Top Nine Things Student Law Clerks and New Attorneys Should Remember from Their Legal Research and Writing Classes

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1. Your reader wants an answer. 
   
   Provide one even if it must be qualified.

2. Clarity is a must. 
   
   Your reader does not want to guess at what you mean to say.

3. The question is never as narrow as it seems. 
   
   Do not assume that the question you have been asked is the only one that needs to be asked.

4. A question almost always begets more questions. 
   
   Answer all the questions you can anticipate before they are asked.

5. When researching unfamiliar areas of law, start with secondary sources (treatises, encyclopedias, law review articles, practitioner manuals, etc.). 
   
   Westlaw and Lexis have extensive secondary source libraries.

6. Give your project time to percolate. 
   
   Example: For a one-day project, consider the initial list of issues and conduct research in the morning; go to lunch and reconsider the list of issues; when you return, conduct additional research on any newly identified issues; draft analysis; proofread analysis; step away from the project for one to two hours or overnight; return to the project and proofread analysis again; then, turn in assignment.

7. Don’t ask every question that pops into your head. 
   
   Keep a running list of questions. Challenge yourself to find the answers without having to ask your supervisor. For those few material questions that remain after you have spent substantial effort trying to answer them, arrange for a short “check-in” meeting with your supervisor. During the meeting, update your supervisor on your progress and ask all of your remaining questions at one time.

8. If you are asked to make corrections or edits to one part of a project, more than likely, other parts also will need corrections or edits. 
   
   Make conforming corrections throughout a single document and consider whether related documents also require corrections.

   
   “Everything” means EVERYTHING, from simple emails to complex contracts.