

# Five Easy Ways to Retrieve Cases

## Searching Cases on Westlaw

### 1. Retrieve a case using a citation

The quickest way to retrieve a case on Westlaw when you know its citation is to use the Find service. You do not need to access a database. At most tabbed pages you can type a citation, e.g., **121 sct 2381**, in the *Find by citation* text box in the left frame and click **Go**. At the tabbed Westlaw page, type the citation in the *Find this document by citation* text box and click **Go**.

#### RETRIEVING MULTIPLE CASES BY CITATION

To find and print multiple cases, click **Find&Print** at the top of any page. At the Find a Document page, type your citations in the *Enter Citation(s)* text box in the right frame, select your result options and delivery options, and click **Send Request**.

### 2. Retrieve a case by party name

You can quickly retrieve a case by party name using a fill-in-the-blank template. To retrieve a case by party name, complete these steps:

1. Click **Find&Print** at the top of any page. In the left frame of the Find a Document page, click **Find a Case by Party Name**.
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**.

**Note:** If you are at a case law database Search page, click **Search by Party Name** in the upper-right corner of the page, then type one or both parties' names in the text boxes and click **Search Westlaw**.

### 3. Retrieve a case by issue

At a database Search page, type your Terms and Connectors or Natural Language search in the *Search* text box and click **Search Westlaw**.

#### 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, alone or in sentence form, that describe its main concepts, e.g., **viewpoint discrimination by the government in a public forum**. You will get better results if you use terms 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 first.

#### TERMS AND CONNECTORS SEARCHING

The Terms and Connectors search method allows you to run a more precise search. 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, e.g., **"americans with disabilities act" a.d.a. /p protect! /s class group**.

For assistance using Westlaw, call **1-800-WESTLAW** (1-800-937-8529).

For free reference materials, visit [west.thomson.com/westlaw/guides](http://west.thomson.com/westlaw/guides).

### Tips for Terms and Connectors searching

- If your search term is a compound word, use its hyphenated form to retrieve all variations. For example, type **good-will** to retrieve *good will*, *good-will*, and *goodwill*.
- If your search term is an abbreviation, type it with periods and without spaces to retrieve all variations. For example, type **h.i.v.** to retrieve *H.I.V.*, *H. I. V.*, *HIV*, and *H I V*.
- Use the root expander (!) to retrieve words with variant endings. The root expander must always be placed at the end of a term. For example, type **distribut!** to retrieve *distribute*, *distributed*, *distribution*, and *distributing*.
- If you type a word in its singular form, you will retrieve both the singular and plural forms, e.g., type **child** to retrieve *child* and *children*. If you use the plural, however, you will retrieve only the plural form.
- Use the universal character (\*) to represent one variable character. You can place the universal character anywhere in a term except at the beginning. For example, type **gr\*w** to retrieve *grew* and *grow*.

## 4. Retrieve a case using field restrictions

Almost all documents on Westlaw are composed of several parts called *fields*. In case law documents, the names of the parties, the name of the judge, and the names of the attorneys are each considered a separate field. Other fields, including the synopsis, topic, headnote, and digest fields, contain exclusive West editorial enhancements. The synopsis field (sy) contains the summary paragraph at the beginning of the case; the digest field (di) contains the headnotes in the case.

Rather than searching entire documents, you can restrict your search to one or more fields. Doing so saves searching and browsing time and makes your search more efficient. To retrieve only those cases in which your search terms are significant, restrict your search to the synopsis field or the digest field, or both. To retrieve cases dealing with retaliation against whistle-blowers, for example, you could type a Terms and Connectors query such as **sy,di(whistle-blow! /p retaliat!)**.

