Legal Versioning is a standardized, readable, and computable way to number versions of legal forms, notices, and policies.

Legal Versioning gives drafters a concise way to tell users of old versions how to review new versions when they come out. Legal Versioning also enables computers to understand and compare version numbers, so software can automate rote document management tasks.

## Summary

Versions are written as numeric codes, as for computer software: 1.0.0, 1.2.0, 2.0.1, and so on.

The first number is the *edition* number. The second number is the *update* number. The third number is the *correction* number. Version 1.7.3 denotes the third correction to the seventh update to the first edition.

For each new version of a project, drafters increase one of the three numbers, depending on the changes they made:

* Increasing the *edition* number tells users of earlier editions to review top-to-bottom to make sure the new version still meets their needs. New editions suit blank-slate rewrites and broad changes.
* Increasing the *update* number tells users of earlier updates to the same edition that they can review just the parts of the new version that changed, such as by preparing a redline. Updates suit versions that add new sections or concepts.
* Increasing the *correction* number tells users of that edition and update that they should always prefer the new version. Corrections suit typo fixes, formatting errors, and other small mistakes.

Drafters can also number working drafts of forthcoming editions, updates, and corrections by putting a draft number after a dash at the end. Version 7.0.0-3 denotes a third draft of a new seventh edition. Version 3.4.0-1 denotes the first draft of a fourth update to a third edition.

## Editions

The first number is the edition number. Publishing a version like 9.0.0 followed by a higher-numbered version like 10.0.0 tells users of 9.0.0 or any earlier edition to review the entire text of new 10.0.0 to decide if it meets their needs.

Example:

Jane publishes a form nondisclosure agreement as 1.0.0. Later, Jane completely redrafts the form from scratch and publishes her new version as 2.0.0.

Bob used 1.0.0 with business clients for several months. On seeing new 2.0.0, he understands he should read 2.0.0 top to bottom to see if it will also work with his business and clients.

## Updates

Drafters often update terms to add or remove material, leaving most language unchanged. Versions like 1.1.0 or 10.15.0 describe these changes.

Publishing a new 10.1.0 tells users of 10.0.0 they should compare 10.0.0 to new 10.1.0 and review what was changed in order to see whether the new version still meets their needs. But users of old 9.0.0 should review new 10.1.0 top-to-bottom.

Example:

Adam publishes a form product-returns policy as 7.0.0. Super Mart reviews 7.0.0 and begins using it in stores.

Adam later changes 7.0.0 to replace language about cash refunds. Since the rest of the policy remains the same, Adam publishes his newly revised policy as 7.1.0. Super Mart’s team sees new 7.1.0, compares it to 7.0.0, which they’re already using, and reviews the new language on cash refunds. Since Super Mart prefers the old language on cash refunds, so they stick with 7.0.0 in their stores.

## Corrections

Some changes don’t add, remove, or change meaningful pieces of language, but merely correct spelling, structural, or other technical errors. Versions like 3.0.1 or 7.11.3 describe these changes.

Publishing a new 10.0.1 tells users of 10.0.0 that they should definitely use the new 10.0.1. Of course, users may always *choose* to review and decide for themselves. But the use of a correction number allows drafters to communicate when changes fix errors, rather than adjust scope or intended effects.

Example:

Professor Miller publishes a privacy notice for medical patients as 3.3.0. Doctor Waller begins using 3.3.0 in his practice.

Professor Miller later spots a spelling error. She quickly corrects it and publishes a new 3.3.1. As soon as Doctor Waller sees that a new 3.3.1 is available, he begins using it, wondering why he hadn’t spotted the typo himself.

## Drafts

Drafters often create working drafts before publishing final versions. Versions like 8.0.0-1 or 2.1.5-3 describe these drafts.

Publishing a new 13.0.0-1 tells users of 12.0.0 to keep using 12.0.0. The new edition is only a working draft, not recommended for use in practice. If a later 13.0.0-2 comes out later, drafters working together to finalize 13.0.0 know to start from 13.0.0-2 rather than the old 13.0.0-1.

Example:

A community advocacy group is preparing a form community foundation charter. The lead drafter prepares an initial draft, 1.0.0-1. After a round of comments, the group produces 1.0.0-2.

Bob wants to start a community foundation for his local neighborhood. He sees the advocacy group’s 1.0.0-2 online. Since he does not see a final 1.0.0 without a draft number, he contacts the advocacy group to ask about the status of the form project.