



SUPREME COURT CASE RESEARCH GUIDE

H. DOUGLAS BARCLAY LAW LIBRARY

*H. Douglas Barclay Law Library
Syracuse University College of Law
Prepared by the Public Services Department*

SUPREME COURT CASE RESEARCH

Check the library's "Location Guide" and the Library Online Catalog for the current location of sources mentioned in this pathfinder.

PURPOSE:

This Pathfinder is intended to direct library users to useful materials for conducting Supreme Court case research. Although there are numerous sources for researching Supreme Court cases, the focus of this Pathfinder is limited to the following texts, finding aids and databases:

OUTLINE:

I. CASE CITATION FORMATS

II. CASE REPORTERS

- A. United States Reports**
- B. Supreme Court Reporter**
- C. U.S. Supreme Court Reports, Lawyers' Edition**

III. DIGESTS

IV. CITATORS

V. CURRENT AWARENESS SERVICES

VI. RECORDS AND BRIEFS

I. CASE REPORTER CITATION FORMATS

A complete citation to a typical United States Supreme Court case (with official and parallel cites) is as follows:

***Laird v. Nelms*, 406 U.S. 797, 92 S. Ct.1899, 32 L. Ed. 2d 499 (1972)**

The case would be cited in each reporter as follows:

- (Official) *United States Reports*: *Laird v. Nelms*, 406 **U.S.** 797 (1972).
- (Unofficial) *Supreme Court Reporter*: *Laird v. Nelms*, 92 **S. Ct.**1899 (1972).
- (Unofficial) *United States Supreme Court Reports Lawyers' Edition*: *Laird v. Nelms*, 32 **L. Ed. 2d** 499 (1972).

The official *United States Reports* (U.S.) is cited as the authoritative source of the Supreme Court's rulings. Parallel citations to the two unofficial reporters are given as a matter of convenience.

II. CASE REPORTERS:

Case reporters contain the full text of U.S. Supreme Court opinions. United States Supreme Court cases are found in the following reporters:

- *United States Reports* (U.S.), (Government Printing Office)
- *Supreme Court Reporter* (S. Ct.), (West Publishing Co.)
- *United States Supreme Court Reports, Lawyers' Edition*, (L. Ed.) (Lawyer's Cooperative Pub. Co.)

A. United States Reports

- Published by Government Printing Office.
- Cases are arranged in chronological order.

- Currency of print material:
 - Slip opinion - about eight months from date of decision.
 - Advance sheet - about two years from date of decision
 - Bound volume - about years after the advance sheet.

FORMAT	COVERAGE	LOCATION
Paper	1790 – present	Unclassified Floor 4
Westlaw	1790 – present	http://lawschool.westlaw.com
Lexis	1790 – present	http://www.lawschool.lexis.com/
Internet	1893 – present	<i>FindLaw's U.S. Supreme Court Decisions</i> http://www.findlaw.com/casecode/supreme.html
	1990 – present	<i>LII's U.S. Supreme Court Decisions</i> http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/

B. Supreme Court Reporter

- Published by West Group.
- Cases are arranged in chronological order.
- Currency of print material:
 - The advance sheets may be as current as two weeks.
- Research Tips:
 - Includes tables of cases reported, statutes construed.
 - Table of words and phrases judicially defined.
 - Synopsis and headnotes for each case.
 - Subject access to the headnotes provided in *U.S. Supreme Court Digest*.

FORMAT	COVERAGE	LOCATION
Paper	1882 – present	Unclassified Floor 4
Westlaw	1790 – present	http://lawschool.westlaw.com

C. U.S. Supreme Court Reports, Lawyers' Edition

- Published by Lexis Law Publishers.
- Cases are arranged in chronological order.
- Currency of print material:
 - Comparable to West's *Supreme Court Reporter*.
 - Advance sheets as current as two weeks after decision
- Research Tips:

- Includes Annotation References and briefs of counsel
- Cases contain summaries and unique headnotes.
- Cross-references to subjects in other Lawyers Co-op publications.

FORMAT	COVERAGE	LOCATION
Paper	1790 – present	Unclassified Floor 4
Lexis	1790 – present	http://www.lawschool.lexis.com/

III. DIGESTS

Supreme Court opinions are arranged in chronological order and are not subject indexed in the reporters. If you do not have the case citation or the names of the parties, start your research with a Digest. Digests provide access to reported cases through annotations of court holdings arranged by subject.

The Barclay Law Library carries the following digests, which cover U.S. Supreme Court cases from 1791 to date:

A. *United States Supreme Court Digest* **Unclassified Floor 4**

- Arranged alphabetically by subject.
- Finding aids include Descriptive Word Indexes and Tables of Cases.
- West key number system offers topical break down of U.S. case law

Research by Subject:

Use the ‘Descriptive Word Index’ to locate West topics and key numbers for locating case abstracts and citations within the main body of the digest.

For example, "Aviation – Property Damage."

(1). The Descriptive Word Index (West, 2001) provides this entry under "property" and damage to property in general from operation of aircraft": Aviation->145."

(2). Look up the topic of "Aviation" (in the topical volume(s) with subjects beginning under letter "A") and browse the annotations under key number "145 injuries to property in general" for case summaries and citations involving liability for injuries to property.

The West, 2001 volume containing the digest topic of Aviation & Key Number 145 will refer the researcher to *Laird v. Nelms*.

