



How to make a TOL Brief

TOL BRIEF

Legal explainers in 5 min or less

A. Choosing a Topic

Step 1 - Propose a Topic

If you are interested in recording a *TalksOnLaw (TOL) Brief*, send us an email at briefs@talksonlaw.com and include the following information:

- Name and contact information;
- Area of expertise and a link to your firm website, if you have one; and
- Topic and title of your proposed brief(s). We encourage you to submit more than one proposed topic.

What makes a good Brief topic?

- A good *Brief* topic is one that the general public or a large group would find intriguing or relevant (for example, a law applicable to California residents or relevant to homeowners).
- Your *TOL Brief* will be BRIEF. The final product will be about 2-5 min. The topic should be specific enough to be covered in that period of time.

Best practices in selecting a topic

- You should have real world experience or credibility on the topic to inspire confidence.
- Think about the topics that are newsworthy or related to a contemporary issue.
- Think of explainers with unexpected/non-obvious answers:
 - Good example: Is it illegal to buy a fake handbag?
 - Bad example: Is it illegal to punch your neighbor?

More examples

- Good example 1: Can you be arrested for drinking in public in NY?
- Good example 2: Who can invest in a startup?
- Bad example 1: Historical evolution of criminal law in the US
- Bad example 2: Explaining Rule 506 Reg D

After you submit a topic, a member of the TOL team will review and get back to you. We may respond with, “Great topic, go for it!” or, “That’s cool, but would you consider changing the scope in the following way?” We may even say, “You are welcome to do it, but just so you know, we have a few other briefs on that topic so you’ll have some competition.”

Step 2 - Define the Scope (Recommended)

You’ve picked a topic but want additional feedback? We recommend that you send us an outline to save yourself some uncertainty. The outline can be a rough overview - it need not be a transcript (though that is also welcome).

Example of rough outline:

Topic: *Who owns your sperm after you die?*

- Interesting fact about the issue
- Issue presented as a question
- Basic rule(s)
- Concrete examples or real cases
- Exceptions or wrinkle in issue
- Conclusions

Once our team clears the topic and/or outline, you can feel pretty confident that you’re well on your way to making a strong *TOL Brief*. Now it’s up to you to perform.

B. Filming your TOL Brief

We strive to make every aspect of *TOL Briefs* as professional and high quality as possible. That includes not only high video production value to maximize viewer enjoyment but also your ability to deliver a message in the most authoritative and entertaining way.

If you want to film your own *Brief* or you know a professional who can film it for you, please read the **Production Guidelines** below carefully.

If you are based in NYC, TOL can assist you in filming your *Brief*. To discuss our rates and reserve a filming session, please include the request and your location in your initial e-mail to briefs@talksonlaw.com. Unfortunately, we can only accommodate filming requests in Manhattan at this time.

C. Submitting your Footage

You can submit the unedited raw footage to us via one of two ways:

1. Email briefs@talksonlaw.com the footage via Google Drive, or
2. Mail a USB Drive or SD Card to the following address:

TalksOnLaw,
379 W Broadway, #551
New York, NY 10012

In order to post-produce, publish, and promote your *Brief*, we need to first receive your signed Release. You can find an electronic version of the *Release* [here](#).

D. Post-Production of *Brief*

You may select one of two options for post-production:

1. Your own post-producers
 - If you have access to highly skilled post-producers, you may opt to use them.
 - Please read the *Production Guidelines* carefully prior to filming. We will not publish any *Briefs* that do not conform with our standards of quality and format. See *E* for an important note on publishing.
2. TOL production (**recommended**)
 - We charge a fee to cover the costs of post-production. Please email us at briefs@talksonlaw.com to inquire about fees.
 - We highly recommend that you use TOL to post-produce your *Brief* to ensure that it meets our standards of quality and format.

E. Important Note on Publishing and Promotion

Your submitted video must follow the *Production Guidelines* and conform with *TOL samples* (see number 1 of the *Production Guidelines*). TOL reserves the right to publish and remove the *Briefs* at its sole discretion.

Production Guidelines

1. Format

The total unedited footage should not exceed 10 minutes. The final edited video must be 2 to 5 minutes.

