

# FORUM

*noun* [C]; *fôr-əm*

an occasion or a place for talking about a matter of public interest



*Greetings from Charlotte!*



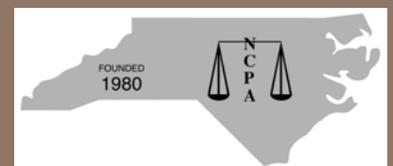
*Another fall, another turned page.*

-WALLACE STEGNER

FALL 2021

## *In this issue:*

- N.C. Rep. Christy Clark, paralegal
- How to work with an investigator
- Changing careers, from teacher to paralegal
- Writing tips from a journalist & this issue's guest editor



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# *Message From the President*

**Beverly K. Moore,  
NCCP**

## **HELLO NCPA!!!**

2021 is zooming along. I mean, it is already August! It was just January weeks ago, right? It's after the "4th," and to me that means summer is winding down and autumn is around the corner. I know, technically it does not arrive until September 22, but I like to think the humidity is on its way out of here!

While we were unable to hold the NCPA Annual Meeting & Seminar in person in 2021, **thanks to Huseby, and especially Hillary Creech**, we were able to hold an awesome virtual seminar. One advantage was that we were able to have a couple of speakers attend that may not have otherwise been able to present if we had been in person.

A big **THANK YOU** and **JOB WELL DONE** to Crystal Robinson, NCCP, for securing the speakers and CP approvals from NALA and the N.C. State Bar. If you were not able to attend, catch the video replays – the Constitution Amendment videos are great!

During a meeting the other day, it was mentioned that paralegal organizations are struggling to survive in North Carolina. This saddened me. I am thankful for NCPA's group of volunteers that are working tirelessly to keep NCPA moving forward. Each and every one of these individuals are busy with work and everyday life, but they find time and energy to devote to this organization. **THANK YOU, I APPRECIATE YOU** more than I could ever express!

**NCPA could use more dedicated volunteers.** If you are interested in helping to lead NCPA or have ideas you want to share, please reach out. My inbox is always open 😊!

Enjoy the rest of 2021 and stay safe my friends,

Bev

**SAVE THE DATE:** *2022 Annual Meeting & Seminar*



*March 25 & 26, 2022, in Cary.*

*See you there!*

# *Message From the COB*

**Heather Padgett,  
NCCP**

## **Happy Summer!**

I hope everyone is finding time to enjoy the sunshine and the salt water, or whatever makes you happy when the temperatures are soaring. As Van Morrison tells us, “Smell the sea and feel the sky. Let your soul and spirit fly.” For me, some days it is the beach, and other days it is cranking up the A/C and pretending the outside does not exist.

On those days when the heat and humidity drive me inside, I have been taking time to read more and I came across two blogs that may be of interest:

[The Researching Paralegal](#) - there are new posts about once a month and the topics range from current events to tech updates, to tips for specific legal areas. There was an interesting post highlighting the need for clarity in appellate work that would be great for someone looking to dip their toes into that field. It includes a sample brief for the California Court of Appeals based on the case of Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

[My Paralegal Place](#) - there are posts a couple of times a month with e-discovery and legal app tips, career and education advice, and various templates and downloads.

Just a word of caution for any new paralegals out there – these bloggers do not work in North Carolina, so always be cautious with any templates or references. I would treat them like Wikipedia – somewhere to start if you have no idea, but it should not be your only source.

On to NCPA matters – your Board of Directors and Executive Committee are continuing to work on long-range plans, as well as preparing for next year’s Annual Seminar. Fingers crossed for in-person in 2022!

We would love to have more involvement from the membership, so if you have questions or ideas for 2022, get in touch, either by email or through the new e-list feature on NCPA’s website. If you are new to the e-list feature, there is a helpful “how-to” document that can be found on each board.

