Title: Basic Legal Research: Tools and Strategies
Authors: Amy Sloan
Edition: 5th
Publisher: Aspen Publishers
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Length: 357 pages
Price: $93.00

Reviewed by: Stephanie A. Huffnagle, Research & Instructional Services Librarian, Legal Research Center, Earle Mack School of Law, Drexel University

Review:

Intended audience: The intended audience is law students who are unfamiliar with legal research resources and the legal research process (either 1Ls or students in an advanced legal research class). The book would also be appropriate for non-law students in a legal research class or paralegal class.

Accompanying materials: According to the publisher’s website, “[I]nstructors are provided with both a Teacher’s Manual and PowerPoint slides for classroom use.” This reviewer has not seen those materials.

Illustrations: The text has many illustrations, including page excerpts from print resources and screen shots of electronic ones, as well as numerous charts and other figures. The illustrations are professionally reproduced. The sample pages and screen shots may be a bit overwhelming and hard to digest for students who have no familiarity with the subject matter.

Gaps in coverage: There is only a slight mention of Bloomberg Law. No discussion of practitioner guides, form books or court rules. No mention of PACER as a source of federal case information. I would have liked to see greater discussion of cost efficiency in legal research.

Unique appendices: “Selected Internet Research Resources” as Appendix A.

Major strengths: The text provides a basic overview of the topics and types of resources you would expect to be covered in a basic legal research course or a legal research textbook. Each chapter is essentially stand-alone so instructors can tailor the use of the book to their individual class/topic schedules.

Major weaknesses: Future incarnations of this book would be best presented based on the legal research process as opposed to focusing on things such as the print/electronic distinction and the specific sources of information. Although Sloan acknowledges in the preface that there is a “greater emphasis on electronic research” in the 5th edition (p. xvi), there is still too much weight given to the traditional print sources of legal research. With all of the discussion of law libraries getting rid of print materials such as reporters, and given that commercial databases (or even free websites such as FDsys) are, for the most part, considered reliable/authoritative and more current than their print counterparts, I expect that contemporary legal research texts will have a heavier focus on electronic means of access.

Organization & updates: This text is very much organized like prior editions. For the most part, the chapters are arranged in a logical order and each is organized in a similar manner making the material easy to follow. The index is well organized and extensive. The preface provides a very detailed list of all
of the changes and updates from the 4th edition. There are two major changes in the 5th edition. The first is that it covers three new legal research platforms – WestlawNext, Lexis Advance, and Google Scholar. The other is the addition of a chapter on evaluating search options.

Recommendations: This book is recommended as a reference guide for law students taking a basic legal research course and/or working on an introductory legal research project. It may also prove useful as an assigned course book for instructors who continue to rely on print resources as a major source of legal research information.