

WRITING COMPETITION

INTRODUCTION AND TIPS

April 16, 2026

H A R V A R D
L A W R E V I E W

TODAY'S AGENDA:

- 12:30pm — Writing Competition Logistics
- 12:40pm — Case Comment Tips
- 1:00pm — Subcite Tips

WRITING COMPETITION LOGISTICS

KEY COMPETITION DATES:

- **Disability and Religious Accommodations Requests** — Now through Friday, April 24
- **Competition Registration** — Wednesday, April 22 through Monday, May 11
- **The Competition** — Sunday, May 17 through Saturday, May 23
- **Offer Weekend** — Mid-July

The 54 Editors selected to join Volume 141 will be required to participate in both a virtual orientation in late July and in-person orientation on campus on Saturday, September 5th and Sunday, September 6th.

COMPETITION COMPONENTS:



Case Comment:

This portion, worth 50%, requires students to review a recent case and write a brief analysis that describes the proceedings and makes a legal or policy argument related to the case.



Subcite:

This portion, also worth 50% of the competition score, requires students to perform a technical and substantive edit of an excerpt from an unpublished article.



Grades Waiver Form:

A waiver form authorizing HLS to release students' grades to *HLR* for consideration as part of the Competition. Students must sign and submit this form for their grades to be considered by *HLR*.



Holistic Review Statement:

A 200-word statement that identifies and describes aspects of your perspectives, experiences, and viewpoints which will enhance your contributions to *HLR*. The statement is optional but necessary to be considered as part of *HLR*'s holistic review process.

The Case Comment and Subcite use a closed universe of sources. You will be provided a full set of source documents (e.g., legal opinions, law review articles, etc.). The use of any source not provided by *HLR* is grounds for disqualification.

COMPETITION POLICIES:

How Are Editors Selected?:

Based on the Competition, 54 students are invited to join HLR each year, including:

- 20 Selected Based Solely on Competition Scores
- 7 Selected Based on an Equally Weighted Combo of Competition Scores and Grades (One from Each HLS 1L Section)
- 3 Selected Based on an Equally Weighted Combo of Competition Scores and Grades (From Any HLS 1L Section)
- 24 Selected through Anonymous Holistic Review

Competition Policy on AI Use:

- **AI Use Generally:** All use of generative AI tools is strictly prohibited. Students also may not copy and paste content directly into their Case Comment or Subcite from any external source.
- **Accessing and Working on Competition Materials:** This year, all Competition materials will be accessed via an online platform students will be prohibited from downloading or printing the materials. Students will need to be connected to the internet to open sources, draft their Case Comment, and add comments to the Subcite but may disconnect and return to work at any time.
- **In Cases of Suspected AI Use:** Students suspected of AI use may (1) resign from the Competition or (2) explain discrepancies in their materials to *HLR's* Competition Disciplinary Committee. Where the Disciplinary Committee finds it more likely than not that AI was used, students may be disqualified from the Competition.

The HLR Writing Competition website provides more information and will be updated with additional resources next week.

CASE COMMENT TIPS

INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE COMMENT:

Key Need-to-Knows:

- **What is the Case Comment?:** A test of students' ability to summarize the substance and procedural history of a "Recent Case" (first 50% of the Case Comment) and to formulate a compelling legal or policy argument related to the Recent Case (second 50% of the Case Comment). This work resembles *HLR*'s student writing experience.
- **What Makes for a Strong Case Comment?:** A strong Case Comment includes clear and accurate reporting of the Case's substance and procedural history and a compelling and well-supported argument. Examples of actual Case Comments written by *HLR* Editors can be found under the "Recent Things" section of the *HLR* website.
- **What Materials Will Be Provided?:**
 - A copy of the Recent Case—which you will use to report the substance and procedural posture of the Recent Case.
 - A copy of other primary and secondary sources relevant to the Recent Case—some of which you will use to formulate and support a compelling legal or policy argument related to the Recent Case.

HOW TO APPROACH THE CASE COMMENT:

Sample Schedule for Drafting Your Case Comment:

- **Day 1 — Review Sources and Identify Key Themes:**
 - Read and take notes on the Recent Case that is the subject of the Case Comment.
 - Identify the doctrines, policy considerations, and any other themes implicated by the case's opinion(s).
 - Review other sources for the same. You won't have time to read everything, so see what you can discern from their titles and abstracts!
- **By End of Day 1 — Formulate a Thesis:** Formulate a thesis/argument—once you pick a thesis, you should ideally stick with it!
- **Days 2 through 3 — Draft and Refine Your Case Comment:**
 - Write the first draft of your Case Comment and continue to iterate on its contents throughout Days 2 and 3.
 - At the end of Day 3, commit to taking a break from the Case Comment and directing your attention to the Subcite.
- **Day 5 — Revisit Your Case Comment with a Fresh Mind:** Refine the substantive strength of your reporting and argument sections.
- **Day 6 — Revisit Your Case Comment with a Fresh Eye:** Refine the technical strength of your Case Comment—including footnotes!

