ETC's Best Practices Series:
Creating Effective Issue Codes

Issues codes are as unique as the cases for which they are used and the team members who will be using them. Some attorneys use a numeric system of coding issues, others prefer an alphabetic system. Both examples are shown at the bottom of this page.

A few tips about issue coding:

- Keep it simple!
- Stay with the more global issues. Don't get lost in the small stuff. Do you have more than 20-30 issues? Look again and try to logically combine them. One of the biggest failures of issue coding is that the team members don't understand how to apply the issues to the data. If limiting issues to no more than 30 feels too constricting, remember that you can always use keywords in the text of a Note or in a field called "Keywords" in the database.
- Some attorneys develop jury instructions at the beginning of their cases in order to maintain focus on the target. If you're one of these, use those jury instructions as a guide to setting up the issues. If you don't develop your jury instructions early in the case, you still might want to keep that kind of a target in mind when developing your issues list.
- Keep your issues aligned with the legal strategy in your case BUT orient them towards facts. For example, don't identify an issue as Sherman Act §1 or your staff may not recognize it as a relevant issue when they are coding an agenda for a suspicious trade association meeting. (Remember – they're often dealing with the minutiae!) Instead, at least one of the issues for that agenda might be "Price-Fixing: Meeting of Competitors."
- Make sure the issue codes are entered in the Issues Lookup table accurately. Proof them as you enter them because correcting them later on, after hundreds of documents and notes are added to your case, is for advanced users. And if the entries in the Issues table are not correct, you'll miss them when searching.
- Lookup tables can be sorted either by the Shortcut column or by the Issue column. Simply click on the column heading in the Issues Lookup Table.

Two Samples of Issues Codes Using Numbers

The benefit to the second example (using 100, 200, etc.) is the ability easily insert issues if necessary without disturbing the alphabetic or numeric order.

Shortcut	Issue
001	001: Anticipation of Costs
002	002: Billing History
003	003: Breach
004	004: Contract Negotiations
005	005: Post-contract Billing

Shortcut	Issue
100	100: Breach
101	101: Failure to meet deadline
102	102: Failure to perform quality control
200	200: Damages
201	201: Punitive

Two samples of Issues Codes Using Alphabetic Shortcuts

The benefit of using alphabetic prefixes is that, if they are configured well, you don't need to print a list of the issues in order to know what the shortcuts are. Remember: the shortcuts must be unique in the table, so if you use the alphabetic method, make sure you use enough characters to help you avoid duplication.

Shortcut	Issue
AOC	Anticipation of Costs
BH	Billing History
BR	Breach
CN	Contract Negotiations
PCB	Post-contract Billing

Shortcut	Issue
BOC	Breach of Contract
BOC-D	Breach of Contract – Failure to Meet Deadline
BOC-QC	Breach of Contract – Failure to Perform Adequate Quality Control
DAM	Damages
DAM-PUN	Damages - Punitive

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