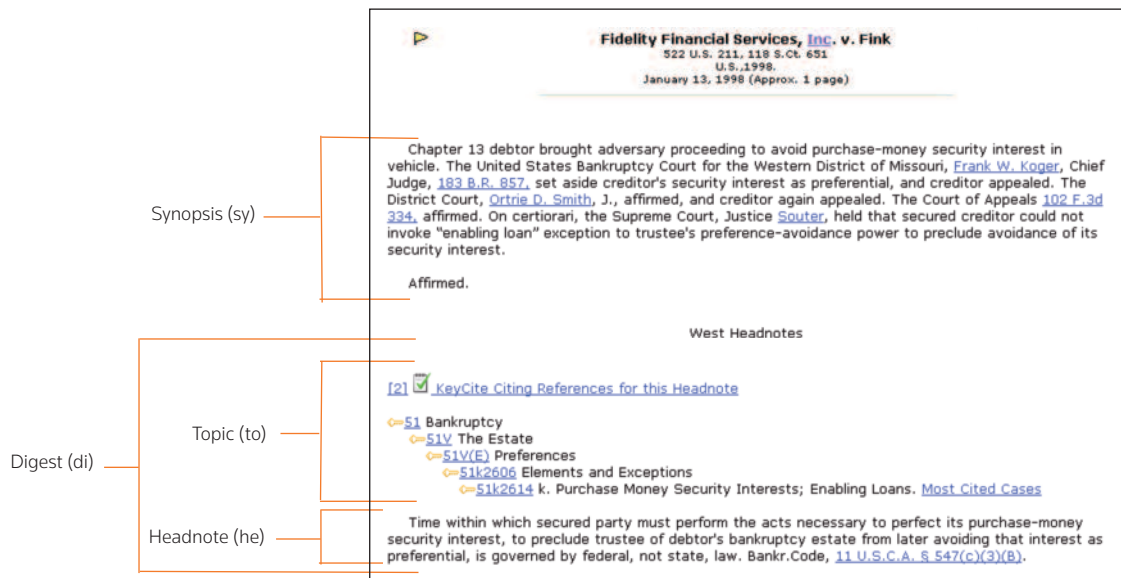


Figure 1. Useful fields in a case

## 5. Retrieve a case using topic and key numbers

Each legal issue in a case published by West is identified, summarized in a headnote, and assigned a West topic and key number. You can quickly retrieve cases involving particular legal issues on Westlaw by running a topic and key number search.

If you have already identified a topic and key number associated with the legal issue you are researching, you can run a search using that topic and key number in a case law database to quickly retrieve cases involving the same legal issue. For example, to search for cases with headnotes classified under topic 231H (Labor and Employment) and key number 758 (Wrongful Discharge in General), first access the appropriate database, e.g., All Federal Cases (ALLFEDS). At the Search page, click the **Terms and Connectors** tab, type **231hk758** in the *Search* text box, and click **Search Westlaw**.

You can also use a topic and key number search in conjunction with other search terms. For example, to search for cases with headnotes classified under the above topic and key number that relate to contracts, type a Terms and Connectors search such as **231hk758 /p contract**.

### USING THE WEST KEY NUMBER DIGEST

The West Key Number Digest, also called the Custom Digest, contains the complete topic and key number outline used by West attorney-editors to classify headnotes. You can use the West Key Number Digest to find topic and key numbers related to your issue and to retrieve cases with headnotes classified under those topic and key numbers. To access the West Key Number Digest, click **Key Numbers** at the top of any page, then click **West Key Number Digest Outline**. (Alternatively, click **Custom Digest** at a case law database Search page.) To browse the list of topic and key numbers, click the plus (+) and minus (–) symbols.

In addition to browsing the topic and key number outline for relevant topic and key numbers, you can also search for them using the Search for Key Numbers feature. Click **Key Numbers** at the top of any page. Then type terms that describe your issue, such as **family and medical leave**, in the *Search for Key Numbers* text box; select a jurisdiction; and click **Search**. You retrieve a list of topic and key numbers from cases in the jurisdiction you selected, as well as from other state and federal jurisdictions as shown in Figure 2. Click a topic and key number in the list to view case headnotes classified under that topic and key number. Click the case title above a headnote to view the full text of the opinion.

**Search for Key Numbers**  
Enter terms e.g., *landlord duty of care to trespassers*

family and medical leave

Jurisdiction selected: **All Federal Cases**  
[Change Jurisdiction](#)

[West Key Number Digest Outline](#)

**All Federal Cases**

**LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT**

- 231hk368 Rights of employee; violations > Discharge or layoff
- 231hk355 Terms and conditions of **leave** > Request for **leave**; notice to employer; foreseeability
- 231hk389(2) Evidence > Presumptions and burden of proof
- 231hk371 Rights of employee; violations > Other particular rights or violations
- 231hk365 Rights of employee; violations > Retaliation in general
- 231hk389(4) Evidence > Weight and sufficiency
- 231hk359 Terms and conditions of **leave** > **Medical** certifications
- 231hk351(3) Disability, illness, or health condition > Particular conditions of employees
- 231hk363 Rights of employee; violations > Denial of or interference with rights in general
- 231hk372 TIME OFF; **LEAVE** > Posting or other notice of statutory rights and obligations

