for professional positions that otherwise might not have materialized that early in our careers.

Our goal for this *Manual* is to help new editors understand their roles and responsibilities, learn how the review fits within their law school's program of legal education, anticipate challenges, plan for the year, and gain tips and ideas to improve the review. We hope faculty advisors and incoming editors will use this *Manual* during the annual transition process. We also hope editors will use the *Manual* as a resource when different challenges or questions arise during the year. The *Manual* can also assist law review members considering an editorial position and faculty members who teach seminars for student-editors.

To help readers navigate the *Manual*, each chapter starts with “Learning Objectives” to preview what editors will learn from studying the chapter. Each chapter ends with “Key Takeaways” that capture the top points the author hopes you will remember long after reviewing their chapter.

In addition to the chapters in this *Manual*, we encourage editors to review two symposia published specifically to train and help law review editors: *Stetson Law Review* Volume 30, Issue 2 (2000) (<https://www.stetson.edu/law/lawreview/2000.php>), and *Thomas M. Cooley Law Review* Volume 30, Issue 2 (2013) (available on HeinOnline). These issues include articles about selecting lead articles, cite-checking processes, working with peers, intraschool journal relations, and showcasing student scholarship.

We want to thank the chapter authors for sharing their expertise and insights that helped us turn our vision into reality. They have all worked on and with law reviews, whether as students, faculty advisors, senior law school administrators, law librarians, or all of those roles. So, when it comes to law reviews, they've been there and done that.

And we express our extreme gratitude to Polatip Subanajouy, the 2021–2022 Scribes Fellow and a recent law review editor, for his hard work on this *Manual*. We relied on his recent editorial experience to ensure that the *Manual* was sharing advice relevant and accessible to current editors. And his fresh perspective, attention to detail, and hard work made this *Manual* better than it otherwise would have been.

Before we end, we want to make a few final points about the *Manual*:

- We use the terms “law review” and “law journal” as synonyms. Regardless of your student-edited journal’s name, this *Manual* is for you.
- We understand that different law reviews use different names for positions. In this *Manual*, “editor” refers to students selected for specific positions on the editorial board. “Member” and “staff member” typically refer to students on the law review who do not serve on the editorial board.
- Every law review is organized slightly differently and has slightly different policies and procedures. We understand that not all advice offered in this *Manual* can be translated to your journal, but we and the chapter authors have attempted to provide information about common practices. We encourage editors to direct specific questions about how your review or law school handles a particular issue to your faculty advisors.
- We and the chapter authors have made every effort to use gender-neutral and inclusive language throughout.
- As law review editors, you’ll notice that the footnoting is light, and we’ve generally shunned speaking footnotes. This approach was intentional. We hope readers will engage with the main text without distraction, which we appreciate is not the approach most law reviews take regarding footnotes and citations.
- Following the advice of chapter author Christine George, in citations, we have listed all authors—instead of employing “et al.”—so that each may receive credit for their work.

As Scribes President Susan Duncan mentions in the Preface, this *Manual* is just part of Scribes’s commitment to law reviews. To supplement this *Manual*, we plan to hold regular webinars for editors and build an online repository for supplemental materials that will help editors with their work and connect them to each other.

Finally, we wish you the very best during your year as an editor. We hope this *Manual* can help you along the way and that you will have a successful year during which you produce great issues, learn a lot, and build relationships that will last a lifetime.

**Darby Dickerson & Brooke J. Bowman**  
January 2022



# Preface

To incoming law review editors: congratulations on your selection! We hope this *Manual for Law Review Editors* will help as you plan and navigate your year on the editorial board. For prospective editors and others, the *Manual* will provide you with an overview of how student-edited law reviews operate and the various considerations editors must balance. I am the current president of Scribes—The American Society of Legal Writers ([scribes.org](http://scribes.org)). Scribes is a nonprofit organization dedicated to excellent legal writing. The organization was founded in 1951 by the Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court. Its individual members include judges, attorneys, law professors, and others interested in improving legal writing, and its institutional members include law schools and courts.

For decades, Scribes has supported law reviews by presenting an annual award for the best student-written article in a law review. In addition, many Scribes members serve or have served as faculty advisors for law reviews.

Until 2017, the National Conference of Law Reviews held an annual training conference for incoming law review editors. Because the NCLR is no longer active, Scribes resolved to expand its outreach to law reviews and provide new services to law review members and editors. This *Manual*—which includes 19 chapters to help editors learn the intricacies of leading and managing an academic journal—is the cornerstone of these new services. Other services will include the following:

- regular webinars for law review editors and members;
- a biennial survey of law reviews that will help reviews and the legal academy better understand how law reviews operate; and
- an online portal that will serve as a national clearinghouse of information for student-edited law reviews.

We anticipate that the portal will include survey results, training videos and materials, and documents such as constitutions, policy manuals, style manuals, and competition packets that different law reviews have permitted us to share.

I want to thank Dean Darby Dickerson and Professor Brooke J. Bowman for editing this *Manual* and leading our other efforts to serve law reviews and law review editors. Dean Dickerson is a former Scribes president and continues to serve on the Scribes Board. Professor Bowman is a long-time Scribes member who also chairs the Law Review Award Committee. Both have extensive experience with law reviews, and both are long-time leaders in the academy. Scribes appreciates them donating their time and expertise to these important projects.

I would be remiss if I didn't invite each person reading this *Manual* to join and participate in Scribes. We have a special membership category for student-editors. Scribes members receive the *Scribes Journal of Legal Writing*, the *Scrivener* newsletter, weekly research and writing tips, and access to webinars about cutting-edge and interesting legal writing topics. Members are also invited to join committees, which provide opportunities to network with leading judges, practitioners, and law professors. Our committees help select winners for Scribes's annual Law Review, Best Brief-Writing, and Book awards and assist in other efforts to continue improving legal writing in the United States. I hope you will consider joining us!

**Susan Hanley Duncan**  
Scribes President (2020–2022)  
Dean, University of Mississippi School of Law