**DRAFTING A COMPLAINT**

**RULE 10: Form of Pleadings**

* Captions; names of parties
* Every pleading must have a caption with the court’s name, a title, a file number and Rule 7(a) designation (that is, what type of pleading it is)
* The title of the complaint must name all parties

**Body of Complaint:**

1. Why there is SMJ, PJ, and Venue
2. Facts stating why you should get relief
3. And the type of the relief requested (monetary, etc).

**RULE 8. General Rules of Pleading**  
(a) Claim for Relief. A pleading that states a claim for relief must contain:  
(1) a short and plain statement of the grounds for the court’s jurisdiction, unless the court already has jurisdiction and the claim needs no new jurisdictional support;  
(2) a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief; and  
(3) a demand for the relief sought, which may include relief in the alternative or different types of relief.

**RULE 10(b) FORM OF PLEADINGS:**

* Address the form of pleadings and requires numbered paragraphs, each limited as far as possible to a single set of circumstances. Though it does not require the identification of claims.
* However, small errors of form are unlikely to be fatal; indeed, it could well be reversible error for court to penalize the pleader for minor errors.

1. Drafting A Complaint
2. purpose of complaint –
   1. notice to defendant
   2. also in combination with answer by defendant, in which parties agree to what is at in dispute, it narrows scope of discovery and trial
      * 1. efficient
   3. also allows the defendant and court to identify actions that can be dismissed pre-trial/discovery
      1. wrong forum
         1. should be evident in plaintiff’s allegations of jurisdiction
      2. failure to state a claim
         1. court can often tell from facts as alleged by plaintiff in complaint whether they add up to a violation of the law
         2. can assume that everything the plaintiff says it true
      3. inadequate evidentiary support…?
         1. if there is inadequate evidentiary support for the plaintiff’s factual allegations (the action by the plaintiff is frivolous), then it would be wrong for the plaintiff’s action to proceed
            1. Plaintiff must justify putting the defendant through the discovery process and trial
            2. Have enough of a showing to justify those burdens on the defendant and court
         2. but can you tell that from the complaint – ?
            1. remember a complaint is a piece of paper – the court examining cannot see what stands behind it
3. Code Pleading however did use pleading standards to try to weed out frivolous actions pre-trial
   1. at the time there was only a pleading period and trial – no discovery period
   2. if an action could not be weeded out at the pleading period you would go to trial
   3. There was a demand in code pleading to plead detailed facts
      1. no bare legal conclusions – had to alleged facts from which those conclusions followed
         1. called “ultimate facts”
         2. could not allege that the D negligently drove
         3. have to allege how the defendant was negligent (eg texting)
      2. but also should not allege evidence (eg the witnesses you had)
   4. These strict systems were intended to prevent people from bringing frivolous allegations to court
   5. but there were two main problems with this approach
      1. first, specificity of allegations is a poor indicator of evidentiary support
         1. you can be specific just by lying without evidentiary support
         2. and you can be general even though you have evidentiary support
         3. a process that looks to the support (the evidence) rather than a proxy (the words in the complaint) is better
      2. second – demanding specificity can be unfair to the plaintiff because the evidence needed to be more specific may be in the hands of the defendant or unfriendly third parties
         1. can’t get that evidence until the discovery period, but will never get to discovery period if you have to be very specific in the complaint
   6. in addition under code pleading the focus is a cause of action
      1. the plaintiff must allege separately his causes of action
4. Modern Approach
   1. Much more generous about pleading standards
   2. all that is required is “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief” FRCP 8(a)(2)
   3. Conclusory allegations allowed
      1. Ex: “defendant negligently drove a motor vehicle against the plaintiff”
      2. offered in a Form as an example of an adequate allegation
      3. not saying specifically how the defendant drove negligently
      4. but what if the plaintiff is vague because he has no evidence of negligence…?
         1. We screen these out not through pleading standards but in discovery
         2. after discovery it will be clear if the plaintiff had inadequate evidentiary support when making his factual allegations
         3. and then can bring R 11 sanctions and summary judgment
   4. also Pleading need not specify a cause of action
      1. Don’t need “magic words” of the elements of the wrong
      2. focus is on a claim, not a cause of action
      3. a claim is a transaction or event that is the reason for the demand for relief
      4. that said, you will have to justify why you state a claim if D brings a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim
5. Procedure for addressing the 3 things that can be wrong the (non-jurisdictional) factual allegations in a complaint under the Federal Rules system
   1. Legal insufficiency – factual allegations do not add up o a violation of the law
      1. How does a defendant bring this up?
      2. Motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim (or can be put as a defense in your answer)
      3. generally the plaintiff will have allowed to amend complaint once to try to state a claim
   2. inadequate specificity
      1. Are the factual statements sufficient to satisfy rule 8(a)(2)?
      2. Not enforced through failure to state a claim
      3. Enforced through a motion for a more definite statement
      4. P then amends to be more specific
      5. If he fails, the court “may strike the pleading or issue any other appropriate order” the order can include a dismissal
   3. inadequate evidentiary support for factual allegations
      1. this is addressed generally after discovery through…
      2. Motion for sanctions for rule 11 violation
      3. Motion for Summary Judgment