You can refer to these *TOL samples* as references while filming:

- [Is there a right to record the police?](#)
- [Faux fur crimes](#)
- [Who owns your sperm after you die?](#)

2. Performance

Refer to the *TOL samples* for performance cues in front of the camera. Here are a few guidelines:

- The audience includes lawyers and nonlawyers. Keep the language simple, straightforward, and easy to understand. Tips:
 - If you use acronyms, explain the abbreviations.
 - Explain legal doctrines or terms of art.
 - Keep the legal jargon and legalese to a minimum.
- Look straight into the front camera when speaking.
- Avoid excessively moving or changing position while recording. We want to make sure your entire body remains in the frame. Hand movements, on the other hand, are highly encouraged.
- Avoid reading from your notes. Feel free to have them near you for reference but keep them out of the frame while filming.
 - We know your primary job is not acting so we don't expect you to memorize a 5 minute presentation and perform it flawlessly all in one take.
 - If you need to take small breaks during filming to refresh your memory, do so. We can edit those out in post-production.
- If you need to rephrase a sentence for any reason, restart the sentence from the beginning. This will help our post-producers edit your *Brief* seamlessly. In fact, we recommend you restart a sentence from the beginning if you stumble over words or misstate a fact, or if there's a disturbance in the background.
- In the interest of making your *Brief* relevant for as long as possible, avoid language that may date the footage, e.g. "today," "yesterday," "last month," "next week," etc.
 - When you mention a recent case or event, either state the date (e.g. "in October 2016, the Supreme Court decided a case...") or keep the language general (e.g. "recently, the Supreme Court decided a case...").
- If you mention case law, state the name of the case and the year of the decision, e.g.. "*Roe v. Wade, decided by the Supreme Court in 1973*".
 - No Blue Booking! Remember, you're speaking to an audience, not writing a memo.

- For best results, record more than one take of the interview. That way, we can put together the best *Brief* by making sure your best takes are showcased.

3. Lighting Needs

Keep in mind that you are lighting for a video production. If you can, consult with someone who is familiar with video production. Some important notes:

- Artificial or natural light may both work.
- Be cognizant of where the light casts shadows.
- Make sure the light isn't shining directly into the camera lens.
- If you are shooting in natural light, be mindful of the changes in brightness that can result from passing clouds.
- Be mindful of any reflective surfaces that may be distracting for the viewer. If you wear glasses, test how the light reflects off your glasses.
- Assess the lighting and video quality prior to filming your entire brief. Test film 10-15 seconds and review the footage to ensure you don't have any of the above-outlined issues.

4. Audio

Good audio is a very important part of a high quality video. If the audio quality of your footage is poor, there is little we can do to salvage it. Recordings with poor audio will not be featured on TalksOnLaw. Tips:

- In order for your voice to be picked up clearly, you will need a recording device or a microphone close to you. A great and simple solution is a lavalier microphone or a boom microphone that plugs into your smartphone. Feel free to go high end, but there are inexpensive options starting from as low as \$15, like [this lavalier mic](#) or [this boom mic](#), both available on Amazon. The built-in microphone on your current smartphone will not be sufficient.
- Test your microphone before recording. Adjust the placement of the boom mic or lavalier mic on your person to make sure your voice is picked up clearly and that the lavalier mic is not rustling against your clothes or hair.
- Avoid noisy jewelry like dangly earrings or necklaces that can interfere with the mic and sound when you move.
- If you hear noise disturbances (e.g. ambulance sirens and elevator dings) while recording, stop and restart from the beginning of that sentence.

5. Cameras

Every space is different and will require unique camera placement based on the room configuration. Guidelines for camera placement:

- The ideal set consists of 2 cameras, one positioned directly in front of you (into which you'll be speaking) and one positioned at an angle (see *TOL samples*). If you have only one camera available, it should be positioned in front of you.

- Professional camera equipment is ideal, but even the latest versions of smartphones like the iPhone or Samsung Galaxy have cameras with capabilities to shoot high quality videos. If you are filming with your smartphone, we encourage you to buy a small tripod/stand (like [this one](#) for iPhones).
- You are welcome to film with additional cameras. Make sure all the cameras you are using produce similar quality footage to ensure seamless editing.
- If you have any questions, please consult with us on the equipment before filming.

6. Post-Production

- TOL Briefs are engaging and dynamic short videos.
 - To that end, all *Briefs* include graphics or animations, b-roll footage, and music.
 - *Briefs* are generally 2-3 minutes in length, and always less than 5 minutes.
- If you choose to have TOL post-produce the *Brief*:
 - Send us the raw, unedited footage of your recording.
 - Send us images, graphics, or b-roll to which you have the right to share and distribute.
- The edited *Brief* will be published by TalksOnLaw, which includes, but is not limited to, posting on its website, social media channels (YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), or affiliated channels, at its sole discretion.