

## Signature Block Question

Why would you put either JD or LLM in your signature block? I have opposing counsel in a case and it says "Bill Jones, JD, LLM" The LLM is in Estate Planning. We are in litigation.

I don't get it! I especially don't get the JD part. Doesn't that get implied in the "I AM A LAWYER" part of this!

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I like Juris Doctor. Law school is the same as med school basically right?

Clark V. Stewart, Alabama

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Some people respond to credentialism. The only people I've seen who put J.D. in their signature block are people who have graduated law school but have not yet passed the bar exam (law clerks to other lawyers, or people awaiting bar exam results). I assume it's to make sure no one can accuse them of masquerading as a licensed attorney when they haven't yet passed the bar exam.

Ryan Phillips, South Carolina

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This echoes the "Esq." discussion, really. For me.

Titles and honorifics can serve two purposes:

1. To inform.
2. To honor.

I will almost always put an "Esq" after the name of an attorney I'm addressing in her or his professional capacity. (And it grates me to no end that Stamps.com won't let me put a period after that.) I never put "Esq." after my own name.

In my letterhead (and this signature block), I list both degrees because I want people to be aware that I have that extra "qualification," and just putting "MBA" would be confusing if I relied on "Attorney at Law" to imply I had a law degree.

TECHNICALLY, "JD" means you've received a Juris Doctor degree. Note that not all lawyers have JDs; some very old lawyers may still have a Bachelor's degree in law (LLB). And, in some states, you can (still, I think; in the past you could in several states) be licensed to practice without attending law school, by reading and interning under a judge, then sitting the bar exam.

TECHNICALLY, "Attorney at Law" means you're licensed to practice law; it is conceivable that a professor who doesn't practice might not maintain licensure, though it seems relatively rare. More often, you may have a JD and choose not to be licensed for whatever reason. I know at least one paralegal here in town who has a JD but who opted never to sit the bar exam.

LLM is ambiguous, arguably. You can get an LLM (a Master's degree) without a JD (a Doctorate), though most often holders of LLMs either 1) hold it as a specialization *after* procuring a JD, or 2) after acquiring the right to practice law in another country, to document a familiarity with American law. Thus, it's very reasonable to put "JD, LLM" to indicate a specialization, because "LLM" standing alone does *not* imply a JD.

And, FWIW, the way I learned it:

- An associate's degree indicates general education, often with some degree of *technical* specialization.
- A bachelor's degree indicates a basic mastery of study, with the ability to explore a specific subject area in some depth. (That's the point of a "major.")
- A master's degree indicates mastery of study, and mastery of the study of a specialized area and deep study and scholarship on a particular subject within that field of study, as demonstrated by the publication of a thesis, and its defense. It may or may not be followed by growing scholarship and specialization.
- A doctorate degree indicates mastery and deep study of a specialized area, including original scholarship, demonstrated by the publication of a broad and deep thesis and its defense, or extensive examination by a board of specialists, to a degree that qualifies one to lecture, teach, or otherwise publicly propound on the subject. It may or may not be followed by growing scholarship and specialization.

YMMV,

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr., North Carolina

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In Argentina, I am called Dr. Silva and so are all the lawyers. I have never been to medical school. I faint if I see blood. My argentine law degree diploma reads "Doctor of Jurisprudence."

People with PhDs are known has having completed a doctorate degree, but yet are not called Doctors at all.

I think we should be called Doctors here in the USA too. Doesn't MD stand for Medicine Doctor? (well in the Latin form)

Veronica Silva, Illinois

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Thanks Rick. I get why you put the MBA. But an LLM in Estate Planning is not going to make me go "Oh wow. This guy knows how to litigate." And the JD just looks weird.

It would be like me writing CPCU after every letter I send. Sure, it could matter to 1% of the world, but 99% of the people getting letters from me don't care. I use it when necessary.

Jonathan Stein, California

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When I want the recipient to know that I mean business, I might put ESWS or EAWS after my name.

Michael Wright

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I'm no expert on the subject, but, apparently, customs vary in South America. A friend from Peru (who now lives here) has a Bachelor of Law degree from the University of Lima. She practiced there before moving here.

(I don't think anyone calls her a Bachelor.)

James S. Tyre, California

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You can be a lawyer without a JD. There are a few such persons.

Roger Rosen, California

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I've always wanted to put ass kicker

Hieu Vu, California

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A benefit of longevity is that prior discussions are recalled on similar topics. Practices vary around the country.

Personally, I don't care what I get called in general, so long as I get paid in a particular matter. Formalities are more appreciated elsewhere.

From what I recall of prior discussion, in some areas of the country formal usages would be an insult if omitted. An example would be the use of "Attorney Stewart" for example (which has never happened here).