Research by Case Name:

(1). If you have the name of the case (*Laird v. Nelms*) but no Supreme Court case reporter citation, use the “Table of Cases”. This table provides a citation(s) for the case. To wit: *Laird v. Nelms*, 406 U.S. 797

Updating Research:

Check annual cumulative pocket parts and the "Closing with Cases Reported Noted" at front of each pocket part.

B. U.S. Supreme Court Digest, Lawyers' Edition Unclassified Floor 4

- A publication of the Lexis Law Publishing Company.
- Designed to cover Supreme Court decisions.
- Arranged alphabetically by subject.
- Cross referenced into “Total Client Service Library.”

This digest has a structure, organization and research methodology that is similar to the *United States Supreme Court Digest*. For further information on using this Digest and other digests found in the law library consult the pathfinder entitled “West Case Reporters & Digests: An Introduction.”

C. Federal Practice Digest Unclassified Floor 4

- Carries Supreme Court and other Federal cases.
- Arranged alphabetically by subject; identical to West's *Supreme Court Digest*.

This digest has a structure, organization and research methodology that is similar to the *United States Supreme Court Digest*. For further information on using this Digest and other digests found in the law library consult the pathfinder entitled “West Case Reporters & Digests: An Introduction.”

IV. CITATORS

Citators provide the subsequent judicial history and interpretation of reported decisions and denote legislative and amendment history of statutes, rules and regulations.

Consult the following citators for U.S. Supreme Court case research:

- *Shepard's United States Citations Cases Unclassified Floor 4*

Covers all Supreme Court cases 1791 to date.

Shepardizing:

- When you have a citation such as *Laird v. Nelms*, 406 U.S. 797 (1972) look up the following in the citator:
- First, look up the volume number from the citation, i.e. Vol. 406
- Second, look up the page number from the citation, i.e. 797.
- Third, review the list of citations under page 797 where your case has been cited.

Updating Research:

- Start with "What Your Library Should Contain" note on the cover of the latest supplement.
 - Find out which volumes and supplements make up a complete set of *Shepard's U.S. Citations*.
 - Start with your most current citation and work backwards with it through all the later supplements.
- Lexis and Westlaw Citator Services
 - Lexis offers the Shepard's citation service.
 - Westlaw offers the KeyCite citation service.

V. CURRENT SERVICES

Current services enable the researcher to find new Supreme Court cases within a few days of the decision.

- *United States Law Week* (U.S.L.W.)

This is a two volume looseleaf service published by the Bureau of National Affairs (BNA).

- Cases are typically decided on Monday. *Law Week* is published on Tuesday and usually reaches the library by Thursday or Friday.
- Internet version is more current. Check with librarian for access.
- In the print version, the "Supreme Court" volume contains full text opinions of decided cases, Court news, summaries of pending cases, cumulative subject index, and table of cases. The "General Law" volume contains news and abstracts of important opinions from federal and state courts.

Research by Subject:

- "Topical Index" has references to docket numbers of cases on point.
- Check these in "Case Status Report" to find out whether the cases have been decided, summarized or fully reported.

Research by Case Name:

- The "Case Status Report" also contains a complete alphabetical Table of Cases.

FORMAT	COVERAGE	LOCATION
Paper	1940 – present	Reserves KF 101 .B8 (current 2 years); KF 101 .B8 (back issues)
Westlaw	1986 – present	http://lawschool.westlaw.com
Lexis	7/82 – present	http://www.lawschool.lexis.com/
Internet	current	<i>United States Law Week (SU COL campus access only)</i> ERC – Floor 3 of law library
Internet	Current	<i>Official Web Site for US Supreme Court</i> http://www.supremecourtus.gov/

- *ABA's Preview of U.S. Supreme Court Cases* **KF 4547.8 .P7**
 - Covers the 1987-88 term to present.
 - Information is current to within about two weeks of the decision.
 - Provides a summary of key cases under specific topics.
 - Includes docket number, date argued, names of advocates, and amicus briefs.
 - Research by Subject: Check the table of contents on the front page of each issue.
- *The OYEZ Project*
 - <http://www.oyez.org>
 - Northwestern University has provided an excellent Internet site to keep updated on pending Supreme Court cases.
 - Included are recent decisions and oral arguments and briefs for selected cases.

VI. SUPREME COURT RECORDS AND BRIEFS

Supreme court cases can sometimes best be understood in light of the briefs and records on appeal. Briefs can also be used to develop arguments or to obtain research leads in similar cases.

- *United States Supreme Court Records and Briefs* **Microform Floor 2**
 - Arranged chronologically with *U.S. Reports*.
 - Supreme Court Records and Briefs dating back to 1832.
 - Full opinion cases only.
 - Briefs are available within a few weeks after argument and before decision.
 - Check case status tables in *Law Week* or *Supreme Court Bulletin* to see if the case has been argued. If it has, check the fiche cabinet to see if the briefs have been received.

Research by Docket Number: For current cases, the fiche are arranged by docket number.

Research by Case Name: Table of cases on index cards filed at the beginning of the fiche for each court term.

FORMAT	COVERAGE	LOCATION
Microform		Unclassified Floor 2
Westlaw	1990 – present	http://lawschool.westlaw.com
Lexis	7/82 – present	http://www.lawschool.lexis.com/