Oh, and one last thing, if you're more of a looking-for-something-to-do-while-sitting-in-the-A/C type, someone sent me a link to that website we all use (rhymes with Schmamazon) and apparently there is a collection of paralegal coloring books – including one with the title “I Used to Have A Life But I Decided to Be a Paralegal” and another promising entry called “How Paralegals Swear.” (I fear there may be some NSFW content there, so fair warning!)

As always, if you have questions or concerns, feel free to reach out. We love hearing from you.  
Heather Padgett, NCCP

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## NCPA appreciates the support of its Sustaining Members!



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# NALA Update

## Kaye Hare, ACP, NCCP

*NCPA NALA Liaison*

On July 22, 23 and 24, 2021, the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) held its Annual Conference @ Home. There were thirty-two sessions offered over three days, giving participants an opportunity to earn up to eleven continuing education credit hours.

The conference was scheduled to be held in Louisville, Kentucky, but the pandemic prevailed once again, and the Association elected to hold the conference virtually.

I attended eight sessions and enjoyed them all. Highlights of the sessions I attended included an excellent presentation on Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legacy, crime scene investigating, and immigration issues.

The conference also offered opportunities to network with other paralegals through a variety of public meetings and panel discussions. I attended the Affiliate Associations meeting on behalf of NCPA. During the meeting the Board recognized those associations celebrating milestone anniversaries and NCPA was recognized as one of only 5 associations in the country celebrating its 40th anniversary. Way to go NCPA!

The conference was a huge success with over a thousand attendees.

Next year, the conference is scheduled to take place July 12 – 14 in Phoenix, Arizona.

Hope to see you there,  
Kaye



**SAVE THE DATE!**



*2022 Annual  
Meeting & Seminar  
March 25 & 26, 2022  
in Cary.*

*See you there!*



**Many of our annual seminar sessions are available online, on demand,  
for one hour of CPE credit each.**

**Find registration information on our website: [NCparalegal.org](https://www.ncparalegal.org)**



# *Communication is Key When Working with Investigators*

*BY Tonya Phifer, President and Sr. Investigator at JPPI, LLC*

I have been in business as a private investigator for 16 years and licensed for 18 years. Fortunately, I have excellent communication with my clients due to my determination to build solid relationships with them and their staff. Over the years, I have learned a lot about the legal field and recently begun taking paralegal classes at Central Piedmont Community College because some of my clients do not have paralegals or legal assistants. Beyond that, I want to understand legal methodology to better assist my clients, even though they may have a legal assistant in their offices.

In my classes, I am not surprised to hear instructors repeatedly saying that the number one complaint from clients is a lack of communication from their attorneys. I witness this often, and I would like to tell you something they will not tell you in paralegal school, “Paralegals also have to step up their communication game when dealing with both clients and investigators; it’s on them to bridge that gap. And when there is not a paralegal that responsibility falls on my shoulders.”

My firm, JPPI, in Charlotte, is well-trusted in the legal community throughout North Carolina. I typically focus on federal cases, even though my staff and contractors work on various types of cases. We are constantly working to build relationships with our attorney clients but also with their paralegals. It is good to be trusted, but trust is something you build over time. I must trust what information paralegals give to me, and in turn, they and their attorneys have to trust what I am giving back. Building trust begins with excellent communication.

When an attorney’s office is not responsive, their partners, the client, and the client’s family begin calling my office instead. I am relatable to the client, but I am also professional with the attorneys and paralegals. I was recently in a meeting with a client and their family, and everyone was tiptoeing around the reality that I am easier to reach than the attorney, who is the only person in this scenario that can give legal advice, which is what they desperately needed. Again, paralegals can help bridge that gap with clients and other legal professionals like me.

When paralegals communicate with private investigators, it is vital to communicate with clear and effective messages, with only facts and what the attorney needs or wants. Please do not leave anything out; opinions are not needed. We are fact finders. I find the

*Continued ...*

information and give it to the attorney to determine what is and is not essential; it is not for anyone else to determine what is critical. We are essentially just task managers and fact finders.