In some areas, the use of JD means you did not pass the bar, and I have seen Esq. used similarly. From discussions here I know that usages vary around the country so I don't worry about it too much.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas

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Love it!!!

Amy J. Holzman, Minnesota

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Hmmmm, I was thinking about putting B.F.D. after my name. Whaddya think?  
Lol

Randy Birch, Utah

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I would say more for marketing purposes than anything else.

Daniel X. Nguyen

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I hate titles and never use them.

Gregory Zbylut, Esq. JD, BS, MBA, CPA, BFD Certified Specialist in Taxation Law,  
State Bar of California

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Lately people are calling me "Mr. Roger." [Roger is my first name.] Is it just me? Is this now a thing? Is it cultural [Hispanic? I'm not.] My last name [Rosen] is not that hard to pronounce.

Do you have the same experience?

Roger M. Rosen

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I see it in use sometimes. However, when they do it to me, no name similar to past TV shows result. :):):)

Darrell G. Stewart

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We've been meaning to say something about those cardigans. And that tendency to break out into "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood."

Here in central Mexico, I'm always encountering Mexicans who insist upon calling me "Rose." I've decided it's a battle I cannot win, having decided that a goodly lot of Mexicans go by their middle names instead of their first, and I figure that they just don't get that "Rose" is my surname and not my middle name.

But I couldn't get over a Texas judge, otherwise well-mannered, who would insist upon calling me Rose. When I told her that she could feel free to call me by my first

name, since we were all on a first-name basis in ABA activities, she said "OK, Rose." She just did not get it.

jennifer rose, Mexico

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I get "Hannah" a lot. Even when I sign a e-mail, "Cynthia", or answer the phone, "Kauai Estate Law, this is Cynthia", they still say, "yes, Hannah, I've been meaning to call you..."

I get that Hannah is a common first name (as is Rose), but when you've clearly enunciated your first name, what do they think, the "Cynthia" is my middle name or something? I know they're not listening, but sometimes it is just weird.

Cynthia Hannah-White, Hawaii

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This is a chance to vent, but after I mention an idea inspired by Darrell Stewart's remark. I add, if you need an excellent attorney in San Antonio, Texas, or a referral, contact Darrell Stewart.

Mr. Rogers. Seems to me a good CLE skit could be put together by presenters doing a take-off on Mr. Rogers to teach a couple of important points. Would take some work but I think it would be a hoot, and more important, educate the audience.

And oh, the real reason I post is this topic of signature block gives me a reason to vent.

With a high percentage of posts I am tempted to complain that the posting lawyer did not set out his/her complete contact information. Two off the top of my head who have properly done so are Darrell Stewart and Rick Rutledge. Pardon if I have left you out.

Many, many posts in Solosez totally fail to provide complete contact information. In many cases I believe the posts would get more, better responses if they contained complete contact information.

If you are one of those, please consider including complete contact information in your posts. Thanks in advance.

Rob V. Robertson, Texas

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It may be cultural. I had a client from Brazil that always called me Mr. Phil.

Phil Taylor, Massachusetts

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Totally cultural. It's very common in Latin America to say, for example, "Sr. José" or "Sra. María." And it's totally fine and respectful.

Vilma Preta

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I get the "Mr. Rick" thing a lot. I recognized it as a Latin thing, but it also seems to be a Southern thing; older kids in the neighborhood call me "Rick," but the little ones (and their parents, when speaking to the children about me) tend to use "Mr. Rick."

But also, clients who insist on calling me "Richard," though I don't recall introducing myself to anyone as "Richard" since, oh, 1986. As a child, being "junior," I went by my initials ("R.J."), but people inevitably remembered that you went by initials, but couldn't seem to remember which ones. JD, JB, JR, DJ, JL... (And for some reason, they seemed to remember the J more often than the R.) So, when I graduated and moved from Michigan to California, I adopted "Rick."

I sign letters as "GARBLE", but my signature block says "Rick Rutledge". I realize my signature BLOCK says "Richard J. Rutledge, Jr.," as does my firm name (which uses the long form was a tribute to my father who died just days after I passed the bar, and was too ill to come to my graduation; though he wanted me to be a lawyer since I was an undergrad 35 years ago, he never got to "see" me as a lawyer).

I sign my e-mails "Rick." I answer the phone, "Rick Rutledge." And some people never seem to catch it. (Oddly, too, some don't seem to connect "Rick" and "Richard," and ask to speak with "Richard Rutledge" when I answer "Rick Rutledge".) My domain name is "RickRutledgeLaw.com" and my email address is Rick@RickRutledgeLaw.com. Maybe they assume "Richard Rutledge" is my father, which is why I call myself 'Rick'? (Alas, my father went by "Dick.")

Yet, I remain, yours truly,

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr.,