2015 National Legal Research Teach-In Kit

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

Print Research

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Hitting the Books is a presentation about the advantages of researching in print, especially when just starting a research project. The presentation details what tools that a researcher will need, how to find key words through the use of indexes, glossaries, and tables of contents, how to use print sources to gain a broader view of a legal topic, and how using print sources can have advantages over searching online. It was written with law school students in mind, but practitioners and other legal professionals may find the information contained in the presentation useful.

Hitting the Books

WHY STARTING IN PRINT SOURCES IS OFTEN THE BEST STRATEGY

Why use print sources for research?

- Low cost per 'search' compared to databases
- Provides a better vantage point on a legal subject so you can see it better
- Resources such as practice guides, treatises, and hornbooks may not be available in electronic form or would be prohibitively expensive to access online
- Provides an opportunity to learn subject and indexing terms quickly
- Impresses your boss and co-workers

The tools you will need.

- Paper, tablet, laptop, cell phone, or other note taking device
- A good pen
- A research plan (The 'One Good Case' approach is an excellent example.)
- A legal dictionary
- A flexible mind set
- A patient and calm approach

Print Sources' Search Boxes

- Case digests (Such as West's Florida Digest)
- Descriptive word indexes
- Table of Cases
- Key number indexes
- Indexes
- Glossaries
- Table of Contents

Where and how to start.

- Focus on the main topic of your legal question when coming up with search terms.

- Start with secondary sources, particularly if you are looking in a field of law that you are not familiar with.

- Look to legal encyclopedias, ALRs, and even manuscripts on the subject you are looking into.

- If you know a statute that you will need to find information on, annotated statutes are a solid starting point.

Keep good notes.

- Write down terms and words that did not work.
- Note authors, cases, themes, and terms of art that are mentioned in the sources that you find.
- Do not erase anything, you never know when you will need a term or idea later.
- Be sure to jot down key numbers linked with your topic.

Narrowing your focus.

- Focus on the jurisdiction that you are concerned with.

- When looking for information concerning a statute, utilize annotated statute sets. (U.S.C.A., Florida Statutes Annotated) They can give a great deal of relevant information with just one search.

- Use key numbers to find similar cases to the ones provided by the sources that you use.

When to stop, or pause, your research.

- If you get frustrated or confused during your search, stop for a bit and clear your mind.

- After 45 to 50 minutes of solid researching, take a break.

- Stop researching when you find that you have 'made a circle' with the citations and materials that you have found.

- While you must update your sources, do not shepardize in the books unless you have no other choice.

Thank you for coming!

- Are there any questions?