

# Finding Information about Cases and Court Opinions

## What is case citation?

Cases are published in volumes called "case reports", "report(s)" or "reporter(s)". Every reported (published) case has a unique citation. As long as you have the citation, you can find any case published in a standard case reporter. A case citation usually contains the case name, the name of the reporter(s) where the case is published, the volume number(s) of the reporter(s), the page number, and the year the case was decided. The following is an example of a case citation:

<i>Miranda v. Arizona</i>	384	U.S.	436	(1966)
Case name	Vol. No.	Abbreviated name of reporter	Page No.	Year of the decision

## How can I locate a case citation?

There are many ways to locate a case citation. The following four ways are commonly used:

### 1. Citations in the encyclopedias

Encyclopedias are a good place to start to get case information on a specific topic. Includes general legal encyclopedias:

- *American Jurisprudence* (abbreviated Am. Jur.) (Call Number: KF105.A53)
- *Guide to American Law* (Call Number: KF156. G77)
- *Corpus Juris Secundum* (abbreviated C.J.S.) (Call Number: KF105.C6 1936)
- *West's Encyclopedia of American Law* (Call Number: KF154.W47)

The citations of the cases are given under the relevant entry (most of them in footnote form). These encyclopedias are compiled in an alphabetical order; you may start searching with the index and remember to try terms under different synonyms.

### 2. Case notes that follow statutes

If you are searching a case that has interpreted a relevant statute, summaries which contain a case citation are given at the end of the entry of the state's code (*Code of Alabama 1975*; Call Number: KFA 30 1975) or the United States Code annotated version (*United State Annotated*; Call Number: KF62 1927 W65).

### 3. Case Digest

Digest is a publication reprinting in a subject arrangement. The summaries are grouped under alphabetically arranged topics and the topic-related case(s) and the citations are given. Several digests are available in our library.

- *West's Federal Practice Digest*, 2d, 3d, & 4<sup>th</sup> editions (Call Number: KF 127.W48)
- *Southern Digest* (Call Number: KF 135.S81S64)
- *West's Alabama Digest*, 2d edition (Call Number: KFA47.1A2)
- *Campus Research Database* (<http://www.jsu.edu/depart/library/graphic/articles.htm>)

### 4. Shepard's Case Citators

Shepard's case citators are often used by researchers to study and verify the current authority of decisions relevant to their research. Citations to the case may look like this:

-473- -----	Page Number
In re Pierce v. Alabama-----	Case Name
1974-----	Year of the decision
(296So2d218)-----	Parallel Citation
419US1130	
42LE830-----	History references and citations
95SC816	
292Ala467	
293Ala776	Other treatment citations by the Alabama
294Ala664	Courts
294Ala671-----	
Cir. 10	Other treatment citations by the federal courts
649FS1018-----	