If I call you, please answer, or return my call ASAP or send me a text. Paralegals must make themselves available so we can be productive because a lot of our work is time-sensitive. I may be “standing in it” right at that moment, so I need to speak to someone to get the information that the paralegal has access to, that I do not.

Responsiveness goes both ways. There have been times when paralegals call me to refresh their memories about something related to a case because maybe their attorney is in a trial during that week. I make a point to make myself available to them, too. Sometimes it is easier for paralegals to ask me questions they may not feel comfortable asking their attorneys. In situations like that, I always follow our conversation up with an email summarizing our discussion and copy the attorney. We all must stay on the same page, and the paralegal needs to run any and everything we talk about past their attorney. I do not want to be perceived as giving legal advice, I don't feel comfortable doing it and I wouldn't do it.

We all must remember we are on the same team, the client's team. Our work is meant to benefit them; the more effectively and efficiently we communicate, the better the cases will run for all involved.



*Tonya Phifer is the president and Sr. Investigator at JPPI, in Charlotte, a company she started 16 years ago in her garage with the help of her grandfather. She has a B.A. in Criminal Justice from the University of North Carolina Charlotte and is working toward a Paralegal Technology diploma at Central Piedmont Community College. She began her career in the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's office. You can reach her via her website: [JPPIservices.com](http://JPPIservices.com).*

*Hear her speak at the Metrolina Paralegal Association's fall seminar, Oct. 22. It's virtual!*

**Don't  
Forget!**

## **N.C. Certified Paralegal Exam Dates**

**Fall Exam - October 16, 2021**

**Application Deadline - August 13, 2021**

*Keep up with certification news at [NCcertifiedparalegal.gov](http://NCcertifiedparalegal.gov).*

LICENSE

# STAY IN THE LOOP ON LIMITED LICENSING

Get the scoop on the [N.C. Bar Association's blog](#), and watch members of the group present their case to the Bar's Subcommittee Studying Regulatory Change via [YouTube](#). (Review their presentation [here](#).)

Connect with N.C. Justice for All via [LinkedIn](#).



North Carolina Justice for All Project

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On Jan. 22, 2021, the Justice for All Project (JFAP) submitted a limited license proposal to the NC Supreme Court and the NC State Bar to allow qualified paralegals and law school graduates to offer limited legal services to the public as an access to justice initiative.

As an update, JFAP received an invitation to appoint representatives to sit on the NC State Bar's Subcommittee Studying Regulatory Change. The subcommittee will formulate its recommendations on the initiatives the State Bar should pursue including ideas such as a limited license for paraprofessionals, initiating a court navigators program, and the liberalization of the rules on the unauthorized practice of law.

Keep up  
with with  
the  
N.C. Justice  
for All  
Project



## A Paralegal in the General Assembly

Meet N.C. Rep. Christy Clark (D-Dist. 98, North Mecklenburg).

As the first paralegal to be elected to the General Assembly, she assumed office on January 1, 2019, and left on December 31, 2020, having lost her election despite serving through some of the worst days of the pandemic thus far.

In Charlotte, Christy is known as a mother of five and an avid pet lover in addition to being a respected elected official and wife to Charlotte attorney Chris Clark.

You can learn more about her stance on the issues via her website [ChristyClarkNC.com](http://ChristyClarkNC.com).

**Here is the Forum's Q&A with her from earlier this summer:**



**NCPA:** Why did you choose to become a paralegal?

**CC:** I was at a transition in my life where I was divorced and needing to find a place to work and a job that I might like. I had always wanted to be a paralegal, so it was a natural progression for me to go to paralegal school.

**NCPA:** What did you do before you became a paralegal?

**CC:** I used to work in logistics in transportation and quality assurance.

**NCPA:** You said it was a natural progression to become a paralegal. Why?

**CC:** When I was in college I worked as a temp, and I worked at a law firm basically as a legal assistant – an assistant to the paralegal – and I enjoyed it. We were doing discovery and it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed being part of that team and learning about the case that was at hand and doing research on the issues.

