

# CAFL Appellate Practice Tip

CAFL Appellate Panel  
Support Unit  
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## CITING TO INTERNET SOURCES IN BRIEFS

More and more, attorneys are citing to online sources in their appellate briefs. Section 18 of The Bluebook and § 2.17 of the SJC Style Manual tell us how to do this properly. First, the print source is preferred; use the print source instead of the internet source if you can. The internet source is appropriate when the document is only found online or “when a citation to the Internet would substantially aid the reader in accessing material that is not widely available in printed format.” SJC Style Manual, § 2.17.

You can cite to an online source directly. Along with the uniform resource locator (URL), include as much information as you can as it appears on the electronic source (author, title, pagination, date, and time, if available):

- Lia Kvatum, *Who Should Get to Adopt Native American Children?*, *The Wash. Post Mag.* (April 3, 2019), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/magazine/wp/2019/04/03/feature/who-should-get-to-adopt-native-american-children/>.

Note that the article above has a specific date of publication. According to The Bluebook, if there is a date associated with the web page, there is no need for a “last visited” or “last modified” indicator. But if there is no date associated with the page, you should note (after the URL) when the website was last updated or last modified. If those “last modified” indicators are also unavailable, *then* you should write when you last visited the site. This type of citation might look like this:

- Mass. Dep’t of Child. & Fam., *Foster and Adoptive FAQs*, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/foster-and-adoptive-faqs> (last visited September 26, 2019)

If there is both an HTML (website) and PDF version of the document online, The Bluebook recommends that you cite to the PDF:

- Mass. Dep’t of Child. & Fam., *Annual Data Profile (2014)*, <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/07/nj/annual-data-profile-cy2014.pdf>
- Children’s Rights Litig. Comm., Litig. Section, A.B.A., *Trauma Caused by Separation of Children from Parents: A Tool to Help Lawyers* (May 2019), [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/litigation\\_committees/childrights/child-separation-memo/parent-child-separation-trauma-memo.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/litigation_committees/childrights/child-separation-memo/parent-child-separation-trauma-memo.pdf)

Do not cite to online legal research services like Westlaw or Lexis for cases. Cite to the official reporter (unless the case *only* exists as a Westlaw or Lexis cite). Also, avoid “link decay,” which occurs when websites change and links expire. Print a copy of your online material and include it in your brief’s Addendum; otherwise, it may not exist by the time the judges are looking for it.