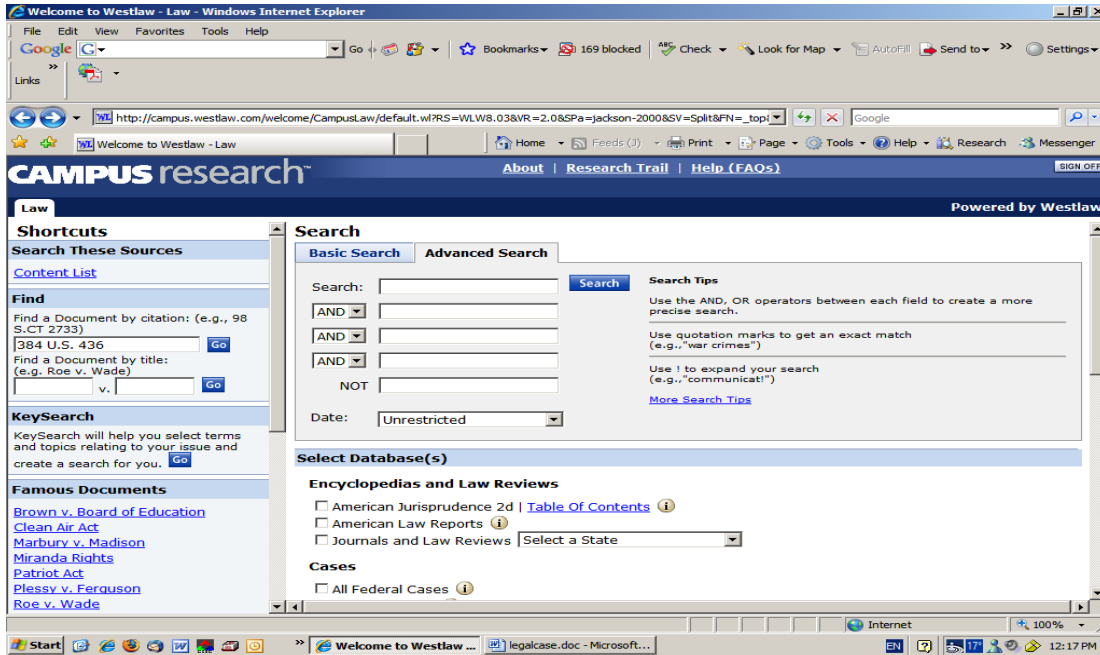
**Where can I find cases?**

You can find cases in print or in electronic format in our library; you can also find cases through the Library subscribed database (Campus Research), or Internet. Details of the print/electric sources and the URLs of the case finding web sites are given below:

- *United States Reports* (U.S.)  
Official Supreme Court reports. Covering cases and decisions from the year 1790 to present. Compiled chronologically. Decisions first appear in slip opinion form, then on an official advance sheet (called the "preliminary print"), and finally the bound U.S. Reports column.  
Print: Vol. 259- Present (Call Number: KF101.U5, Location: 10th Floor)  
Campus Research database at: <http://www.jsu.edu/library/resources/>  
Internet Access: Findlaw.com
- *United States Supreme Court Reports, Lawyer's Edition* (L.Ed.)  
Commercial Supreme Court reports. Covers all Supreme Court decisions since the court's inception in 1790. Compiled chronologically.  
Print: Vol. 1- Vol. 67 (Call Number: KF101.U52, Location: 10th Floor)  
Campus Research database at: <http://www.jsu.edu/library/resources/>  
Internet Access: Findlaw.com
- *United States Supreme Court Reporter* (S.Ct.)  
Commercial Supreme Court reports. Covers Supreme Court cases since 1882. Compiled chronologically.  
Print: Vol.52-Vol.110A (Call Number: KF 101.S9, Location: 10th Floor)  
Campus Research database at: <http://www.jsu.edu/library/resources/>  
Internet Access: Findlaw.com
- *Federal Supplement* (F. Supp.)  
U.S. District Court cases and decisions. Includes decisions of the U.S. Court of International Trades cases. Compiled chronologically under each district court.  
Print: Vol. 176-Vol.949 (Call Number: KF 120. F4, Location: 10th Floor)  
Campus Research database at: <http://www.jsu.edu/library/resources/>
- *Federal Reporter Second Series/Third Series* (F.2d/F3d)  
Lower federal cases and decisions of the U.S. Courts of Appeals from 1880. More emphasis on the U.S. temporary emergency at present. Compiled chronologically under each circuit court.  
Print: F.2d: Vol. 176-Vol.999, F.3d: Vol. 1- Vol. 104 (Call Number: KF 105.F42, Location: 10<sup>th</sup> Floor);  
Campus Research database at: <http://www.jsu.edu/library/resources/>
- *Alabama Reporter* (Ala.)  
Report cases argued and determined in the Supreme Court of Alabama. Compiled chronologically.  
Print: Vol. 97-Vol. 687 (Call Number: KFA 45.A22, Location: 10th Floor)  
Campus Research database at: <http://www.jsu.edu/library/resources/>
- *Alabama Appellate Court Reports* (Ala. App.)  
Report cases argued and determined in the court of appeals of Alabama. Compiled chronologically.  
Print: Vol. 16-Vol. 57(Call Number: KFA 47. A2, Location: 10th Floor)  
Campus Research database at: <http://www.jsu.edu/library/resources/>