**NCPA:** Are you working as a paralegal today?

**CC:** I am not, actually. Well, I sort of am. I work for my husband (Chris Clark, of Clark Law in Charlotte) but only do special projects for him. Obviously, when I was running for office and serving I didn't have time to be a full-time employee for him. Now, I just do special projects for him, especially for clients I have a relationship with from before I ran for office.

**NCPA:** What prompted you to run for office?

**CC:** Looking at the landscape of politics in North Carolina, I saw a lot of the races for the General Assembly (NCGA) were running unopposed. I felt like – and, I believe this is true no matter which side of the aisle you're on – no person should run unopposed. When it got closer to the filing deadline in 2018 and the maps that were drawn made it possible for it to be a competitive race, I decided that was something I wanted to be a part of.

**NCPA:** When we last talked, you mentioned you were considering running again. Can you talk to us more about that?

**CC:** Yes; because of the census last year, the maps will be redrawn again here. It will depend on whether or not the map for District 98, or 99 – or a new district, is competitive. We know – and this has been true for hundreds of years in this state regardless of the party in charge, the party in power gerrymanders the district. So, I am waiting to see if it will be a competitive map. If it is, I will be on the ballot. If it isn't, I will be in a support role for someone else who is runs in that seat even if they know they can't win. (She expects new maps to be drawn in November.)

**NCPA:** You were the first paralegal in the NCGA, right?

**CC:** The first certified paralegal, that's right.

**NCPA:** What was that like?

**CC:** Being a paralegal definitely helped me. It helped me in my advocacy work before I went to the General Assembly because I understood legal terminology and working with lawyers. Then, that same thing carried over into service. Then, I served on the Judiciary Committee. Since I had been a paralegal, it was absolutely easy for me to understand.

**NCPA:** It sounds like you enjoyed being part of the NCGA.

**CC:** Yes, very much so; I did.

**NCPA:** Can you give us some insight into what's enjoyable about it?

**CC:** There's a lot. What you see in the news is always the controversial and negative stuff. But, that's not what goes on every day. Every day in the NCGA, 99 percent of the bills pass with a unanimous vote – we all agree on what it says. It is a place where you can help people. When you get there, you learn about all of the issues North Carolina is facing, whether it's education or water quality or benefits for people who have epilepsy, really any issue that's important to folks that might need some support from a statute or legislation. That's what is fun and enjoyable, to help people and to help change laws so our state is more efficient and more good work can be done and more people can be helped. That's where my heart is, helping people – I love that part of it.

**NCPA:** In October, you're going to be speaking at the Metrolina Paralegal Association's Fall Seminar on the topic of why paralegals should pay attention to the legislative process. (Side note: All are invited to attend!) Can you give us a brief on why it's so important for citizens and paralegals to pay attention to the NCGA?

**CC:** For citizens, in general, the NCGA makes the laws that impact your daily lives, whether it's traffic or your kid's education or your grandparent's care in an elder care facility, or any aspect of your life – your water quality, how much your electricity costs, all of that is determined at the NCGA. It is really important to pay attention to, and know who represents you and what they're doing. As a paralegal, one of my roles – our office represents the Marine Commissions in the area, so for us, the Marine Commission is statutorily formed through the NCGA and I have to pay attention to what they are doing because they are always changing laws for water quality and water use for our lakes. That may be true for anything, no matter what area of law you're in. We've changed laws around personal injury, around small business and small claims court and more, things that relate to what paralegals do every day.

**NCPA:** Since things have been so difficult over the past many months with the pandemic, I wonder if you would like to end with some advice for paralegals or those who are looking to become paralegals?

**CC:** I would say to keep an open mind regarding the type of law firm where you might want to work. There may be an appeal to go to a large law firm where it feels like their making a lot of massive change, but there may also be a small boutique law firm that specializes in a particular type of law. Those types of firms can have a more concierge feel and you get to know the clients more. It becomes personal, like a family.

