

DRAFTING LEGAL DOCUMENTS: Practical Resources

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If you're going to practice law, you're going to draft legal documents. No matter what type of practice you pursue, drafting will be an integral part of your daily work: Civil litigators draft complaints, other pleadings, interrogatories, jury instructions, settlement agreements, appellate briefs, etc. Criminal lawyers draft plea agreements, motions *in limine*, writs of *habeas corpus*, appellate briefs, etc. Transactional attorneys draft contracts of all types, leases, promissory notes, articles of incorporation, etc. Even more than doing research, you will find that legal drafting is in many ways the very definition of practicing law.

Although every document you create will likely be unique unto its situation, it is not necessary to reinvent the wheel every time you sit down to draft. This research guide is intended to provide you with an overview of some of the most useful resources for attorneys in drafting legal documents.

"Just Show Me..."

The best guidance for legal drafting is usually **seeing an example** done by someone else. As a legal term of art, these exemplars are called **forms**. Although such examples will **never be perfectly tailored** to your unique situation, they usually provide enough information to get you started on your own drafting.

Forms are available in many...well, forms. Commercially published **formbooks** provide general drafting information, as well as forms specific to subject, jurisdiction, and document-type. **Court-prepared forms** are standardized forms provided by courts for frequently used pleadings or other court procedures. Your institution may have an **in-house databank** in which legal documents prepared by attorneys have been archived as forms. Your **colleagues** may have ideas about where to find forms. The **matter file** may contain documents that can