

Law Pathfinder

HOW TO READ A CITATION

Most law books are cited in the order of volume number, book, and page. For example, 410 U.S. 113 would signify volume 410 of United States Reports, page 113. Statutes are cited by statute title and section number, such as 42 United States Code, section number such as 42 U.S.C. 1983 for title 42 United States Code, section 1983. A handy list of abbreviations is found in either of the law dictionaries, Ballentine's Law Dictionary (REF/KF156/.B29/1969) or Black's Law Dictionary (REF/KF156.B53/1979).

LEGAL ENCYCLOPEDIAS

These are good starting places to get an overview of a topic. Includes general legal encyclopedias: American Jurisprudence abbreviated Am. Jur. (Available in print through 1997 at REF/KF105.A53 and kept up to date on CD-ROMS located at the workstation near the reference desk); Guide to American Law (REF/KF156/. G77 kept up to date with yearly supplements); and Corpus Juris Secundum, abbreviated C.J.S. (REF/KF105/.C6/1936) ceased with volume 101. Always begin searching with the index and remember to try terms under different synonyms. The text will contain many footnotes leading you to further sources.

TEXTS AND TREATISES

These are books that contain law on a specific subject. Examples of these are the West's Nutshell Series, West's Hornbooks, and the National Organization on Legal Problems in Education (NOLPE) Monographs Series. These are cataloged by subject and placed on the shelves with other materials on the same topic. To retrieve a list of the library's holdings in these series enter title or keyword searches in the library's online catalog for Nutshell series; Hornbook; or NOLPE monographs series.

ARTICLES

Articles are printed in journals or in law reviews. Look for your subject in printed indexes or computer databases. The Index to Legal Periodicals (REF/KF8/. I5) is located on a study carrel by the law collection on the 10th floor. The electronic databases that the Library subscribes to can be found on the Electronic Databases for Law page.

CODES

Codes contain legal rules known as statutes, regulations, or ordinances, which are mandatory, meaning that courts must follow them. These are accessed through an index that refers you to a numbered section. They are updated by supplements, pocket parts, or on CD-ROMS. The library subscribes to: Code of Alabama, 1975 (which is available in print at REF/KFA30/1975/. A2 and in CD-ROM); United States Code, abbreviated U.S.C. (REF/KF62/1988/. A2); United States Code Annotated abbreviated U.S.C.A., (available in

print until 1989 at REF/KF62/1927/. W25 the complete edition with updates is available on CD-ROM). Regulations of federal agencies are contained in the Code of Federal Regulations, abbreviated C.F.R. (available in print at REF/KF70/. A3 and through electronic link: [National Archives and Records Administrations' code of Federal Regulations](#)).

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LAW

A proposed law is called a bill or a resolution. After a bill becomes a law it is published. These are classified either public laws or private laws. A public law affects the nation as a whole, or deals with individuals as a class and relates to public matters. A private law benefits only a specific individual or individuals. These are abbreviated *Pub. L. No. 103-1* or *Priv.L. No. 103-1*, with 103 designating the Congress. The government issues the first official publication of a law in the form of a slip law. Other sources for recent public laws are The United States Code Congressional and Administrative News (PERIODICAL/K25/.N5) and United States Law Week (REF/K25/.N54x). At the end of each session of Congress, all the slip laws, both private and public are published in numerical order as part of the set, United States Statutes at Large (REF/KF50.U5). Each volume has its own subject index.

REPORTS OR REPORTERS

Reporters contain opinions (sometimes called decisions or cases) written by courts to explain how and why certain legal rules were used to resolve a dispute in a particular lawsuit. These rules constitute the "common law," and are followed by courts deciding later cases with similar facts and issues to be resolved so that consistency may be maintained. With few exceptions, these cases are from courts of appeal rather than trial courts. The most common exceptions are decisions from federal district courts reported in the Federal Supplement, abbreviated F. Supp. (available in print through v.949 at REF/KF120.F4 also available and updated on CD-ROM). Opinions are not written or published in every case.