### *Contest*

**The contest this quarter is an orange leaf hunt. There are hidden leaves like the one below throughout the Forum. The first person to submit the correct total amount of orange leaves -- not counting the newsletter's cover page! -- in this edition of the Forum will win a prize. Email [info@ncparalegal.org](mailto:info@ncparalegal.org) with your answer. You will be notified if you are the winner, and winners will be announced in the next edition of the Forum.**





## From Teacher to Paralegal

*BY: Sarah Hayden*

From the time that I declared my major to be English, people have asked me if I planned to go into teaching. I did not. Despite having a number of incredible educators in my life, I had no affinity for the profession. I told people I didn't like kids and that I didn't want to spend all of my time grading papers. I genuinely never even considered the idea of teaching.

In truth, I never had much of a plan for after my education. I had always intended to get my PhD and then figure it all out from there. But six years ago I was finishing my master's degree and burned out on school in a way I had never thought possible. I knew I could not go on to a PhD and I simply did not know where I was going to go instead. People continued to suggest teaching and I laughed at the idea. I wanted to do something glamorous, like write the next great American novel or be editor for an elite publishing company – never mind the intensive steps to get into those positions that I had definitely not taken – teaching is not glamorous and there isn't an educator out there who wouldn't laugh at the person who suggested it was.

I went on doing other odd jobs until my husband and I moved to North Carolina and I began tutoring students until I could find some more steady work that might turn itself into a career. To my surprise, I enjoyed tutoring. I enjoyed working with the children and seeing them light up when they got something and saw their hard work pay off. I started the process of becoming a teacher in North Carolina, knowing it wasn't the perfect fit but also knowing that it was the only thing I had done that made me feel I was contributing something valuable to society, which was, ultimately, what I wanted to do.

For five years I taught high school English. I battled through the early mornings and the behavior issues, searching for those “aha” moments in my students. Hoping to see the positive changes I wanted so desperately to make. By and large, though, they were hard to find and hard to see. Teaching is an incredibly noble profession and one that requires a dedication and commitment to the students that surpasses just about anything else. It is a job best served by those who are passionate. They are the ones who make the most difference and the ones who can see even the faintest glimmers of progress that few others can.

I was not one of these special people, but while I was teaching, I discovered a passion for advocating for the rights of my students and my colleagues. I loved researching the laws and policies that surrounded the decisions being made about education (without the input of the educators). I was fascinated by the application of the laws and policies and by the differences subtle changes in language could make. And I remembered being told a thousand times over that I should be a lawyer (I happened to be a rather argumentative child) and suddenly a job I could make a career of occurred to me. I wanted to study law.

Ultimately, I would like to attend law school and become an attorney, but for now, I am working to complete my paralegal certificate. I have loved my classes and have reignited my passion as a student. I find my textbooks engaging and interesting. My 31st birthday just passed, so I am coming to this revelation later in life than I might have liked, but my experience as a teacher has been invaluable in my search for the right career.

I just began a new position at a real estate law firm. My first week has shown me that I have a lot to learn. This fact could have caused me dismay at how far I still have to go, but instead it invigorates me. I am so excited to learn, not just the “hows,” but the “whys.” In a way, I see this as being what the law is all about. We must constantly ask ourselves why and if the answer isn’t good enough, we need to find a better one. What I have enjoyed so much about learning about the law is knowing that it will be constantly changing and evolving to meet the needs of the people it serves. This constant metamorphosis is inspiring and daunting, but for the first time, I know I’m on the right professional track and I am so excited for each next step.



*Sarah Hayden is a Paralegal Technology student at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte. She is also the most recent first place winner in the Metrolina Paralegal Association's essay scholarship contest.*



INTERVIEW WITH  
JOURNALIST &  
COURT REPORTER

# Rhiannon Fionn-Bowman

WORDRAKE

*This article is reprinted with permission of [WordRake](#).  
Rhiannon Fionn-Bowman, NCCP, is the guest editor for this issue of the Forum.*

Journalists excel at asking good questions and finding the story, which are the foundation of good writing. Good questions will reveal to you the story yearning to be written. Knowing your story will help you plan and focus your writing. And with that focus, you'll know what's important to your audience and deliver on deadline.