There is no one right way to budget your time throughout the Competition. But the approach proposed above is one commonly used by students taking the Competition. You should consider mapping out a schedule before the Competition begins!

CASE COMMENT STRUCTURE:

Case Comments All Follow the Same General Structure:

Paragraph #	Recommended Content
¶ 1	Discuss the background/context of the case and your argument.
	Then write: “Recently, in [insert case name], the [insert circuit number] Circuit [insert holding].”
	Finally, state your thesis succinctly.
¶ 2	Set out the facts of the case, from the beginning.
¶ 3	Describe the procedural posture and holdings in the lower court(s).
¶ 4	Describe the appeals court’s opinion. It should begin: “The [insert circuit number] Circuit [insert “affirmed,” “reversed,” “vacated,” “remanded”]. Writing for the panel, Judge [insert opinion author’s name]”
¶ 5	Continue giving an account of the opinion.
¶ 6 to ~ ¶ 8	Describe each concurring and dissenting opinion in a separate paragraph.
~ ¶ 9	Restate your thesis. Make sure to choose a thesis that is about the case, not just general doctrinal or policy issues that are brought up in the case. Try to think creatively, while recognizing the realities of your time and length limitations.
¶ 10 to the End	Flesh out your argument, drawing upon cases and source materials. Your final paragraph should be a conclusion.

The word limit for your Case Comment is 3,750 words, including footnotes. Your reporting section should compose about half of your Case Comment. Your argument section should compose the other half—scope your thesis accordingly!

CASE COMMENT GRADING CRITERIA:

Four Factors are Considered:

- **Legal Analysis:** Your understanding of the substance and procedural history of the Recent Case.
- **Argument:** Your ability to organize your thoughts, develop a logical argument, and use supporting materials in a manner that is appropriate and compelling.
- **Writing Ability:** Your clarity of reporting, cogency, concision, and style.
- **Originality:** Your ability to generate original insights from the sources provided rather than merely repeating arguments from one of the opinions or sources.

HLR takes seriously the need to maintain anonymity in grading to promote fair competition among students. Accordingly, no person grading any portion of your Competition submission will ever be told your name nor any other identifying information.

SUBCITE TIPS

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBCITE:

Key Need-to-Knows:

- **What is the Subcite?:** A test of students' ability to perform technical and substantive edits for an unpublished excerpt. The excerpt has been seeded errors for you to find. This work most resembles the day-to-day work of an *HLR* Editor.
- **What Types of Errors Will Be Included?:** The Subcite has been crafted to include a wide array of different types of errors. You are expected to look for errors that violate the Bluebook and *HLR*'s own internal rules as well as other general grammar and style standards.
- **What Materials Will Be Provided?:**
 - A copy of the unpublished article—which you will use to identify and propose corrections to errors.
 - A copy of select Bluebook rules and *HLR*'s own internal rules—which you will use to identify errors being tested by the Subcite.
 - A copy of sources relevant to the article—which you will use to verify the accuracy of the piece's writing and footnotes.

CATEGORIES OF SUBCITE ERRORS:

Example Categories of Subcite Errors:

- Abbreviation
- Acronym
- Bluebook
- Capitalization
- Characterization
- Colloquialism
- Consistency
- Cross-Reference
- Dangling Modifier
- Footnote Call
- Fragment / Run-On
- Heading
- Hyphenation
- Internal *HLR* Rule
- Logic
- Move Sentence
- Move Paragraph
- Order of Authorities
- Parallelism
- Pincite
- Punctuation
- Quotation
- Redundancy
- Signal
- Singular/Plural
- Source
- Spacing
- Spelling
- Split Infinitive
- Structure
- Subject/Verb Agreement
- Substance
- Support
- That/Which
- Typeface
- Verb Tense
- Word Choice

Point Values for Each Error:

The point value for each error has been determined based on the level difficulty of finding each error:

- 1 Point = Very Basic Errors
- 2 Points = Basic Errors
- 3 Points = Intermediate Errors
- 4 Points = Difficult Errors
- 5 Points = Very Difficult Errors

The Subcite is meant to be challenging. No student ever finds all errors, nor should you expect to.