**ResultsPlus™** [About](#)

**Employment Coordinator**

1. [Parental and Family Leave, Particular State Provisions, Wisconsin](#)

**ALR**

2. [Who is Eligible Employee Under 101\(2\) of Family and Medical Leave Act \(29 U.S.C.A. 2611\(2\)\)](#)

**Am.Jur.2d: Job Discrimination**

3. [Maternity and Family](#)





Figure 2. Search for key numbers

## Checking your case in KeyCite

KeyCite, West's citation research service, makes it easy to determine the current status of a case. KeyCite status flags inform you when your case is no longer good law for at least one of the points of law it contains or when it has some negative history but hasn't been reversed or overruled. To view the history of a displayed case, click **Full History** or a KeyCite status flag, if available, in the left frame. To display the full text of a case in the KeyCite result, click its retrieval number. Click **KeyCite** at the top of any page to display a detailed explanation of the depth of treatment stars.

To view the direct history of the case in an easy-to-read graphical view, click **Direct History (Graphical View)**.

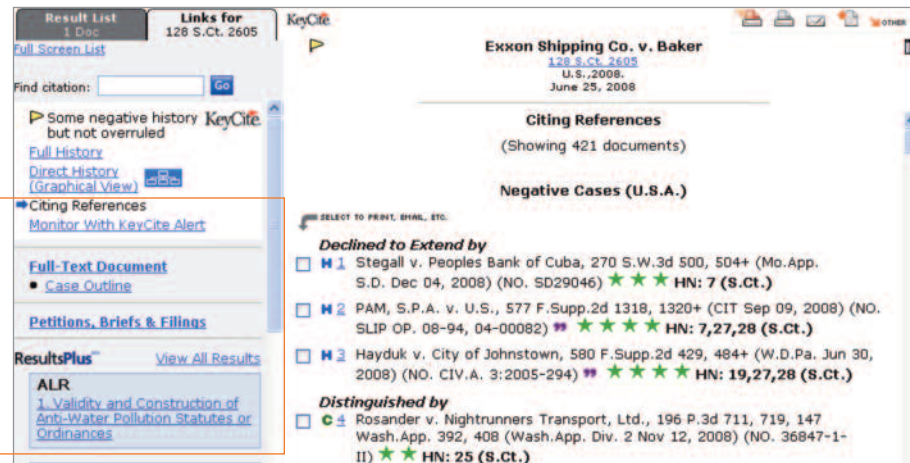
### KeyCite status flags

-  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 history or negative citing references.

## Finding related material

You can expand your research by using the resources on the Links tab in the left frame.

- To display a list of KeyCite citing references for a case you are viewing, click **Citing References**. Citing documents include cases, administrative materials, secondary sources, and briefs and other court documents. Negative citing cases are listed first, followed by a list of other cases, administrative decisions, secondary sources, and briefs and other court documents.
- To view a list of appellate and trial court decisions, click **Petitions, Briefs, and Filings**.
- ResultsPlus displays a list of additional documents that relate to your search. Click a title in the ResultsPlus list to view the full text of a document.



The screenshot shows the KeyCite interface for the case *Exxon Shipping Co. v. Baker*, 128 S.Ct. 2605 (U.S., 2008). The left sidebar contains a 'Links for 128 S.Ct. 2605' section with a search bar and a list of links: 'Some negative history but not overruled', 'Full History', 'Direct History (Graphical View)', 'Citing References', 'Monitor With KeyCite Alert', 'Full-Text Document', 'Case Outline', 'Petitions, Briefs & Filings', and 'ResultsPlus™'. The main content area shows the case title, date, and a list of 'Citing References' and 'Negative Cases (U.S.A.)'. The 'Citing References' section shows 421 documents, and the 'Negative Cases' section lists several cases, including *Stegall v. Peoples Bank of Cuba*, *PAM, S.P.A. v. U.S.*, and *Hayduk v. City of Johnstown*.

Figure 3. Related materials for a case