Starting your research
Figure out what you’re looking for.
Legal research is the search for authority to predict a likely outcome in order to advise a client or to advocate for a client.

Building a Foundation
Understand the facts – read your record.
Understand legal terms – legal dictionaries, words and phrases.
Understand general legal principles and what general areas of law are involved – general secondary sources such as treatises.

Suggested Treatises on Constitutional Law
Law Permanent Reserves KF 4550 .T785 2000
use 2nd ed. for Chapters 9 - 18
Law Permanent Reserves KF 4550 .T785 1988
Hornbook Series
Law Course Reserve KF 4549 .C655 2006
Law Permanent Reserves KF 4550 .R63 2007
Law Permanent Reserve KF4550 .R43 2005

Thorough Research Involves Many Sources
The order in which you look for relevant authorities is a dependant on what you already know, what is most accessible to you, and how you like to research, so long as you find everything you need to find.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Authority</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Constitutions</td>
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<td>(Can be binding)</td>
<td>Statutes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Regulations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Commentaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Can only be persuasive)</td>
<td>e.g. Law Reviews</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background Materials</td>
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<td>e.g., Records and Briefs</td>
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A Word on Citation Theory
We cite to provide authority for our pronouncements. Cites identify the source of authority, tell where to find source of authority, and provide limited information on weight of authority such as date, jurisdiction, and relevant subsequent history.

Statutes
Statutes mean what they say; be sure to read related statutory sections, such as definitions and savings clauses. If using a code on LexisNexis or Westlaw, check the table of contents to see what other sections there are in that statutory chapter.

Statutes mean what they say, but even more than that, they mean what a court says they mean. Use annotated codes to find cases interpreting particular statutes or constitutional provisions. Shepard’s and KeyCite can also help you find additional citing cases.

Cases
American Law Reports (A.L.R.) is a case-finding tool which provides historical background; citations to primary sources; and a structure for analyzing cases. A.L.R. is on both Westlaw and LexisNexis. It also has paper indexes.

Digests are a useful for finding cases under legal concepts and principles. They bring together cases with a variety of fact situations. Using digest topic and key number searching on Westlaw allows you to electronically search just cases selected as being about the particular point of law represented by that topic and key number. Be sure to type in the topic in key number in the format: [numerical topic designation]k[key number]. For example Constitutional Law key number 580 would be written as 92k580.

Full-text searching will allow you to find relevant cases based on the words used in the case or added by editors.

General Search Hints
LexisNexis and Westlaw allow you to choose between two search engines: Terms and Connectors or Natural Language.

Terms and Connectors searching uses search words combined with Boolean connectors to find all exact matches of your search statement. Use this kind of search when you need comprehensive results; when there are unique terms; when you have a good idea of the type of language that will be in the documents you are seeking; and if you want to know how many documents in the database contain your search terms.

Natural Language searching is a relevancy ranking search engine that applies your search words as weighted according to algorithms to find “most” relevant based on the system’s ranking criteria. Use this kind of searching when you don’t know much about a subject; when you want more than just a casual mention; when you are willing to take a close match; or when you are looking for an extensive discussion of your search words.

Topical Services such as United States Law Week (BNA) and the Criminal Law Reporter (BNA) provide another subject approach to recent cases. These are available by subscription through the A-Z List of Databases.
Periodical literature (Law Reviews)
Law review articles are used to monitor recent developments, to find citations to primary sources, and for use as persuasive authority. You can find relevant articles using indexes or full-text searches, but I recommend using indexes first. Indexes use human intelligence to direct you to articles primarily about your topic or a particular case; full-text searching takes you to any mention of your search terms. The indexes discussed below are available in their native formats from the Alphabetical List of Databases and also through LexisNexis and Westlaw.

Index to Legal Periodicals & Books (ILP)
ILP lists articles under general legal topics. The LexisNexis and Westlaw databases only go back to 1980. To find older articles use the ILP Retrospective database through the Alphabetical List of Databases.

Current Law Index (CLI) a/k/a Legal Resource Index (LRI) a/k/a LegalTrak
CLI tries to classify articles more exactly using modified LC subject-headings. It began publication in 1980 so all versions cover the same years.

Current Index to Legal Periodicals (CILP)
CILP is primarily a current awareness service. It contains tables of contents from recent law reviews and classifies titles under broad legal subject headings. The last eight issues are on Westlaw; it is not on LexisNexis at all.

Law Reviews – Full Text
Full-text searching can help you find more focused discussions in law review articles. Use full-text searching when you are trying to find support for a specific proposition.

The LexisNexis Legal Publications Group File is the most comprehensive of its law review databases containing law reviews, bar journals, ABA journals, legal newspapers, legal newsletters, specialty legal publications, and CLE materials.

Westlaw’s TP-ALL database contains law reviews, texts, American Law Reports (ALR), legal encyclopedias (American Jurisprudence 2d and Corpus Juris Secundum), CLE course materials, bar journals, and legal practice-oriented periodicals.

Supreme Court Rules
Electronically:
Supreme Court Rules from the United States Supreme Court
http://www.supremecourtus.gov/ctrules/ctrules.html
New Rules Effective February 16, 2010 in Adobe PDF Format

Supreme Court Rules from Cornell Law School – Hypertext and searchable
http://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/supct/overview.html
(as of February 3, still the 2007 rules)

In Print:
Law Course Reserve KF 8816 .A2 F42 (old Rules on page 510)
Court Records – Records and Briefs


*Records and Briefs of the United States Supreme Court* in Microfiche since 1971, Microform Room cabinets 7-9

Westlaw SCT-BRIEF database contains Merits briefs date from the 1990-91 Term to the present, and Amicus briefs date from the 1995-96 Term to the present.


Court Records – Oral Arguments

*May It Please the Court: Landmark Cases Argued Before the Supreme Court*, Transcripts and Cassettes, Law Permanent Reserves and Law A/V KF 4748 .M39 1993

*Oral Arguments of the Supreme Court of the United States* Law Microform Room cabinet 6, drawer 8


LexisNexis United States Supreme Court Transcripts begin with October 1979. Westlaw SCT-ORALARG database contains transcripts of oral arguments in cases heard by the United States Supreme Court from the Court's 1990-91 Term to the present.

Find Additional Books – QUEST

Keyword search for simple keyword searches. Use advanced search for field-restrictors, and more sophisticated keyword searching.

Updating

Do you have the latest information? Check dates of coverage whether you access information print or online.

Citator Services – KeyCite and Shepard's – will let you know if newer authorities have something to say about the authority you want to rely on.

When to Stop

Don't stop too soon. Remember too look at your issue from more than one angle and using a variety of sources and methods.

Don't waste your time. If you keep finding the same thing from different sources, you have found what is out there. Take a break in your research and start writing or at least outlining your paper to see where the holes in your research are.

Help is Available

Reference Librarians are on duty:

  Monday - Thursday  9:00 - 8:00
  Friday  9:00 - 5:00
  Saturday and Sunday  1:00 - 5:00