

# 2016 National Legal Research Teach-In Kit

Research Instruction & Patron Services Special Interest Section  
American Association of Law Libraries

## Demonstrating the Importance of Context with Google Earth

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This exercise is designed to help students in our Practice Ready Legal Research (advanced legal research) course understand the importance of context in developing a legal research plan. Using Google Earth, students are asked to identify several famous landmarks. As with legal research, they are encouraged to use contextual clues to help them assess the landscape.

## Demonstrating the Importance of Context with Google Earth

Practice Ready Legal Research, Week 1

Developed by Bonnie Shucha, University of Wisconsin Law School

*Intro:* The topic for today's session is *Developing a Research Plan*. As you know from your reading, many law students and attorneys will begin a research project without much forethought. As soon as they receive their assignment, they'll jump on to their favorite database and start typing in keywords. While this technique may result in *an* answer, taking some time to develop a research plan can help you improve the quality of your answer, both in terms of accuracy and efficiency.

Before we discuss *how* to develop a research plan, I'd like to take you on a tour of a few famous landmarks to demonstrate *why* it is important to step back and think before delving into a research project – to assess the legal landscape and gather as many relevant facts as possible. This will provide you with valuable context as you conduct your research.

*Instructions:* You could do a live Google Earth search but I opted to play a screen cast that I had recorded earlier pausing to illustrate various points. URL for screencast – <http://goo.gl/Hes7f6>

### Location 1

- Pause right away.
  - o Can anyone tell where we are? If so, what contextual clues give it away?
- Play to zoom out, then pause again.
- Play to zoom way in then note use of Street View.
  - o As with a legal research problem, use all tools at your disposal to see things from a new point of view and increase the context surrounding your question.
- Landmark = Bascom Hill which is a familiar landmark and location to UW students.
  - o Without needing to view more of the map, you know what to expect around the corner and over the hill.
  - o This is analogous to an issue in a familiar area of law in a familiar jurisdiction. You already know the landscape of the law, both the legal principles and the laws in your jurisdiction, so you don't need to devote time to that type of research in your plan. But you do still need to gather the relevant facts for the legal issue.

## Location 2

- Pause right away.
  - o Can anyone tell where we are? If so, what contextual clues give it away?
- Play to zoom in.
- Landmark = Eifel Tower which may be a familiar landmark, but perhaps not a familiar location.
  - o This is analogous to an issue in a familiar area of law but in an unfamiliar jurisdiction. You already know the legal principles but you don't know the particular statutes, cases and regs in this jurisdiction so you'll have to address that in your research plan. And, you still need to gather the relevant facts for the legal issue.
- Turn on "Borders and Labels" and then zoom out.
  - o This gives you more context about the location - which streets, rivers, and cities surround the Eifel Tower. This is similar to doing jurisdictional research.

## Location 3

- Pause right away.
  - o Can anyone tell where we are? If so, what contextual clues give it away?
- Zoom in, then zoom way out.
  - o Here we see more contextual clues like the coastline and geographic features, but is it enough to determine the location?
- Now let's turn on "Borders and Labels"
  - o We see now that we're somewhere to the northwest of Los Angeles, but still may not know what landmark we're looking at.
  - o Consider this a situation where your familiar with the jurisdiction but are presented with an unfamiliar legal issue.
- Zoom way in.
  - o Watch for the city names and notice the geographic landscape – the hills. Can you tell which landmark it is yet?
- Landmark = Hollywood Sign
  - o Note how we used the contextual clues to gather more information. This is similar to the process that you would use to research a new area of law.

Location 4 - this one is a tough one

- Pause right away.
  - o Can anyone tell where we are? If so, what contextual clues give it away?
- Zoom out, then zoom in.
  - o Does anything about the landscape help you? Perhaps that's not enough.
  - o Consider this as a situation in which you're unfamiliar both with the area of law and the jurisdiction.
- So let's use a different tool - Street View - to get a look from a different perspective
  - o This is like using a secondary legal source to provide you more context about a legal issue
- Ok – here we have a guy taking a photo, tree lined paths, stone walls and archways, benches, a stone building with Spanish Mission style architecture
  - o Does any of this information help us figure out what landmark that we're looking at?
  - o As with legal research, you'll find that some information is relevant to your search and some isn't. And you won't always know which is which right away.
- And at the very top, we have a small label that tells us that our landmark = The Alamo.