**What is Campus Research database? How can I get access to it?**

Campus Research database is a subscribed online research service that provides enrolled JSU students with access to a comprehensive collection of law-related resources: all federal and state cases including U.S. Supreme Court cases; statutes and regulations; legal encyclopedia; law reviews and journals. You can access to Campus Research database according to the following steps: 1. Go to Library homepage: <http://www.jsu.edu/library/index.html>  
2. Click on "Find Articles" link on the left.  
3. Select "Campus Research (Westlaw)" under "Databases by Title" by clicking the drop down box, click on "GO"  
4. Select "I Agree" on "Campus Research" agreement page, then click on "Go" button, and you will see the following "search page screen":



5. Type your citation in the box under "Find a Document by citation" according to the style of the example, click on "Go" button on the right; your case will be shown as:



### What's an opinion of a court? How to read the opinion of a court?

When a judge hears a case and arrives at a judgment, an explanation or analysis of the reasoning behind the decision is frequently written. The analysis, called an opinion, is then published in the "Reporter" for the court. Significant decisions are published also in other Reporters.

When several judges are sitting on the court that hears the case, the decision of the court can be unanimous, split, or determined by a simple majority. A judge is assigned to write the opinion if the court, but any participating judge may write a separate opinion of his own. He may agree with the majority on the most points but disagree on others, elaborating on points of agreement and disagreement. He may agree with the majority decisions for reasons other than those given in the majority opinion. He may disagree with the court's decision and write a dissenting opinion of his own, or he may disagree without writing an opinion. Dissent in the courts appears to have increased over the years. Frequently, the reader will have to glean the relevant facts, issues, and holding from the body of the opinion. To facilitate this, Reporters generally print a brief summary of the case, called "Headnotes", prior to the actual text of the court's opinion. These headnotes are not authoritative, but merely reader aids.

A case opinion appearing in a Reporter will usually contain the following general categories of information: title, facts, issue, decision, decree.

- Title: Usually the title includes name of litigants. The full citation contains the volume and the page of the volume in a book of law or a Reporter. If there was an appeal, the preface to the case will usually report the court from which the appeal came and the dates the case was argued and decided. The attorneys who argued the case, and others who assisted in preparing the briefs are noted. The justice delivering the opinion is also reported.
- Facts: Facts include the circumstances, events, or occurrences as they actually took place and can also be physical objects as they actually exist or existed. A fact is an actual and absolute reality as distinguished from fiction or error. It is an event. The parties may have disputed the facts, as well as the law, so the "facts" given in the opinion are the facts as determined in a hearing or trial. If the facts are not in disputes, the court will usually say so.
- Issue: An issue is the disputed point or question of law to which the parties in an action have narrowed their claims or allegations, and upon which they are desirous of obtaining the decision of the proper tribunal. When the plaintiff and defendant have arrived at some specific point or matter affirmed on the one side and denied on the other, they are said to be "at issue".
- Decision: The court makes a judgment or decree in settlement of a controversy submitted to it; it is an authoritative answer to the questions raised before it. A decision of the court is its judgment; an opinion is the reason given for that judgment.
- Decree: A decree is the resolution for the actual litigants which is pronounced on hearing and understanding all the points in an issue, and determining the right of all the parties to the suit, according to equity and good conscience. Decrees in equity are either final or interlocutory: a final decree fully and finally disposes of the whole litigation leaving nothing that requires further judicial action; an interlocutory decree is provisional or preliminary decree which is not final and does not determined the suit but directs some further procedures preparatory to the final result. The interlocutory decree is pronounced by the court for the purpose of ascertaining matter of law of fact preparatory to a final decree.

### Can I find case related articles or law reviews by using Campus Research? Are there any other places that I can find related information?

Yes. Campus Research (Westlaw) provides access to more than 700 journals and law reviews. Most of the articles are in full-text. Other Library subscribed databases, such as LegalTrac, CQ Electronic Library, Wiley InterScience Law Journals, ProQuest Newspapers, etc. also provide related information. These databases cab be accessed via the link at:

<http://www.jsu.edu/library/resources/>

H. W.