These principles also apply to legal writing. In this interview with award-winning independent investigative journalist turned court reporter and paralegal, Rhiannon Fionn-Bowman shows us how we can write more compelling legal documents—and deliver them on time—when we approach legal writing like journalists.

### **What is your role and how are you involved in legal writing?**

I am an N.C. Certified Paralegal, a Digital Court Reporter, and a retired award-winning investigative journalist. I recently started a freelance paralegal business, Legal Word Trade, and am currently working remotely for various clients.

### **What can journalism teach us about legal writing?**

A lot of the core principles are the same: Do thorough research, never submit your first draft, don't take people's words out of context, be fair and honest, and remember that good writing requires good editing—so you might as well read through your work one more time before you hit send, just to be safe. Better: Have someone else read your work before you submit it.

*Continued ...*

### **What can journalism teach legal professionals about witness interviews and fact-finding?**

Allow some space for people to answer. Too often, I notice attorneys becoming impatient or frustrated, and they “step on” the witness’ testimony. That’s aggressive and puts the witness on the defensive. Someone in that position will be less forthcoming and less likely to add extras that you don’t even have to ask about because they will readily volunteer to fill an awkward-feeling pause. And, especially with virtual proceedings where talking over each other can lead to a record full of “inaudibles,” give people a chance to answer your questions, and purposefully leave gaps between the answer and your next question.

As far as fact-finding goes, give yourself a chance to brainstorm what information you need, where it might be located (or who owns it), and how you will get it. Ten minutes of planning might save you much more time later. While being unafraid to ask one more question is usually a good thing, you also have to know when to cut your research, and that might depend entirely on your client’s budget.

### **What can legal professionals learn from journalists about working with editors?**

The first rule of effective communication is Know Thy Audience. Who are you writing for, and what are you trying to convince them to do? Don’t marry your words, i.e. don’t take edits personally. Ever. The editing process should be about clarity for your audience first, then polishing for perfection. It’s all about effectively communicating to your audience. Your ego must take a back seat. And don’t use several words—or giant words—when a more concise or simple word will do.

### **What instincts, habits, or approaches from the journalism world are you now applying in law?**

Trust, but verify. Use plain language. Ask open ended questions. Practice active listening—and it is a practice. And learn to keep a straight face no matter what’s going on around you.

### **What is your writing process when you must write to length and deadline?**

I begin early with a notes file of some sort where I can begin stashing research, emails, and anything else that is related—this includes a document with pertinent links, descriptions of those links, and often screenshots of the webpages in the event something changes.

On the day before your deadline, you should be polishing for perfection not pulling an all-nighter. I read the work out loud to myself and sometimes to someone else (who is patient enough to endure a lot of pauses and re-reading) more than once to check the pacing and understandability of the text.

And I spend a lot of time thinking about what I am going to write and any information holes in need of filling—in other words, what questions do I still have? If you wait until the last minute those questions will likely remain unanswered, but if you begin as soon as the assignment arrives, your brain will have time to stew on the subject and genuinely think through any roadblocks or counterarguments you might encounter.

*Continued ...*

It is also imperative for me that I have a silent, uninterrupted block of time to write. Because my husband also works from home and is a loud talker, like me, we have both invested in noise-cancelling headphones. If I need to focus, I will also turn off all notifications on my computer, phone, and social media. If the doorbell rings I will not answer. “No interruptions” means no interruptions; you cannot expect yourself to think clearly—and writing is thinking—if your train of thought is being constantly disrupted.

