Field Guide to Legal Research

By Paul D. Callister. (2019), 153 pages, ISBN: 9781640209817. $50

Subject: Legal research textbook

Useful for: Useful as a concise guide for solving legal research problems for those who already have a good understanding of basic legal research principles.

Format: Chapters with table of contents and index; activities at the end of each chapter.

Reviewer's Comments:

This book is aimed at upper-level law students, law clerks and attorneys to help them work through complex legal research problems by walking them through several real-world scenarios based on problem type (known item problem or subject problem). It also covers the relationship between problem type and the kinds of authority (primary or secondary) used for research. Many specialized research tools and techniques that are not typically discussed in a first-year legal research class are also covered with small screen shots of the service used.

In addition to the intended audience mentioned above, this book could also be a useful tool for an Advanced Legal Research Class. Rather than just explaining how to do research, it asks the reader to think about how to structure their research. Many of the "On Your Own" exercises at the end of the chapters encourage the reader to fill in exercises based on legal research information that would be relevant to them and asks follow-up questions like "How does such an exercise help you learn legal research?" This could easily be used as the basis for an independent class exercise followed by a class discussion.

Additionally, the book also contains a chapter on the octants of legal research resources which provides helpful visuals on concepts like the relationship between Known Item Problems and Subject Problems, with respect to controlled vocabulary, computer algorithms, secondary sources, primary sources, subject order, and chronological order. Octants could easily be incorporated into a Basic Legal Research Class or Advanced Legal Research Class to help students struggling to understand how these legal research concepts fit together.

RIPS-SIS Legal Research Text Review

This book would be helpful to anyone with a good understanding of basic legal research principles who would like to learn more problem-solving strategies for how to approach a research problem or to anyone who teaches legal research and would like some new approaches to present to an Advanced Legal Research Class or Basic Legal Research Class.

Reviewed by: Shannon Kemen, University of Cincinnati, in 2021.