

The Importance of Competency

The importance of research competency is widely acknowledged in disciplines within and beyond the legal community, as supported by academic research findings and studies documenting essential skills for the twenty-first century workplace. This literature shows notable evidence of lagging skills in many research-intensive areas, including the field of law.

The Cost of Incompetence

Especially as law firms, government agencies, and other workplaces seek to reduce expenses and, in many cases, absorb the costs of research, the price tag for poorly executed research is unwelcome. Wasted professional time, disregard for client costs, and database usage charges are some of the direct costs associated with a poorly constructed research plan. Worse still is the expense to an organization and to clients and other individuals when incompetent legal research impacts legal representation negatively, resulting in unfavorable decisions and sanctions against attorneys.

The **American Association of Law Libraries** invites you to read the material available through its Legal Research Competency information center. You will find the Principles and Standards as well as articles and research on the topic of competency.

Visit:

<http://www.aallnet.org/main-menu/Advocacy/legalresearchcompetency>

Connect



The screenshot shows the website for the American Association of Law Libraries. The main heading is "Legal Research Competency". Below the heading, there is a search bar and a "Member Login" section. The page is divided into three main columns: "Outreach", "What's New", and "Action Center". The "Outreach" column lists links for law firms, law schools, courts, and bar examiners. The "What's New" column lists "There is a Competency for That!", "Legal Research Principles", "Wearable: Engage Expectations", "AALLGS New Associates Research Skills", and "LUNARY: Practice Ready Graduates". The "Action Center" column lists "Share Your Ideas", "Connect", "Read", "Learn", and "Promotional Blurb".

Please share your ideas and your competency assessments via the AALL Legal Research Competency information center.

We would like to engage with you in an effort to enhance legal research competency across the legal profession.

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American Association of
Law Libraries

Legal Research Competency

The Principles

Who Benefits?

*Embrace the
Challenge*

Introduction

The critical importance of research competency is demonstrated within and beyond the legal community in academic research findings and studies of skills needed for the twenty-first century workplace, including the field of law. Further, the literature shows notable evidence of lagging skills in those areas.

The **American Association of Law Libraries (AALL)** has developed a set of principles and standards for legal research competency that draw from information professionals' deep involvement in legal research in academe, law firms, the courts and government agencies, and other settings, and from the literature of the legal profession which makes the case that research competency improves efficiency and effectiveness.

The challenge to each entity within the legal profession – including law schools, CLE providers, bar examiners, paralegal and law office manager associations, law firms, and others – is to embrace legal research competency as a necessary skill and to incorporate these standards and competencies into its own performance measures.



Principles for Legal Research Competency adopted by the American Association of Law Libraries

- I. A successful legal researcher **possesses foundational knowledge** of the legal system and legal information sources.
- II. A successful legal researcher **gathers information** through effective and efficient research strategies.
- III. A successful legal researcher **critically evaluates** information.
- IV. A successful legal researcher **applies information effectively** to resolve a specific issue or need.
- V. A successful legal researcher **distinguishes between ethical and unethical uses of information**, and understands the legal issues associated with the discovery, use, or application of information.

Who benefits?

Law Schools

Law schools are required by the American Bar Association to ensure that each student receives substantial instruction in legal research. New Standards state that a law school must establish learning outcomes that shall, at a minimum, include competency in legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, problem-solving, and written and oral communication in the legal context. The Principles provide a framework for establishing learning outcomes.

Law Firms

The current legal practice environment is challenged by increased client demands for efficiency, enhanced digital platforms for legal information, and fundamental changes to regulatory structures. The economics of law practice can cause an ongoing tension between training time and the need to drive revenue. New law school graduates are expected to be practice-ready, even when they have not had specific curricula in all subject areas of the law. The Principles offer a structure for focused training that can dramatically increase the effectiveness of newer lawyers.

Courts

Law clerks may be exposed to an area of the law which is new and unfamiliar. The Principles can guide researchers by providing a framework for selection of sources and performing research. The Principles can also be used as part of an orientation program for new law clerks or other researchers within the court.

Bar examiners

AALL's Principles, Standards and Competencies provide a framework for the assessment of research competency that can be applied at any point during a legal professional's career and in any specific field within the legal profession.