Research Refresher: Getting Background & Keeping Current

I. Ask a Librarian

- **Your firm's library**: librarians can be your best friend when you need help!
- **Goodson Law Library** ([http://www.law.duke.edu/lib](http://www.law.duke.edu/lib)): open Mon-Fri 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. over the summer. Call, e-mail, IM or find us on the web/Facebook.

II. Search Smarter

- **Online Research Guides**
  - Cornell Legal Research Engine ([http://library.lawschool.cornell.edu/WhatWeDo/ResearchGuides/Legal-Research-Engine.cfm](http://library.lawschool.cornell.edu/WhatWeDo/ResearchGuides/Legal-Research-Engine.cfm))
- **Print Research Guidebooks**
  - WorldCat ([http://www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org)): search subject “Legal Research—[State]” for guidebooks on a particular state.
  - Specialized Legal Research (Ref Desk KF240 .S64): looseleaf binder with chapters on researching selected advanced legal topics.

III. Try an Encyclopedia

- **Wex** ([http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex/search](http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex/search)): collaborative, Wikipedia-like law dictionary and encyclopedia, hosted by Cornell’s Legal Information Institute.
- **American Jurisprudence 2d**: legal encyclopedia; entries provide an overview of a legal topic with references to selected cases and statutes. Available in print; Lexis; Westlaw.
- **Corpus Juris Secundum**: Similar to AmJur, but provides more extensive case references. Available in print; Westlaw.
- **State-specific encyclopedia**: Available for more than half the states; usually part of the Jurisprudence series. See Harvard Law Library’s list at [http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/research/guides/united_states/alr_legal encyclopia.html](http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/research/guides/united_states/alr_legal encyclopia.html).

IV. Find an Article

- **LegalTrac** ([http://library.duke.edu/metasearch/db/id/DUK00130](http://library.duke.edu/metasearch/db/id/DUK00130)): Searches law reviews, bar journals, newsletters, and other legal periodicals; selected full-text. Also available on Lexis and Westlaw as “Legal Resource Index” database.
  - **Law Reviews**: published by law schools; more scholarly in tone and audience. Full text on Lexis/Westlaw back to early 1980s. Earlier years in HeinOnline ([http://library.duke.edu/metasearch/db/id/DUK00693](http://library.duke.edu/metasearch/db/id/DUK00693)); prepublication articles may be posted on SSRN ([http://www.ssrn.com](http://www.ssrn.com)).
Legal Journals/Magazines: published by bar associations and other organization; written by practitioners for practitioners. Many are available on Lexis/Westlaw; others are available to bar members only.


Finding Full Text: To check if a journal is available electronically through Duke, search the Libraries’ online catalog (http://catalog.library.duke.edu) for the journal title and look for the icon to locate the full text in databases.

V. Other Sources for Background


Hornbooks: larger, one-volume discussions of a legal topic, with footnotes for further reading.

Treatises: largest, multi-volume treatments of a legal topic, written by leading scholars and with many footnotes. Considered most authoritative; frequently cited to courts for persuasive authority. Helpful list at http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/research/guides/united_states/legal_treatises_subject.html.

American Law Reports: lengthy, encyclopedia-like entries on selected legal topics. Extensive case references, sorted by jurisdiction & topic. Available print; Lexis; Westlaw.

50-State Surveys: compile references to statutes and regulations across multiple jurisdictions—can save you time while researching.


Westlaw: SURVEYS and REG-SURVEYS database.

Pattern Jury Instructions (PJI): “model” instructions which judge can deliver to jury; outline the elements and causes which the parties must prove. Availability varies by state: print; Lexis; Westlaw; Loislaw; Casemaker.

VI. Keeping Current

Alert services: Lexis and Westlaw allow you to periodically re-run searches, to inform you of new cases/sources on your topic or of changes to the Shepard’s/KeyCite report.

Lexis: Can save alerts for search results or Shepard’s reports. Delivery on Lexis or via email. Manage from the “Alerts” tab in the Research System.

Westlaw: Can save alerts from search results, KeyCite reports. Delivery to Westlaw sign-on, email, or straight to printer. Manage from “Alert Center” in upper right-hand corner.

Looseleaf/Electronic Services: Topical binders or (more frequently) websites which update lawyers about the latest cases, legislation, and developments. See list of titles in the Bluebook (Table 15).

Blogs (a.k.a. “blawgs”): Available on a variety of legal topics; usually written by practicing lawyers. For links to “blawg” directories and search engines, see http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/blogs.

RSS Feeds: Available on blogs and many websites, RSS technology brings updates to the site directly to you (rather than you having to check each web page yourself).

Aggregator (Reader): What you use to collect and view the RSS feeds all in one place. Google Reader works with your Gmail account.

Once you have set up a reader, subscribe to feeds by clicking on blogs and sites. The latest posts will update automatically in your feed reader.

RSS in Plain English video: http://www.commoncraft.com/rss Plain English