

Frequently Asked Questions: How to Get Published in the *Wisconsin Lawyer*

Introduction

The *Wisconsin Lawyer*, the official publication of the State Bar of Wisconsin, provides members with information that directly aids and improves their practice and the delivery of legal services to their clients. The magazine publishes articles on changes in the law, explores law-related trends and developments, and provides a forum for expressing ideas, concerns, and opinions that affect the practice of law in Wisconsin. In addition, the magazine includes human-interest articles about how lawyers practice law or profiles about lawyers who are interesting beyond the practice of law. The *Wisconsin Lawyer* is sent to every Wisconsin-licensed lawyer – currently more than 20,500. The magazine also is read by other law-related professionals; additional subscribers include law firms, law schools, law libraries, government agencies, and others.

1) Who makes content decisions?

The content of the *WL* is determined by the publication's editors, in consultation with the Communications Committee, which serves as the *WL* Editorial Board. How-to, practical articles of general appeal are preferred over theoretical articles. Articles discussing developments in Wisconsin law are preferred over articles focusing on federal law.

The Editorial Board is composed of 12 Wisconsin-licensed lawyers with varied practice, geographic, and publishing backgrounds. Substantive law articles are submitted to the Editorial Board and an appropriate section member for review. Articles are reviewed for timeliness, usefulness and broad appeal to readers, scholarly analysis, accuracy, and readability.

The Editorial Board and editors regularly review readership and general membership surveys, membership demographics, and reader feedback to determine whether the publication is meeting readers' needs. The Editorial Board and editors frequently discuss ideas for editorial content and direction, and ways to encourage quality submissions from readers.

The latest readership survey revealed that:

- 92 percent of respondents ranked the *WL* as one of their top three reading choices for legal information; cited as one of the top three benefits of State Bar membership
- nearly 74 percent of the respondents read at least one-half of the magazine

2) I'd like to write an article. What steps should I take?

While it isn't required, it's always a good idea to call the *WL* editors to discuss your topic before writing so that we can check our database to see if others are writing on the same or similar topic. In situations where multiple lawyers are writing on the same topic, it's their choice whether to continue; however, the Editorial Board generally will choose only one article on the topic.

The editors can guide you through the editorial process; perhaps even suggesting that you submit a query letter to the Editorial Board. A query letter should briefly describe the topic and the author's expertise in order to gauge Editorial Board interest in

a topic that might be too narrow for our readership. Although a query adds a step to the editorial process, it may save you time in the long run.

For topic ideas, consider:

- recent court decisions, particularly those that change traditional court interpretation
- recent legislation
- solutions to practice-management issues – ways to handle partner/associate compensation, unique ways to apply technology to improve workflow, and so on.

Query letters and manuscripts should be sent to the *Wisconsin Lawyer* Editorial Board in care of the State Bar of Wisconsin, P.O. Box 7158, Madison, WI 53707-7158; or by email to wislawyer@wisbar.org.

The *WL* writing guidelines (copy provided) are available on WisBar, the State Bar's Web site, at www.wisbar.org/wislawmag/guidelines.html.

3) What is the review process for substantive material?

Once a month the Editorial Board receives substantive articles submitted for publication over the past 30 days. The board completes a written evaluation of each article – ranking the article's timeliness, broad interest/appeal, practical application, originality, and readability on a scale of zero (poor) to five (excellent). A high timeliness ranking means move publication along quickly, low means that publication can occur whenever there is space. The board also recommends the article for publication as is, after revision, or not at all.

The editors determine publication based on Editorial Board input and sends a written evaluation to the author. Once an article is accepted for publication, the article is added to the editorial calendar. If the article was ranked high, publication could occur within the next couple of months; however, if its ranking was low, within six months. We try to keep the editorial calendar flexible so that we can be responsive to late-breaking information. The publication date also depends upon existing backlog of material and other editorial plans.

4) What criteria are used in evaluating articles?

The Editorial Board and editors consider the following criteria when reviewing the publication worthiness of articles:

- Will the information help Wisconsin lawyers in the practice of law?
- Is the topic timely? Will it be of broad interest to State Bar of Wisconsin members? Or, is it more appropriate for a special-interest publication, such as a section newsletter?
- Is the subject matter new, not recently covered in the *Wisconsin Lawyer*?
- Does the author present ideas in a balanced manner, rather than presenting one side of the issue? If not, is an opposing viewpoint appropriate?
- Is the article easy to understand? Does it avoid legalese? Does the author assume a level of understanding that may not be shared by the majority of readers?
- Does the article offer more than what you can find reading the statutes? Does it include helpful analysis? Solutions? Raise issues not yet resolved by the courts?

- Is the article self-promoting, including commercial services, products, or organizations?

5) Do you have other tips for getting published in the WL?

Consider these other suggestions:

- Be concise, objective. Present all sides of an issue, if possible. Illustrate points with hypothetical examples; help readers apply the legislation/decision to an everyday situation.

- All manuscripts should include an introduction and conclusion. Tell readers what the article is about early. Don't make readers guess. You won't get them through the second paragraph.

- Don't submit the article to multiple publications. We won't review what is pending publication elsewhere, nor do we get excited about reprinting an already published article. The Author Agreement requires disclosure of multiple submissions.

- Follow the writing guidelines, particularly the length.

- Don't submit articles through a PR or marketing firm, or marketing director because, to the Editorial Board, these articles generally are considered to be self-promoting. The better practice is to solicit a lawyer or another person with expertise on the subject, product, service, or procedure to submit the article. If the focus is on a service or product, include competitors' offerings and/or other viewpoints. Be sure the topic is of broad interest and is presented evenhandedly.

- Writing can be a humbling experience – expect feedback – the result will be a better product.

6) What is the policy on copyright and republication?

Authors retain copyright interest in their articles. The State Bar uses an Author Agreement in which we ask for a perpetual nonexclusive license to: 1) publish the article in the *WL*; 2) adapt or make derivative works of the article, or any portion of it, as part of any product or publication of the State Bar; 3) reproduce, distribute, publish, display, and perform State Bar versions of the article in any medium now known or later developed, including on our Internet Web site; and 4) authorize third parties to reproduce, distribute, or provide access to the State Bar versions of the article.

If the author or others want to reprint the article elsewhere, we require notification and that publication credit be given to the *WL*.