

Searching Cases on Westlaw

Search Tips for westlaw.com®

Retrieving a Case by Citation

The quickest way to retrieve a case on Westlaw when you know its citation is by using the Find service. You do not need to access a database. From a tabbed jurisdictional page you can type a citation, e.g., **121 sct 2381**, in the *Find by citation* text box in the *Shortcuts* section and click **GO**. At the tabbed Westlaw page, type a citation, e.g., **121 sct 2381**, in the *Find this document by citation* text box and click **GO**.

You can also click **Find** on the toolbar and type your citation in the *Find this document by citation* text box. To view a list of publications that can be retrieved with Find or to view the proper abbreviation for a publication, click **Publications List** in the left frame.

Retrieving a Case by Title

You can use a fill-in-the-blank template to retrieve a case by its title. Complete the following steps to retrieve a case by title:

1. Click **Find** on the toolbar. The **Find a document** page is displayed. Click **Find by Title**. (If you have personalized your *Shortcuts* section to include a *Find by Title* link, click that link.)
2. Type one or more parties' names in the text boxes in the right frame.
3. Select the jurisdiction in which the case was heard or the reporter in which it was published and click **GO**.

For example, to retrieve *Palmer v. A.H. Robins Co.*, 684 P.2d 187 (Colo. 1984), type **palmer** and **robins** in the text boxes. Select **State Courts**, then select **Colorado** from the corresponding drop-down list and click **GO**.

Searching for Cases by Issue

The *Quick Search* section of a tabbed jurisdictional page enables you to type a Terms and Connectors query or a Natural Language description of your issue, choose a database(s), and run the search from the same page. At the tabbed Westlaw page, access a database by typing its name or identifier in the *Search these databases* text box, e.g., **sct** or **u.s. supreme court cases**, and click **GO**.

1. Choose which search method you want to use. (Term and Connectors is the default search method unless you have changed it to Natural Language in your Options Directory.)
2. Type your search.
 - To search using Natural Language, type a description of your issue in plain English, e.g., **viewpoint discrimination by the government in a public forum**. Click **Add Date Restriction** to choose a date restriction, e.g., **most recent 90 days**, or to type your own date restriction. Click **Add Other Restrictions** to restrict your search by court, attorney, or judge.
 - To search using Terms and Connectors, type a query using key terms from your issue and connectors to identify the relationship between terms, e.g., **“americans with disabilities act” a.d.a. /p protect! /s class group**. For assistance in creating a Terms and Connectors query, click **Connectors/Expanders** to display a complete list of search connectors. To further restrict your search, click **Fields** or **Dates**.
3. Click **Search**.

Westlaw is available on the Web at www.westlaw.com.

For technical assistance, call West Customer Technical Support at **1-800-WESTLAW** (1-800-937-8529).

For search assistance, call the West Reference Attorneys at **1-800-REF-ATTY** (1-800-733-2889).

If you are a law student, call **1-800-850-WEST** (1-800-850-9378) for assistance.

Natural Language Searching

The Natural Language search method allows you to use plain English to retrieve relevant documents. Simply enter a description of your issue using terms, in sentence form or with just the key terms, that describe its main concepts. You will get better results if you use concepts you think a court would use to describe the issue.

After you run your search, the documents most closely matching the concepts in your description are displayed. Instead of cases being displayed in reverse chronological order, as with Terms and Connectors searching, the cases with concepts that most closely match the concepts in your description are displayed first. The enhanced list of citations helps you identify relevant documents in your search result because it includes, for each citation, your search terms and surrounding document text.

Terms and Connectors Searching

The Terms and Connectors search method allows you to do a more precise search. You enter key terms from your issue and use connectors to specify the relationship between the terms. For example, you can require that your terms appear in the same sentence or the same paragraph.

To retrieve only those cases in which your search terms are significant, restrict your search to the synopsis field (sy), the digest field (di), or both, e.g., **sy,di(avoid! /p bankruptcy)**. The synopsis field gives you the summary paragraph at the beginning of the case; the digest field gives you the headnotes in the case. If you run a search using one or both of these field restrictions and retrieve no documents, you can run the search again without the field restrictions.

