

LLMC: Legal Research on Westlaw and Lexis

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What we will cover today

1. Differences between primary and secondary sources
2. Types of secondary sources (e.g. legal encyclopedias, treatises, and practice guides)
3. Searching for secondary sources: using natural language & filtering by source type.
4. Using the Annotated Code
5. Finding and using caselaw on Westlaw and Lexis
6. Using Topic and Key Numbers on Westlaw
7. Citators – making sure the law you're using is still valid

In-Class Research Problem: Medical Marijuana

Primary sources (primary authority)

Examples: Caselaw and statutes & codes

- Created by the courts and the legislature
- It's the law!
- Binding/mandatory vs. nonbinding/persuasive
- Jurisdiction
- Weight of authority (level of court)

Secondary sources (secondary authority)

Examples: encyclopedias, treatises and practice guides, A.L.R. annotations, journal or law review articles, and restatements of the law.

- Secondary sources are background resources.
- Secondary sources are NOT binding, but they can be a good way to start research as they contain valuable citations to primary sources.

Secondary sources are huge time-savers!

Secondary Sources

Legal Encyclopedias

- Report on the general state of the law in different subject areas.
- There are two multi-state legal encyclopedias: American Jurisprudence (Am. Jur.) and Corpus Juris Secundum (C.J.S.).
- In addition, California has two state encyclopedias: California Jurisprudence (Cal. Jur.) and Witkin's Summary of California Law.

Treatises and Practice Guides

- Essentially, single-subject legal books.
- Treatise examples: Corbin on Contracts, Products Liability in a Nutshell, Witkin California Criminal Law.
- Practice guide examples: California Landlord-Tenant Practice, California Civil Practice.
- Popular practice guide publishers include Matthew Bender (Lexis), CEB (OnLaw), and Rutter (Westlaw)

American Law Reports

- Contains articles called “Annotations.”
- Annotations collect summaries of cases from a variety of jurisdictions to provide an overview of the law on a topic.
- They are more detailed than encyclopedias.

Legal Periodicals

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Searching for secondary sources

- In Westlaw and Lexis you have two options for accessing secondary sources.
 - **Option 1:** Type in the name of the item (e.g. California Jurisprudence, American Law Reports, etc.) and select one of the populated options, and search within the item.
 - **Option 2:** Search by natural language and filter by clicking on secondary sources, jurisdiction, and/or type.

In-class Research Problem

Calvin is a resident of San Diego and suffers from chronic back pain. He has a valid medical marijuana card and often smokes in the morning to alleviate the pain. His employer routinely administers drug tests. Calvin is worried that he could be fired for failing a marijuana drug test even though he has a medical marijuana card.

- What is California's law regarding medical marijuana?
- Should Calvin be worried about failing a drug test even though he has a medical marijuana card?

Primary Sources

Annotated Codes - Federal

Most researchers rely on one of two commercially published, annotated editions of the code.

- United States Code Annotated (USCA) published by West and available on Westlaw, or
- United States Code Service (USCS), published by LexisNexis and available on Lexis.

Beyond the text of the law and notes of court decisions*, these commercial editions also provide references to legislative history, administrative regulations, and various secondary sources.

Annotated Codes - State

Most researchers rely on annotated codes containing summaries of relevant court decisions and other references, published in most instances by either West or LexisNexis. Several states have competing codes from both publishers.

- For example, California has both West's California Annotated Codes available on Westlaw, and Deering's California Annotated Code available on Lexis.

Searching for cases

- Before searching for new cases, make sure you have reviewed the cases already identified in your secondary source literature and annotated codes.
- To start a new search, start with the smallest database you can (e.g. California state cases, or 9th Circuit cases).
- Focus on published cases.

Using key numbers to find more cases on Westlaw

- After conducting a word search on Westlaw, you find a relevant case with an on-point headnote.
- You can use the key number assigned to this headnote to retrieve other cases discussing the same point of law.

Why do researchers use citators?

- To find the direct history of a case
- To find negative treatment
- To find positive treatment
- Note what point of law is being treated positively or negatively
- To identify similar cases or useful secondary sources
- Citators can also be used to update statutes

LRC Reference Desk

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