

ETHICS OF CRIMINAL
APPELLATE PRACTICE

2024

*ROBERT O. DAWSON CONFERENCE
ON CRIMINAL APPEALS
Austin, Texas*

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I. THE SCOPE OF THIS PAPER

This paper presents selected rules of professional conduct that – in my admittedly subjective view – are particularly relevant to criminal appellate lawyers. These rules can be found in their entirety in the Texas Government Code, Title II, Subtitle G, Appendix A, Article X, § 9. The paper also refers to case law which interprets the rules and related concepts, and to the commentary to the rules.

II. TEXAS STANDARDS FOR APPELLATE CONDUCT

The Supreme Court of Texas and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals adopted Standards for Appellate conduct on February 1, 1999. “The Standards were created to educate the Bar about the kind of conduct expected and preferred by the appellate courts.” Edward L. Wilkinson, *If One is Good, Two Must Be Better: A Comparison of the Texas Standards for Appellate Conduct And The Texas Disciplinary Rules Of Professional Conduct*, 41 ST. MARY’S L.J. 645, 645 (2010). The Standards do not alter or amend the current rules state in the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct. Furthermore, the Standards themselves not that it shall not be permitted to use the Standards as a basis for motions for sanctions, civil liability or litigation. *Id.* at 646.

The Texas Standards for Appellate Conduct are to provide guidance to appellate practitioners in their interactions with clients, opposing counsel, and the courts to encourage professionalism in appellate courts. The Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct, however, are more broadly aimed at discouraging behavior which substantially undermines justice in all courts. “While only violations of the Disciplinary Rules are subject to sanction by the State Bar, violations of the Standards will undermine a lawyer's credibility and persuasiveness with courts and fellow counsel.” *Id.* at 699.

III. Competence

A. The Rules

Preamble: Terminology

"Competent" or "Competence" denotes possession or the ability to timely acquire the legal knowledge, skill, and training reasonably necessary for the representation of the

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