Tips for Terms and Connectors Searching

- A compound word may appear as one word, as a hyphenated word, or as two separate words. If your search term is a compound word, use its hyphenated form to retrieve all variations. For example, **print-out** will retrieve *print out*, *print-out*, and *printout*.
- Abbreviations may appear with or without periods or spaces. To retrieve the various forms of an abbreviation, enter it with periods and without spaces. For example, **h.i.v.** will retrieve *H.I.V.*, *H. I. V.*, *HIV*, and *HI V*.
- If you type a word in its singular form, you will retrieve both the singular and plural forms. If you use the plural, however, you will retrieve only the plural form.
- The online Thesaurus is useful for finding related concepts for your search terms for both Natural Language and Terms and Connectors searches. (If it's not displayed in the *Quick Search* section of your tabbed jurisdictional page, you can click **Edit** in the *Search for* section and add it.) At the tabbed Westlaw page, access a database and then type a search. Click **Thesaurus** to select related terms from a list that corresponds to terms in your search.

The West Reference Attorneys are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week—at no charge—to assist you with your research. In addition, you can order free reference materials that go into more detail about Terms and Connectors searching at west.thomson.com/documentation.

Useful Fields Restrictions in Terms and Connectors Searching

Synopsis (sy) — Chapter 13 debtor brought adversary proceeding to avoid purchase-money security interest in vehicle. The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Missouri, Frank W. Koger, Chief Judge, [183 B.R. 857](#), set aside creditor's security interest as preferential, and creditor appealed. The District Court, Ortrie D. Smith, J., affirmed, and creditor again appealed. The Court of Appeals [102 F.3d 334](#), affirmed. On certiorari, the Supreme Court, Justice Souter, held that secured creditor could not invoke "enabling loan" exception to trustee's preference-avoidance power to preclude avoidance of its security interest. Affirmed.

West Headnotes

Digest (di) —

Topic (to) — [\[2\] KeyCite Notes](#)
 ↳ [51 Bankruptcy](#)
 ↳ [51V The Estate](#)
 ↳ [51V\(E\) Preferences](#)
 ↳ [51k2606 Elements and Exceptions](#)
 ↳ [51k2614 k. Purchase Money Security Interests; Enabling Loans. Most Cited Cases](#)

Headnote (he) — Time within which secured party must perform the acts necessary to perfect its purchase-money security interest, to preclude trustee of debtor's bankruptcy estate from later avoiding that interest as preferential, is governed by federal, not state, law. Bankr.Code, [11 U.S.C.A. § 547\(c\)\(3\)\(B\)](#).

Searching Using Topic and Key Numbers

If you have identified a topic and key number associated with the legal issue you are researching, you can run a search using the topic and key number to quickly retrieve cases involving the same legal issue. Access the appropriate database and type the topic and key number as a Terms and Connectors search term. For example, to search for cases containing topic 92 (Constitutional Law) and key number 91 (Right of Assembly and Petition), type **92k91** in the text box.

You can also use a topic and key number search in conjunction with other search terms. For example, to search for cases with the above topic and key number that relate to political parties, type **92k91 /p political /s party organization**.

A list of West digest topics and their numerical equivalents is available in the Custom Digest.

Using the Custom Digest

The Custom Digest contains the complete topic and key number outline used by West attorney-editors to classify headnotes. Every legal issue in a case published by West is identified and summarized in a headnote, then assigned a topic and key number. You can use the Custom Digest to find topic and key numbers related to your issue and to retrieve a list of cases with headnotes classified under those topic and key numbers. All headnotes classified under a specific topic and key number are contained in a single document.

To access the Custom Digest, choose **Key Numbers & Digest** from the *More* drop-down list on the toolbar. To browse the list of topic and key numbers, click the plus (+) and minus (-) symbols. Select the check box next to each topic or key number you want to search for, then click **GO**. Select the jurisdiction from which you want to retrieve headnotes and click **Search**.