Cases decided in the United States Supreme Court are reported in the United States Reports, abbreviated U.S. (REF/KF101/. U5 Library has v. 1- (those before v. 259 are on microfiche, for printed copies of cases before v.259 of United States Reports see United States Reports Lawyers' Edition abbreviated L.ED. (REF/KF101/.U52 Library has v.1-262)). These are also reprinted in the Supreme Court Reporter, abbreviated S.Ct. (REF/KF101/. S9 the Library has v.52-113).

Note: Cases are indexed in U.S. Supreme Court Digest(REF/101.1/.U55). Cases after 1900 are also indexed in Shepard's United States Supreme Court Case Names Citor (REF/KF101.2/.S55).

Cases from the intermediate United States Courts of Appeals (also called U.S. Circuit Courts) are printed in Federal Reporter, first, second, or third series, abbreviated F. and F.2d and F.3d. (REF/KF105/. F42 and available in CD-ROM). Federal Supplement, abbreviated F. Supp. (REF/KF120/. F4 and available in CD-ROM) contains district court cases.

Note: These are indexed in the West's Federal Practice Digest (see REF/KF/127/. W48, after 1989 use the CD-ROM version).

State appellate court opinions are printed in state reporters or regional reporters. The library has the Southern Reporter (REF/KF135/. S8 Library has v.1-200, 1887-1941) and subscribes to the Alabama Reporter (REF/KFA45/. A22 which began with v.331, no. 240 taking up the numbering of the Southern Reporter, 2d Series, Alabama edition). The Alabama Reporter is now in CD-ROM format.

Note: Alabama cases are indexed in the Alabama Digest (REF/KFA/47.1/A2, available in CD-ROM since 1997).

The Reporters are not arranged by subject, nor are the sets indexed. Often a reference may be found from text or footnotes of texts, encyclopedias, or other cases. Annotated codes will list cases, which have cited a statute following the text of the statute. Digests must be used for subject access to the reporters.

DIGESTS

Digests are the traditional means of finding cases. They are published for most states and several of the regions. There is also a federal digest. The most commonly used digest system divides the law into about 400 topics. Each topic is subdivided into principles of points of law which are each assigned a "key" number. Pigeonholed under each key number are brief paragraphs abstracted from cases, which summarize what each case says about that point, and citations to where each case can be found. It is possible to go directly to the topic in the digest and scan through the key numbers, but it is usually less confusing to start in the "Descriptive Word Index" to the digest. This index uses common words to lead to the right topic and key number. The digest also contains a "Case Table," which can be used to look up a citation if only the name of a case is known. The library has the Southern Digest (REF/KF135/. S81/S64 v.1-29) and subscribes to the Alabama Digest 2d (REF/KFA47.1/. A2 now available in CD-ROM), West's Federal Practice Digest (REF/KF127/.W48 library has 2d, 3d, and 4th series and is available in CD-ROM), and the United States Supreme Court Digest (REF/KF101.1.U55).

REPORTS AND DIGESTS FOR CERTAIN COURTS OR TOPICS

Special reports and digests cover bankruptcy, military justice, education, labor, tax, and many others. The library subscribes to West's Education Law Reporter (REF/KF4110/.A2/W47) which is indexed in West's Education Law Digest (REF/KF4110.3/.W47). There is also a guide to using this reporter service, A Guide to using West's Education Law Reporter (REF/KF4110/.A2/W47/Guide) which is shelved with the reporter volumes.

CITATORS

Citators are sources that provide through letter-form abbreviations or words, the subsequent history and interpretation of reported cases, and lists of cases and legislative enactments. The most widely-used citators are the various units of "Shepard's Citations." The library subscribes to Shepard's Acts and Cases by Popular Names: Federal and State (REF/KF90.S52), Shepard's Alabama Citations (REF/KFA47.2/S5), Shepard's Federal

Citations (REF/KF105.2.S42), Shepard's United States Citations (REF/KF101.2/.S54),
Shepard's United States Supreme Court Case Names Citator (REF/KF101.2/.S55).

Sources

American Association of Law Libraries. How to Research a Legal Problem: A Guide for Non-Lawyers. Chicago, IL. : The Association, 1993.

Jacobstein, J. Myron, et. al. Fundamentals of Legal Research. 6th ed. Westbury, NY: Foundation Press, 1994.

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