



Civil Litigation for Paralegals

[by Elizabeth Richardson and Milton Regan Jr.]

Whether litigation is your specialty or you are simply looking for clarification on civil issues, *Civil Litigation for Paralegals* by Elizabeth Richardson and Milton Regan (West Publishing) is a great addition to your reference library. This volume is a comprehensive overview of the litigation process, with sample court documents, detailed legal explanations, and on-the-job advice for paralegals.

The first three chapters deal with the basics: the American court system, jurisdictional issues, and evidence. Ms. Richardson and Mr. Regan do a good job of describing the issues, running down legal terms in detail. There is also a useful glossary at the end of the volume. It seems, though, that a basic knowledge of civil litigation is helpful in understanding some elements of the book. For example, various federal and state opinions are showcased in each chapter, driving home the chapter's message with a case in point. While the cases are helpful in illustrating the text, it seems assumed that the book's readers will know how to read an actual opinion.

The following chapters follow a hands-on approach, describing the litigation process step by step, illustrated by sample letters, filings, and other documents. Chapter 4 includes great practical tips for interviewing witnesses, organizing informal investigation, and analyzing claims and remedies. Chapter 8 describes the discovery process, focusing on the paralegal's role in particular. It explains such tasks as organizing documents, making deposition arrangements, and preparing deposition digests. Chapter 9 is quite useful for paralegals who perform trial preparation tasks, with tips for gathering documents, organizing the file for trial, and preparing demonstrative evidence. Chapter 10 is a great description of settlements and alternative dispute resolution.

Chapter by chapter, the book follows two sample cases through the litigation process, which is meant to illustrate how the process works in real life. The first case follows a

plaintiff through a negligence suit arising from defects in an electric blanket, while the second entails a wrongful-termination action. The authors do a great job of this in Chapters 4 through 10, where the first case is examined through almost every sample document, filing, and motion. The second case, on the other hand, receives very little attention throughout the book—its inclusion is undermined by its lack of presence, making the reader wonder why it was used in the first place. Another small glitch? The first three chapters could have greatly benefited from including the first case in more detail, which the authors do not do enough. For example, the authors' explanation of personal jurisdiction would be made even stronger by applying this remote concept to an actual case and explaining foreign legal terms through the suit. Particularly for paralegals who have to apply legal issues to real-fact patterns, the inclusion of the same case earlier in the book would have been helpful.

Civil Litigation for Paralegals is particularly strong in its explanation of law office procedures, such as filing, docketing, client communications, and billing. Ms. Richardson and Mr. Regan rightfully describe the attorney-paralegal team as an invaluable tool in any law office. However, the book's ongoing role-playing dialogue between fictional attorneys and paralegals is often skewed: it depicts attorneys as perpetually accommodating, patient, helpful and polite towards their paralegals. If only that were always true in the "real" legal world!

Each chapter incorporates an "Ethics Block;"

these sections are quite helpful because they address ethical considerations with paralegals in mind. For example, the authors talk about the ramifications of paralegals giving legal advice, the importance of timely research by paralegals, and ways paralegals may help attorneys avoid conflicts of interest. Chapters conclude with great review questions and practical application exercises, but there do not appear to be any "right" answers listed in the book.

Overall, *Civil Litigation for Paralegals* proved to be a great reference tool, with clear examples of civil litigation documents, pleadings, and filings. It is a straightforward, helpful, and fairly easy read about this often dense and tough subject.