



Legal Research

Today, most of the resources you would need to do your legal research are available online, such as government websites and Findlaw.com. There are a number of easy ways to search the online resources including searching by citation, party name and full text key words.

Online Resources

Library of Congress Guide to Law Online: <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/guide.php> - The site contains annotated Internet links and sources for legal researchers.

Findlaw.com LawCrawler: <http://lawcrawler.findlaw.com/> - This area of FindLaw.com contains U.S. Caselaw & Codes, State Caselaw & Codes, Supreme Court, and Constitution.

California Resources

California Supreme and Appellate Court Cases since 1934: <http://www.findlaw.com/cacases/>.

California Codes & Statutes, Legislative Information, Bill Information, Code of Regulations, Law Revision Commission, Legislative Information, Municipal and County Codes and Ordinances, Legislative History Online, Research Guide for Compiling a California Legislative History are available at http://california.lp.findlaw.com/ca01_codes/index.html

To access **ProQuest** articles on or off campus, go to <http://www.westvalley.edu/library/databases/>. You will need your **name** and **student ID number** to log in.

Legal Citations

Introduction to Basic Legal Citation (online ed. 2010): <http://www.law.cornell.edu/citation/>

Finding Precedent Cases in Printed References

Case Method:

Find specific cases that interest you in the United States or California case reporters. Let's say you are looking at an old California case regarding damages for injuries sustained by a motorist in a collision with a Southern Pacific Company passenger train. The case is *Nelson v. Southern Pacific Company*. The citation given is 67 p.2d 682. This tells you that you will find the case in volume 67 of the California Reporter covering cases reported in Pacific Reporter Second Series beginning on page 682. (Ref KFC 50.P3 Ser. 2 v. 67-68.)

As you look at the case, you will see key numbers associated with subject specific head notes. For example you will see **4. Railroads 350(11)**. The head note indicates that this key item deals with the speed of the train on its right of way and lets you know that if you go to West's California Digest (Ref KFC 38.W4 2d v. 37) containing the subject RAILROADS and look up key item 350(11) you will find summaries of other cases dealing with a similar point of law.

Statutes/Codes Method:

You will also find references to precedent cases as you read through statutes or codes. For example, if you were looking for codes dealing with forgery with intent to defraud, you might begin with the West's Annotated California Codes General Index (Ref KFC30.A40W5 General Index D-I). Under the subject **Forgery**, you will be referred to **Pen 475**. Find the **Penal Code** (Ref KFC30.A40W5 v.48A) and look up section 475. You will be given the text of the code followed by useful references if you are looking for precedent cases. Notice that under **Library References** you are referred to key digest item **Forgery 7** where you can find precedent cases. You will also notice that a section called **Notes of Decisions** is included in the code volume. These numbered notes provide summaries of precedent cases and the citations needed to look the cases up.

Because the resources available through Findlaw.com are so extensive, free of charge and continually updated, the costly print copies of these legal resources are being phased out of our library. For teaching and historical purposes, however, a selected list of legal research materials is listed below. With the exception of *West's California Reporter* and *California Legal Secretary*, the updating services for these print resources have been discontinued.

Legal Dictionaries

Oxford Companion to American Law	Ref KF154.O96 2002
West's Encyclopedia of American Law	Ref KF154.W47 1998
Black's Law Dictionary	Ref KF156.B53 2004
Legal Thesaurus	Ref KF156.B856 1992
Encyclopedia of the American Constitution	Ref KF 4548.E53 2000
Supreme Court Drama: Cases that Changed American Law	Ref KF 4550.Z9B73 2001

Primary Legal Sources (Codes & Case Law)

United States code annotated (search topics in Gen. Index)	Ref KF62.U5 (to 2002)
United States code congressional and administrative news	Ref KF 63.U5 (to 2002)
United States Supreme Court reports lawyers' edition	Ref KF101.L3 series 1&2 (to 2002)
The Constitution of the United States of America:	Ref KF 4527.J39 1973
West's annotated California code (search topics in Gen. Index)	Ref KFC 30.A40W5
California reporter Pacific 2d Series (cases 1931-1959)	Ref KFC 50.P3 2d series
West's California reporter	Ref KFC 50.W4 series 1&2& 3 (current)
Bay area local court rules (superior courts)	Ref KFC 968.A29B39 2003

Secondary Legal Sources

Digest of U.S. Supreme Court Reports	Ref KF101.1.L3 (to 1994)
Corpus Juris Secundum (U.S. legal encyclopedia)	Ref KF154.C62 (to 1994)
United States Patents Quarterly	Ref KF 2975.3.U55 series 1&2 (to 1996)
McCarthy on Trademarks and Unfair Competition	Ref KF 3180.M29 1992
California Jurisprudence 3d (CA Legal Encyclopedia)	Ref KFC 80.C29 (to 2002)
West's California Digest 2d (Topical Guide to CA Case Law)	Ref KFC 38.W4 2d series (to 2003)
Summary of California Law 9th Edition	Ref KFC 80.W5 1987 (to 1995)
California Legal Secretary	Ref KFC 77. H39 (current)
Witkin Combined Index (Summary of CA Law)	Ref KFC 80.W584 1991
Witkin Combined Table of Statutes & Rules (CA Law)	Ref KFC 80.W583 1991
Witkin Combined Table of Cases (CA case law)	Ref KFC 90.W584 1991
California Civil Practice	Ref KFC 310.B36 (to 1992)
California Civil Procedure Before Trial	Ref KFC 995.C34 1990
California Forms of Pleading & Practice	Ref KFC1010.A65C3 (to 1998)
Effective Introduction to Evidence in California	Ref KFC 1030.E352 (to 2005)
California Criminal Law (Witkin)	Ref KFC 1100.W57 1988

Other useful WVC Library Research Guides are **Government** and **Writing to Law Makers** viewable at <http://westvalley.edu/library/research-guides/>.

Help Available at the County Law Library

If you need the help of a professional law librarian contact the Santa Clara County Law Library at (408) 299-3568 or on their web at www.sccll.org.