         1. On the basis of evidence found during discovery, no reasonable jury could find for plaintiff
         2. this stops the case before trial
6. EXAMPLE of difference between legal insufficiency, inadequate specificity, and inadequate evidentiary support:
   1. Defendant intentionally engaged in contact with the person of Plaintiff Michael Green that was harmful or offensive, causing damages.
      1. What is wrong with this?
      2. It is inadequately specific under 8(a)(2)
         1. What kind of damages?
         2. When/where/how was Professor Green wronged?
            1. what was this harmful or offensive touching…?
      3. It does state a claim – all the elements of battery are there
   2. On Wednesday, September 27, 2017 at 2:41 p.m., Defendant intentionally failed to praise Plaintiff Michael Green for Plaintiff’s exemplary lecture on civil procedure, in circumstances in which praise would have been reasonable, thereby causing Plaintiff substantial psychological distress.
      1. what is wrong with this?
      2. It is specific enough for 8(a)(2) –
         1. It gives defendant proper notice of what he is accused of
      3. problem is legal insufficiency - it fails to state a claim
         1. this claim does not add up to a violation of the law
   3. Over the period of June 30, 2016 to September 26, 2017 Defendant Henry Taylor operated a moon base which emitted mind rays directed at Plaintiff Michael Green, allowing Defendant to read Plaintiff’s thoughts and causing Plaintiff to experience severe headaches and ringing in the ears.
   4. This is adequately specific under 8(a)(2)
   5. it also states a claim (for battery)
   6. Only issue is that Green has no evidentiary support (we know this because it did not actually happen…)
      1. We can’t actually screen this out in the pleading stage
      2. The wording of the complaint is adequate, so the only way to stop it from proceeding is after discovery
      3. then will bring rule 11 sanctions, and motion for summary judgment
7. Why can’t you always get to discovery? – just slap a complaint together that states a claim and is adequately specific
   1. You can be sanctioned under a Rule 11
8. Why have this system? Why not rely on pleading standards to screen out actions with inadequate evidentiary support?
   1. too hard to tell from language of complaint what level of evidentiary support is behind it
   2. Sometimes the evidence you need is in the hands of the defendant – there is no way you could get it without discovery
      1. We want to allow cases like this to go to discovery so we can see if there is evidence of a wrongdoing
      2. Balancing act between plaintiff’s right to bring suit and defendants interest in not having to contest frivolous lawsuits
9. It is useful to distinguish two types of challenges of the plaintiff’s compliant that are made in the cases on pleading in Glannon
   1. *First type*: D is not claiming that the P does not have evidentiary support for the allegation  
      - D is worried that what is alleged does not add up to a violation of the law (some element of a cause of action looks like it is missing)
      1. Example: assume that under the relevant law there is no strict liability for product defects, only negligence liability
      2. P alleges that D manufactured the product “improperly”
      3. Does the P fail to state a claim or not – how generous should we be in reading the allegations?
      4. This is what Conley addresses – it is also what is going on in the Dioguardi and in Doe v Smith
      5. Conley standard - complaint should not be dismissed for failure to state a claim unless it appears beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief
         1. the language “unless it appears beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts” is misleading
         2. the point is give a very generous reading – try to find a claim instead of finding no claim
         3. This may not be the best way to go about this – cases that fail to actually state a claim may get through to discovery phase
   2. Second type: D thinks P does not have evidentiary support for the allegations  
      - all the elements for a cause of action are alleged (there is no Conley problem) but the D thinks that P lacks evidentiary support for an allegation (that is why the P lacks specificity)
      1. Defendant argues that the allegation is vague because there is no evidence
      2. If there was evidence, the pleading would be specific instead of vague
      3. This is what is going on in Twombly and Iqbal
10. Dioguardi v. Durning
    1. Court is very generous in a reading of a rambling complaint and finds that it does state a claim
11. Doe v. Smith
    1. two minors – one films them having sex and shows to students at school
    2. suit brought in federal court
    3. Same situation – the pleading does not explicitly state a claim but the court of appeals gives it a generous reading and finds that it states a claim – another example of Conley rule
    4. Lots of state law violations listed
    5. There is just ONE federal claim – wiretapping statute
    6. DCt dismisses it for failure to state a claim – failed to allege an interception
       1. then dismisses state law claims
       2. does not dismiss them for lack of SMJ
          1. they have supplemental jurisdiction, because of the federal wiretapping action
             1. even a federal action that fails to state a claim can “arise under” federal law and so be the federal hook for supplemental jurisdiction
       3. the state law actions are instead dismissed according to a discretionary rule of abstention (we will discuss it later) – the state law actions have supplemental jurisdiction but ct chooses to dismiss them because they would be better entertained in state court
    7. Ct App reverses
       1. The statute prohibits intercepting “wire oral or electronic communication”
          1. Court assumes parties were likely talking while being filmed at some point – and that it had sound recording capacity
             1. so there was an oral communication
             2. if it becomes clear in discovery that it doesn’t the will fail to state a claim
          2. filming was an interception of oral communication
          3. court of appeals also concludes that interstate commerce could be involved because could have involved the film being sent by email
             1. again the complaint read generously