FOR EACH ERROR, YOU MUST:

1. Highlight the Error

You must highlight the exact range of text you propose replacing...

- **One.** <o>
- **One.** <one.>
- **is** for <was >
- **is for** <was for>

Ideally, highlight only those characters that you are proposing a change to, as in the first example above.

The more characters you highlight, the more characters you must accurately recreate in your proposed edit—even one wrong character in your proposed edit means you will receive no credit.

2. Leave an Adequate Comment

A comment is adequate if it does each of the following...

- ✓ Identifies the category of error implicated
- ✓ Explains the error and cites to any relevant rule
- ✓ Proposes a correction within a set of angled brackets

When proposing an edit in a comment, *HLR* underlines characters that should be italicized and **bolds** characters that should be in Small Caps. Each of your comments must adhere to this practice for you to receive credit for each comment.

EXAMPLE ADEQUATE COMMENT:

TYPEFACE/BUEBOOK: Bluebook Rule 16, article titles should be in italics, not small caps. On my read, the article title is not italicized here.

Please consider: <Title of Article>.

For a statement made **prior to** a custodial interrogation to be admissible, the familiar rule of Miranda v. Arizona¹⁷ is that a suspect must have “voluntarily, knowingly and intelligently” waived certain rights after **recieving** adequate warnings and before questioning began.¹⁸ These rights are the “right to remain silent” and the “right to the **presents** of an attorney, either retained or appointed.”¹⁹ If a suspect indicates that he or she wishes to speak to an attorney or wishes not to be interrogated, **the the** interrogation must stop. Responding to questions or volunteering information **waives** the right subsequently to consult **a lawyer or an attorney** before choosing whether to continue the interrogation.²⁰

Subciter 5:00 PM
CHARACTERIZATION: On my read, *Miranda* warnings are limited to custodial interrogations. Please consider: <during>.

Subciter 5:00 PM
SPELLING: On my read, this word appears to be misspelled. Please consider: <receiving>.

Subciter 5:00 PM
QUOTATION: On my read, in the cited authority, the sentence uses the word “presence,” not “presents.” Please consider: <presence>.

Subciter 5:00 PM
REPETITION: On my read, the word “the” has inadvertently been repeated twice. Please consider: <the>.

Subciter 5:00 PM
CHARACTERIZATION: On my read, the right to an attorney is not waived by these actions. Please consider: <does not waive>.

Subciter 5:00 PM
REDUNDANCY: On my read, “lawyer” and “attorney” mean the same thing in this context. Please consider: <a lawyer>.

TRICKY ERRORS:

Nested Errors:

Sometimes, there are errors within errors. You should highlight the smallest error first, then the next smallest error, etc.

Example:

Elena Kagan, 114 YALE L. REVIEW 2245, *Presidential Administration*, 2245, 2246 (2001).

The above example includes the following errors:

- **Error 1:** This was published in *HLR*, not *YLJ*.
- **Error 2:** Review is abbreviated Rev.
- **Error 3:** The citation is out of order.

Misplaced Paragraphs:

Sometimes, a sentence or paragraph would make more sense if moved to a different location in the piece.

Example:

- Paragraph #1: Argument #1
- Paragraph #2: Argument #2
- Paragraph #3: Conclusion
- Paragraph #4: Introduction

You'd highlight Paragraph #4's first sentence, use the **MOVE PARAGRAPH** error tag, and identify where to move it to. **You must also identify any resulting conditional errors.**

Conditional Errors:

Sometimes, one proposed edit is conditioned on the author's acceptance of another.

Example:

- Proposed Edit #1: Move last paragraph, ending with FN 54, to be first paragraph.
- Proposed Edit #2: Replace FN 54's *supra* citation with a full citation to the source.
- Proposed Edit #3: Replace what used to be the first full citation to that source with a *supra* to the relocated FN 54.

You'd tag Proposed Edits #2 and #3 as **CONDITIONAL** upon Proposed Edit #1.

WHERE CAN YOU GO WRONG?:

- Not properly identifying an error, explaining an error, or proposing a correction.
- Not using a polite tone in your comments.
- Including frivolous comments in an attempt to maximize your score.
- But note that you will NOT be penalized for making good faith suggestions for edits unless they are egregious overcorrections.

IN CLOSING...

THE MOST IMPORTANT TIPS OF ALL:

1. On Day 1 of the Competition, Start by Reading the Competition's Instructions.
2. Finish the Competition.

THANK YOU!