Researching Statutes

Legal Research Center Video Series

Julianne Odin
An Introduction to Statutes

- Laws enacted by a legislature are called statutes.
- Statutes are first published in a collection of “session laws”—all the laws passed during a particular legislative session.
  - Federal: Statutes at Large
  - California: California Statutes and Amendments to the Code
- Then statutes are organized by subject and published as “codes.”
  - California: 29 separate subject area codes
- You will almost always want to do your research in the statutory codes rather than the session laws.
Statutory Codes: Unannotated vs. Annotated

- Federal and state governments usually publish a version of their statutory codes—this is the “official” version and contains only the text of the statutes (no annotations).
  - Note that California is one of a handful of states that do not publish an official version of their codes.
- Commercial publishers publish annotated versions of a code. These contain the same statutory text as the official version, but they add additional information to help researchers (annotations).
What are Annotations?

• History of the statute
• Secondary sources that discuss the statute and explain how the statute is interpreted and applied
• Case law summaries of cases that have interpreted or applied your statute (an excellent jumpstart on your case law research)
Federal & California Legislative Codes

Federal
• Annotated codes:

California
• Annotated codes:
  • West’s California Codes (West)
  • Deering’s California Codes (Lexis)

Note about West & Lexis:
1. Annotations are different— check both for most thorough coverage
2. Often have exclusive licenses with other publishers—their annotations will point you to affiliated content
• Only the West products will refer to West Digest Topic & Key Numbers
Statutory Code Citation: Examples

- 29 U.S.C. § 1823
- Cal. Corp. Code § 309
- Nev. Rev. Stat. § 17.150
- Conn. Gen. Stat § 52-570d

Note:
- Named or numbered “title”
- Some combination of numbered chapters, sections, and subsections
Researching in Print: Check the Bluebook
Finding a Code Section:
When You Know the Code Section

• Example: 29 U.S.C. § 1823
  • Westlaw
  • Lexis
Finding a Code Section: When You Know the Name of the Act

Examples:
- “Sarbanes-Oxley Act”
- “Patriot Act”
- “TARP”
- “Dodd-Frank”

Popular Name Table—at the end of:
- USC, USCA, USCS
- West’s California & Deering’s California
- Also on Westlaw and Lexis
Finding a Code Section:
When You Just Know the Topic

• Example: California programs that provide funding to retrofit schoolbuses for clean fuel
  • Search terms:
    • California
    • Clean fuel; emissions; clean energy
    • Bus; schoolbus; school transportation
Review

- Introduction to statutes—how they are created & published
- Annotations—contents and why they’re valuable
- Federal & California code sets
- Bluebook Table 1
- Pulling a code section from a citation
- Navigating around the statutory text and annotations, especially the case law summaries
- Using the Popular Name Table
- Searching for a code section on a specific topic, including a brief introduction to Boolean searching—we’ll cover this more fully later in the semester
LRC Reference Desk

- lrcrefer@sandiego.edu
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- Other videos in this series: https://www.sandiego.edu/law/library/research-trainings/lwr-trainings.php