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Book Review: Legal Writing Advice: Questions and Answers

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**Legal Writing Advice:
Questions and Answers**

By Gertrude Block (Buffalo, NY:
William S. Hein & Co., 2004). 210
pgs. \$59.95. Order, (800) 828-7571.

*Reviewed by
Lisa Mazzie Hatlen*

Years ago, in my pre-law profession, I crafted an ad for a consumer-friendly health library to run on the back of the local television guide. The headline read: "If You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers." Shortly after the ad appeared, I received an anonymous letter in the mail, written in perfectly legible script, informing me that the ad headline was grammatically incorrect. There was something about "If You've Got Questions" that was not sitting well with the anonymous writer, and properly so.

These days, America Online chirps,

"You've Got Mail" (spawning a movie of the same name), and the Milk Processor Education Program wonders if you "got milk?" (spawning innumerable knock-offs of the slogan, all starting with "Got"). All of which goes to prove what author Gertrude Block says in *Legal Writing Advice: Questions and Answers*: To make these phrases grammatically correct "would elevate grammar over idiom, and idiom invariably wins that battle."

Block correctly notes that "language is a lawyer's most important tool. In fact, some have said that it is their only tool[.]" Most lawyers would not wonder if the heading "Defendant's Got No Case" is grammatically correct; however, most might struggle with whether to use *insure* or *ensure*, or *that* or *which*, or whether it is really okay to split an infinitive. Well, if you've got those questions, Block's got the answers.

Block's modest-sized book is a

collection of her "Language Tips" columns, which were published initially in the *Florida Bar News* more than 20 years ago and have since appeared in other state bar journals, including occasionally in the *Wisconsin Lawyer*. Block has organized the book into a question and answer format with topical chapters – Meaning, Etymology, Style, Propriety, and Grammar – and has included an index for easy reference to a topic or word (though, sadly, "have" and "got" are not listed). The book covers a wide range of legal writing questions. For example, you can learn whether *en banc*, *in banc*, and *in bank* all mean the same thing (they do) and make the proper choice between "as grounds therefore" and "as grounds therefor" (choose the latter). But the book also covers much in addition to legal writing. It explains the

vexing *who* versus *whom* distinction and includes an entire section on politically correct language. There's no doubt that Block knows her stuff, and *Legal Writing Advice: Questions and Answers* serves readers as a helpful reference book.

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