Overview - Comparing Treatises in Book Form and Online

I have numerous sets of fact patterns which are keyed to treatises that are available in both book format and on Lexis or Westlaw. This exercise is designed to have the students evaluate the results they get searching in the different formats. It's a nice, hands-on way to show the benefits and burdens of both formats, and the role that luck can play in which works better.

I have the students work in groups of four, divided again into groups of two. Each set of two students works on one fact pattern; in each group, one student researches the fact pattern in the book, and the other student does the same research online. The exercise is timed.

When the first fact pattern is finished, the two students compare results as requested in the handout. Then I pass out a second set of questions. I use multiple copies of the same questions. Each group of four only needs two unique questions.

In the second fact pattern, the team members switch. The student who used the book in the previous example does an online search, and the student who did the online search uses the books. Then those two students compare the results of the online search versus the book search. This way, each student has a chance to do both the online and the book research, and evaluate each format.

If you don't have some of these publications in your state, any local treatise that is also available online will do; the fact patterns can be translated directly to your local treatise.