Using ResultsPlus™ to Expand Your Research

ResultsPlus offers links to additional sources of information that you might otherwise miss when you research case law or statutes. References to additional resources are automatically displayed, when appropriate, in a list alongside your search result citations list. Up to 10 references that have a high statistical likelihood of matching the concepts in your search are displayed.

Each listing includes a brief description containing terms

from the title of the document so that you can easily determine whether you want to investigate further. To view the full text of one of the listed documents, click its number or description in the ResultsPlus list.

When you search a case law database, ResultsPlus may offer links to the following publications: *American Law Reports* (ALR®), *American Jurisprudence 2d* (Am Jur®), *American Jurisprudence Proof of Facts*, *American Jurisprudence Trials*, *Immigration Law Service*, and *Norton Bankruptcy Law and Practice 2d*. When you research state or federal statutes databases, ResultsPlus may offer links to ALR annotations and Am Jur articles.

ResultsPlus may also suggest up to two West topic and key numbers relevant to your case law or statutes research. Simply click a topic and key number reference in the ResultsPlus list to quickly retrieve a single Westlaw document containing headnotes from cases discussing the legal issue classified under that topic and key number. The most recent cases are listed first.

If you have a WestlawPRO® plan, there is a charge to view the full text of an ALR or Am Jur document, but there is no charge to click a topic and key number to retrieve headnotes if your initial search was in a database included in your plan.

Using KeySearch®

KeySearch is designed to help you find cases and secondary sources within a specific area of the law. It guides you through the selection of terms from a classification system based on the West Key Number System® and then creates a Terms and Connectors query for you. You do not have to formulate a Terms and Connectors query yourself!

To access KeySearch, click **KeySearch** on the toolbar. Browse the list of topics and subtopics in the right frame by clicking any of the terms. You can also scan the list of topics and subtopics for a specific term by typing the term in the text box in the left frame and clicking **GO**. (If you use more than one term, use a connector between them, for example, **child /3 support**).

To select a topic or subtopic for which KeySearch will supply a query, click the term or click the **Search all of** link at the top of the page. Then choose the source you want to retrieve documents from and, if desired, type your own search terms in the *Add search terms* text box. KeySearch constructs a query for you based on the topic or subtopics you selected, the search terms you added, and the source you selected. Click **Search** to run the KeySearch query.

Using KeyCite® to Check Your Citations

Use KeyCite, West's citation research service, to determine whether your case is good law and to retrieve a comprehensive list of citing references. You can quickly access KeyCite information for the case you are viewing by clicking the KeyCite status flag, if available. You can also access KeyCite by clicking **KeyCite** on the toolbar or by typing a citation in the *KeyCite this citation* text box at your tabbed jurisdictional or topical page.

KeyCite Status Flags for Cases



A red flag warns that the case is no longer good law for at least one of the points of law it contains.



A yellow flag warns that the case has some negative history, but has not been reversed or overruled.



A blue H indicates that the case has some history.



A green C indicates that the case has citing references but no direct or negative indirect history.

Citing References to the Case

To view a list of cases, administrative materials, secondary sources, and briefs that cite your case, click **Citing References** on the Links tab.

Negative citing cases are listed first; the remaining cases are listed according to the depth of treatment they give your case. Secondary sources, such as ALR annotations and law review articles, and briefs are listed last.

You can limit your list of citing references by headnote, Locate, jurisdiction, date, document type, or depth of treatment category. Click **Limit KeyCite Display** at the bottom of the KeyCite citing references result. You can also hold your pointer over the arrow next to *Limit KeyCite Display* and choose a restriction from the menu that is displayed.

KeyCite Depth of Treatment Stars

KeyCite depth of treatment stars indicate how extensively a cited case decision has been discussed by the citing case.

- ★★★★ Examined The citing case contains an extended discussion of the cited case, usually more than a printed page of text.
- ★★★ Discussed The citing case contains a substantial discussion of the cited case, usually more than a paragraph but less than a printed page.
- ★★ Cited The citing case contains some discussion of the cited case, usually less than a paragraph.
- ★ Mentioned The citing case contains a brief reference to the cited case, usually in a string citation.

KeyCite Quotation Marks

Quotation marks (") in your KeyCite result indicate that the citing case directly quotes the cited case.