CAFL Appellate Practice Tip

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Don't Forget to Scrub your Metadata!

Scrub my what? Metadata!

Metadata is information buried in documents, such as the author's name, keywords, and copyright information. Tracked changes made to a document are also saved as metadata. If you have collaborated with someone on a document, metadata may even include the name of that person and their comments.

Your document's metadata might be visible after you e-file it, even if you think it is hidden. All of the tracked edits, revisions, deletions, side-box comments ("Oh, I'll bet Justice X will just love this—if he even understands it!"), and prior versions of the text may be lurking in the document. Clicking "accept all changes" or "hide tracked changes" is not enough to ensure that they won't be seen. What does this mean? It means that you might file a brief thinking that those tracked changes are gone only to discover (in one case, during oral argument) that the edits can be opened. The reader only needs to click on a little box that appears in the text. Yikes! The joy of e-filing!

How can you avoid clerks and judges seeing your metadata and potentially embarrassing edits? Get familiar with your software's "scrub" function. Make sure to scrub the document of metadata before filing it with the Appeals Court. You can scrub the document in its Word version and also after it is converted to a PDF.

The most straight-forward advice we can give is to click on your document's "help" function and search for how to scrub metadata using that particular software. There is also a lot of information online about how to scrub a document of its metadata. Click on these links for tips:

[Colorado Bar Metadata Document](#)
[Washburn Law, Removing Metadata](#)
[Wake Forest Law Mac Metadata Removal Helpdesk](#)
[Adobe Acrobat "How To" Metadata Removal](#)

Already scrubbed your electronic document of all its metadata?   Here are a few more tips:

Save the scrubbed document with a special file name so that you don't backtrack to an earlier version by mistake.

Send it to a trusted friend or colleague and ask them if anything is cropping up that shouldn't be. Sometimes the act of sending a document and opening it using different software exposes hidden metadata.

Print the document. Sometimes there are a few hidden comments or changes that you think you caught that are still lingering.