

## **Impeccable Research: A Guide to Mastering Legal Research Skills, 2d**

By Mark K. Osbeck. (2016), 207 pages, ISBN: 978-0-314-28238-5. \$55

**Subject:** Legal research textbook

**Useful for:** Useful for anyone who conducts or teaches legal research

**Format:** Chapters with index

### **Reviewer's Comments:**

In Part I of this book, Mark Osbeck lays out a five-step strategy for legal research. The steps, described in detail in the first five chapters, are as follows:

1. Plan your research;
2. Consult secondary sources;
3. Conduct your research for primary authorities;
4. Expand and update your case research;
5. Analyze and organize your research results.

The first step is one that many of us tend to skip, but Osbeck stresses the importance of having a “research plan” (p.6). The first thing to do is clearly articulate the question presented. Then you consider what legal issues might be involved and what sources you will use to research them.

Chapter 2 deals with secondary sources. One of the things I liked most about this book was its emphasis on using secondary sources as a starting point for research. Working in an academic law library, one of the most frequent mistakes I see students make is diving into case law without having an adequate grounding in the relevant legal issues. Secondary sources like treatises and legal encyclopedias can provide such a grounding, which is why Osbeck rightly recommends consulting them first.

Chapter 3, on researching primary authorities, recommends making a “preliminary outline” (p.36) of your issues and sub-issues. You can then link your research results to the outline. Osbeck also recommends keeping a record of your research and saving copies of all relevant sources.

Chapter 4 provides useful guidance on how to expand and update your research using tools like key numbers and citators. Chapter 5 explains how to analyze and organize your research results and how to use your finished outline to prepare your written work product.

After the five-step strategy has been explained in Part I, Part II deals with refining legal research skills. It contains a useful troubleshooting guide that addresses such common complaints as, “I’m not sure when or how I should end my research” (p.28). Part III provides a basic overview of primary and secondary sources of law.

What really sets this book apart from other legal research textbooks is the five-step strategy described in Part I. Osbeck has developed a comprehensive, goal-oriented approach that can prevent many of the common pitfalls of legal research and help researchers get better and more consistent results.

The second edition has been expanded to reflect changes in electronic research platforms and to add more detail in certain sections. A checklist for the five-step research strategy has also been added.

**Reviewed by:** Robert N. Clark, University of Houston, in 2017