ADVICE TO NEW STUDENT WORKS EDITORS

Richard B. Graves III[*]

Welcome to management! Odd as it may sound, this is the most appropriate greeting for new student works editors. Your previous law school experiences have consisted almost entirely of challenges and obstacles that you have overcome by individual effort. As editors, however, you will be judged by the output of others. Good editors, by definition, are those who ensure that their writers produce "on time and on target" — that they produce quality works in a timely manner. This Essay suggests ways of dealing with the difficulties you likely will encounter in overseeing the work of other students.

Those difficulties are considerable; these works must come from inexperienced writers whose time is in great demand for other endeavors. At least some of those writers, moreover, likely will be of a temperament that is not entirely conducive to meeting deadlines with polished works. The following are some approaches to overcoming these obstacles. Not all will be appropriate to any particular editor, writer, or organization, so choose among them with care.

I. MAKE YOUR EXPECTATIONS CLEAR

Most new journal members are elated, at least for a while, at having won the honor and professional advantages of membership. It is important to emphasize during this "honeymoon period" the demands that membership will make on their time and effort. Doing this while the elation is still strong can harness some of your writers' enthusiasm for the hard work that lies ahead.

Maintaining their enthusiasm, or at least their motivation to perform hard work at your direction, likely will be one of your greatest challenges. The students who make law review usually are among the most involved and heavily recruited people on campus. They usually have strong incentives to spend considerable time

interviewing on and off campus, participating in demanding student activities such as moot court, and doing well in class.

In this context, it is important to remember that most of the immediate and practical benefit of law review membership to students lies in its value as a credential for career advancement. That value begins as soon as new members are named and often does not depend on how well those members actually perform their duties. Accordingly, many students see their law review achievement as essentially complete as soon as they have updated their résumés.

It is essential to challenge this complacency whenever you encounter it. Achieving journal membership is not easy, and there is no reason that new members should be allowed to adopt the mindset that *maintaining* journal membership should be easy. Accordingly, it is a good idea to explain, at the outset and in detail, both the full burdens of journal membership and the consequences of failing to carry those burdens well.

It is also important to stress that the hard work of everyone on the journal staff is *interdependent*; each issue is put out according to a schedule that depends not only on the writer of an individual piece, but also on the editors, the publication staff, and the publisher.[1] Missed deadlines have a way of rippling outward from the

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1. Thus, student works editors must familiarize themselves with the steps in the publication process and publication schedules.

offending writer in ways that affect many others. When writers you supervise understand this, they can begin to see that deadlines are not arbitrary; they are checks to make sure that problems are recognized early enough that they can be solved without harming the publication schedule.

Because these checks are so important to protecting the journal's schedule, it is a good idea to give preliminary and interim assignments to new writers as soon as possible. This will cause them to budget time for writing duties earlier, thus avoiding potential conflicts and time crunches. Likewise, set deadlines early and make them as short as you reasonably can, allowing time for many intermediate or "draft" deadlines. This will allow you to detect and address problems long before they threaten the publication schedule.

One way to help your writers avoid problems and to make their work easier is to give them models of the kind of work you expect from them. This will help you avoid misunderstandings about the kind of output you want.

An easy and effective means of doing this is to give them copies of the best works of the relevant type from past issues of the journal. Typically, journals give awards for the best student works, and records are kept of the awards. You can copy the winning entries from the past several volumes; choose the ones that best exemplify the sort of product you want and give them to your writers.

II. KEEP YOUR FEEDBACK FOCUSED

With respect to the kind of feedback your writers can expect from you, define your role early and clearly. You should emphasize that you are an editor and not a proofreader. If you appear to be willing to take on the task of "cleaning up" rough drafts, you will find your time consumed in doing just that. Even worse, proofreading errors make your job more difficult by obscuring stylistic and organizational errors. Your job is to focus on the forest, not the trees. Make sure your writers know that what they turn in to you must be their best, most careful work, even at the draft stage.

When giving feedback, it is important to bear in mind that most journal writers are ego-identified with their work to some degree. This can cause those writers to react in a defensive or even hostile way when their work is criticized. Accordingly, it is a good idea to use approaches to feedback that minimize the sting of criticism.

One good way to do this is to use a two-step process. First, do a written markup of the draft and return that markup to the writer. Then follow up with a face-to-face conference, but only after at least a day or two have passed. This will allow the sting of the written criticism to fade. Time will not heal *all* wounds, however, and you need to be prepared to deal with writers who have difficulty distinguishing between critical evaluations of their work and personal attacks on themselves.

Dealing with writers of this variety is never pleasant, and doing it well requires both firmness and diplomacy. In this era of e-mail and remote collaboration, you might be tempted to avoid face-to-face conferences altogether. Resist this temptation; a markup cannot answer questions, and a good dialogue between an editor and a writer can save a great deal of time and effort by raising and addressing issues neither party might have spotted alone.

A few more words on firmness and diplomacy — when giving feedback, either written or oral, you should give specific rather than general feedback. Discuss the specific strengths and weaknesses of particular portions of the draft. Generalized positive comments may cause writers to believe that only a little more work is required to finish the project; generalized negative comments can sap writers' morale. Direct all your comments to specific features of the draft.

III. AVOID REINVENTING THE WHEEL

The demands that editorial work will make on your time will be substantial no matter what you do, but there are ways to get the most from your efforts — and those usually consist of using the efforts (present or past) of others. For example, most journals keep back files, and sometimes these files contain drafts and markups. Old markups can be a great resource in helping you learn your job — you can get up to speed by observing what past editors have done and share what you have learned with your writers.

Similarly, get familiar with standard references on citation, style, and grammar, and cite them in your critiques.[2] This will help your writers understand and apply your critiques. A good way to do this is to create a markup sheet that identifies the most common errors you encounter. This sheet should lead the writer to references that explain these errors and how to avoid them. This will require an investment of time on your part early on, but it will save you considerable time in the long run.

Another way to benefit from the efforts of others is to work peer edits into your schedule. Have your writers edit one another's drafts. Keep a copy of their edits for yourself and return the original edits to the original writers. This usually will have the effect of ensuring that the drafts you receive are better proofed and more

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2.   E.g. ALWD & Darby Dickerson, *ALWD Citation Manual: A Professional System of Citation* (Aspen L. & Bus. 2000); Bryan A. Garner, *The Elements of Legal Style* (Oxford U. Press 1991); Tex. L. Rev., *Manual on Usage & Style* (8th ed., Tex. L. Rev. Assn. 1995).

polished than they otherwise would be. (Writers are usually considerably better at spotting others' errors than they are at spotting their own.) Peer edits also tend to sensitize writers to the difficulties you face as an editor, and this tends to help writers understand why you impose the requirements you do.

IV. ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

This Essay suggests some of the means by which you can effectively control the efforts of your writers. As the introduction suggests, however, your own judgment is a critical factor. You need to choose carefully among the options presented here and tailor them to the organization and personalities you encounter. Above all, be both realistic and flexible.

That said, good luck! Go forth and manage!