

Legal Research Demystified: A Step-by-Step Approach

By Eric P. Voigt. (2019), 344 pages, ISBN: 9781531007836. \$69

Subject: General Legal Research

Useful for: Useful for those who teach legal research or provide reference assistance to patrons who do not have legal research experience.

Format: Three parts, divided into chapters, including index, with review questions at the end of each chapter.

Reviewer's Comments:

Legal research is an art, I think, though it may benefit sometimes from algorithmic approaches to the tasks involved in locating, validating, and understanding the law. To that end, I advise (and follow) what I understand to be common best research practices in my teaching.

Professor Voigt aims to provide students with algorithms (defined here as a set of steps to be followed in solving a research problem) that will routinize legal research. Students *do* benefit from checklists and understanding the iterative process of legal research. However, as a librarian, I do not think that his presentation of process is as novel as he indicates: “[m]ost textbooks focus on the bibliographic features of various sources, not legal research as a process” (xv). The discussion of process, such as in the chapter regarding the development of a research plan, would benefit from deeper discussion. Also, perhaps due to its introductory nature, the book does not include much discussion about when and how a researcher may deviate from the steps suggested.

The contents are divided into three parts. In order, they are 1) an overview of the United States legal system, including descriptions of the process of creation and order of publication for cases and statutes; 2) steps for researching “common law”; and 3) steps for researching statutory authority. Students might find helpful the preliminary material in each part, describing the “steps” or process he recommends researchers follow. Also, each chapter includes practice questions that have answers available online for those who purchase a code. (The code comes with new books, but purchasers of used books may purchase the code separately.) Instructors are, it appears, able to review class performance on the practice questions if they are assigned.

Although I like some features of this book, it would not work for the teaching that I do in stand-alone for credit research courses. The discussion of regulatory research has less depth than I include in my introductory course for first year students as well as for my foreign-trained lawyer students.

RIPS-SIS Legal Research Text Review

Secondary sources are suggested as a preliminary starting point in the common law research part, but the discussion (a single chapter) is not as deep as I would prefer. Possibly the 21-chapter model works better for those who teach their students for an entire year or have class meetings more often than once weekly. Note that Professor Voigt teaches both research and writing, and so this might be a better fit for those dual-focused courses.

The text includes multiple figures which are used to amplify the text. However, the figures, such as those in Chapter 8 regarding citators, are not consistent throughout in terms of their language regarding the relatively new on Westlaw Edge KeyCite Overruling Risk signal. For this reason, combined with the brevity of the many sub-parts in each chapter, students may find the text confusing at points.

Legal Research Demystified is worth a look, even if only to supplement teaching materials or approach to instruction.

Reviewed by: Margaret (Meg) Butler, Georgia State University, in 2019.