

RIPS-SIS Legal Research Text Review

Basic Legal Research: Tools and Strategies, 7th edition.

By Amy E. Sloan. (2018), 352 pages, ISBN: 9781454894018. \$122.

Subject: General Legal Research; Legal Research Textbook

Useful for: Useful for new legal researchers and instructors looking for supplemental tools for student researchers.

Format: Chapters with index, with annotated screenshots of the legal research process and checklists at the end of each chapter.

Reviewer's Comments:

Sloan's legal research textbook has been updated from the 6th edition to include sample pages from common primary and secondary sources, screenshots of the research process from common legal research databases, updated online sources, updated citation information which includes both ALWD (6th ed.) and Bluebook (20th ed.). The most significant change reflects the predominance of online resources in libraries and in legal practice. The author notes that like previous editions of the book, it is designed so that chapters can be assigned in any order. Since many legal research instructors start their course with a discussion of developing a research plan (Chapter 11 in this text), the note is a good reminder to make textbooks work for you.

This text provides meaningful amount of detail, but not enough to overwhelm a new legal researcher while covering primary and secondary sources of law. It does a good job exploring source driven versus content driven approach to researching. There is a sufficient amount of coverage of print sources, but the overall approach recognizes that more legal research is now performed online. I am not sure how useful the sample print pages and screenshots are to researchers. The screenshots are particularly problematic due to the constant changes to webpage layout that the major databases regularly roll out. In addition to the issues with examples, I also noted some editing errors and mis-numbered headers in the e-book which may confuse students.

Where the text really shines is in its checklists, citation examples, and flowcharts. For each type of resource (*e.g.*, cases), the text provides a checklist for searching that may help students feel confident that they have covered all the steps. While that may not mean a researcher is finished researching, it may alleviate some stress that they are forgetting a step. New researchers often struggle with citation and the examples for

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citing each type of resource are simple without the overwhelming context of the Bluebook. Flowcharts for searching binding and nonbinding authority provide a simple but effective visual representation of a concept that can sometimes be difficult for newer researchers to grasp. The text also includes sample research plans.

Other highlights of the text are its discussions of organization through effective notetaking, knowing when to stop researching, and strategies for when a researcher encounters too many or too few results. Overall, this text strikes a balance between providing a new researcher with enough information to perform research without focusing on every minute detail which may be overwhelming.

Reviewed by: Kelly M. Leong, Fordham University School of Law, in 2020.