### **What are your top 3 tips for helping legal professionals better plan their writing to meet deadlines?**

Start early, even if it’s a simple brainstorm session on a notepad. If your work is forever screeching in at the last minute, you’re doing it wrong and causing too much stress for yourself, everyone around you, and everyone involved. When you begin working on a writing project as soon as you get it, you are able to give your work enough time to breathe. I guarantee if you take a break from your writing you will find changes you’d like to make when you come back to it. And begin the habit of giving yourself a deadline that is actually the day before your work is due. On deadline day, you’re doing a final read through and polishing, or you’ve moved on to working on something else.

### **What is the importance of writing a captivating lead? How do you write one?**

It’s everything if you want to grab someone’s attention in this frantic world. “Begin with the end in mind,” as the advice goes from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen Covey. Tell the reader what your conclusion or argument is up front, then build your argument and supporting evidence around that and repeat your conclusion at the end.

### **What are the qualities of a good story? How do you use storytelling in legal writing?**

Details, details, details. As the oft-repeated writing advice goes, “Show, don’t tell.” What sounds, smells, flavors, feelings, and sensations can you include? Use direct quotes to help further your story and avoid including quotes that do not advance the story. And, please, be brief.

### **What 3 problems do you see legal professionals facing most frequently in writing that could be solved by applying advice from the field of journalism?**

Their own egos, procrastination, and not being fully prepared when they sit down to write. Bonus: Lack of editing help—it’s always good to get another set of eyes on your work. Seriously, when a lawyer says to me, “I don’t need editing help,” I know that’s a lawyer I don’t want to work with, because every writer needs editing help, even the best of the best. In fact, I assert the best are such good writers because they have editing help and/or are very good about editing their own work multiple times before publication.

### **What has journalism taught you about identifying the right source or the right expert?**

That you should always ask the experts you do find who they would ask for additional information or what resources they might rely on for a particular topic. Then review those resources yourself and make/save copies of everything you can for your own reference. As much as you are able, know the answers to your questions before you ask them. And if you genuinely don’t understand something, ask the expert to explain in plain language, then give them as much time as they need to adequately explain. Assumptions are no help to anyone.

*Continued ...*

## What are your tips for getting interviewees, experts, and witnesses to talk?

Be kind. Be patient, but persistent—make sure they answer the question you’re asking. Listen carefully. Give them plenty of time to answer—pauses are okay. If you give them the chance, your witness will probably fill the silence with more information than you asked for originally. If you appear upset or frustrated, you’ve already lost. Take some deep breaths before you begin an interview and take breaks if you need them. The more centered and calm you are, the more centered and calm your witnesses or interviewees will be. Remember: Most people never speak to a journalist or an attorney, so allow some easy questions at the start to shake off any jitters and demonstrate that you’re a reasonable person simply seeking the truth.

## Journalists say: “Look for the rhythm of the story.” Is this true for law? How do you apply it in legal writing?

Absolutely. No one wants to read a boring document. If you’re being redundant with your word choice or littering your work with run-on sentences full of jargon and \$3 words, you will bore your audience to sleep or leave them irritated. Use active and vivid language that is on point—don’t use three words or \$3 words when a simple word will do. Mix your text with both short and long sentences. Break up paragraph-long sentences whenever possible. Read your work out loud to yourself or someone else to check your pacing.

### About Rhiannon Fionn-Bowman, NCCP

*Rhiannon Fionn-Bowman is a freelance N.C. Certified Paralegal, communications consultant, and digital court reporter. She was recently elected to the Metrolina Paralegal Association’s board as the 2nd VP of Programs. She is also serving as guest editor of the N.C. Paralegal Association’s quarterly newsletter, the Forum, in August 2021. Rhiannon is a retired award-winning independent investigative journalist and filmmaker—her work in film and journalism focused mainly on coal ash (the waste product that remains after coal is burned to generate electricity) and the greater energy industry. You can follow Rhiannon on Twitter at @RhiFionn and @LegalWordTrade. Her website is legalwordtrade.com.*

*Thank you for allowing me to be your guest editor for this issue of the Forum and highlight voices from Charlotte. If you would like to serve as guest editor, contact [info@ncparalegal.org](mailto:info@ncparalegal.org).*

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