

KEY POINTS

Where do you start your research?

You've just been handed a new research project. Perhaps it's your first project. Perhaps as an experienced researcher, it's another one of many. The same problem faces you. You've read the facts, you understand the legal issues, and you've a good idea of the parameters of the project. Where do you start your research?

If the area of law is unfamiliar or it's been a while, start with a preliminary overview from texts and treatises, law review articles, or *American Law Reports* (ALR®) annotations. These sources are available on Westlaw® and can lead you to primary authority as well as acquaint you with some of the terms of art in the area to help construct your searches on Westlaw.

Need a quick definition of unfamiliar legal terms, e.g., *nunc pro tunc*? Sign on to Westlaw and access the Black's Law Dictionary®, Eighth Edition database (BLACKS). Type your terms in the *Enter Dictionary term* text box and click **Search Westlaw**.

You may also want to check the American Law Institute Restatements of the Law databases.

If the area of law is likely to be governed by federal statute, start with the United States Code Annotated® (USCA®) database. West editors have added notes of decisions that point out cases applying or construing the statute.

Identify useful West topic and key numbers pertinent to your topic. When you sign on to Westlaw, use those West topic and key numbers as search terms. You can find relevant West topic and key numbers in

- the West headnotes in cases cited in memoranda or briefs (use Find to retrieve the case on Westlaw)
- your preliminary survey of secondary authority
- pertinent sections in the USCA
- West print digests or the West Key Number Digest (formerly Custom Digest) on Westlaw
- West's *U. S. Code Congressional and Administrative News*® (USCCAN)

For more information on using West topic and key numbers, see page 3.

Use KeyCite®, West's citation research service, to retrieve additional relevant cases as well as verify that cases are good law.

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call the West Reference Attorneys at
1-800-REF-ATTY (1-800-733-2889)

Tailor Westlaw to Suit Yourself

To save time and streamline your Westlaw searching, you can personalize Westlaw to focus on the areas of law you need most often. Westlaw offers tabbed custom pages that allow quick access to primary and secondary legal materials, as well as public records, news, and other information.

If your cases are usually filed in federal courts sitting in Illinois, you'll often want cases from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. If your workload contains mostly securities cases, you'll want to access the securities materials. It's also nice to have a quick overview of the Westlaw materials available for a particular jurisdiction, e.g., California; topical area, e.g., Social Security; or type of research, e.g., federal legislative history.

To select the tabbed custom pages that fit your needs, click **Add/Remove Tabs** at the top of any page to display the available tabbed pages.

Select the appropriate check box next to each tabbed page you want to add; remove tabbed pages by clearing the relevant check boxes. Six tabbed pages can be displayed at one time. Click **Next**. Then select the page you want displayed first each time you sign on to Westlaw and click **Save**. Change tabbed pages easily as your workload changes.

Editor's note: For many states, you can access tables of contents and indexes for the *United States Code Annotated*, a state's annotated statutes, a state's administrative code, and other materials directly from a state's tabbed page.

You can also personalize a tabbed page. For example, you can add databases not listed or remove databases you seldom use from the *Select Database(s)* section; just click **Add/Remove Databases**. On tabbed pages with *Resources* sections in the right frame, click **Edit**. Select or clear the appropriate check boxes and click **Save**. Think you've made a mistake and want to start afresh? Click **Restore Default Settings**.

Create Your Very Own Westlaw Password

You have a lot of numbers to remember. If you feel like you're going on overload and memorizing a string of numbers and letters to access Westlaw is the last straw, you can create your own Westlaw password. Perhaps you'd like to use your cat's name—Laptop—or express your feelings—Beam Me Up—or be your favorite fantasy character—Merlin. Instead of using the Westlaw password issued to you, take a few minutes to create your own. At the Westlaw sign-on page, click **Switch to sign on using your own Username and Password**. Next click **Register for Username and Password**. Follow the easy on-screen directions and click **Save**. As Captain Jean Luc Picard said, you may now engage!

Search Tip: Topic and Key Number Searches

| When you want to | Formulate a search such as |
|--|--|
| zero in on an issue and reduce the number of documents retrieved to a core set of relevant documents, add a West topic number (or name) to your query | to(208) /p indemnif! /s enforc! unenforc! valid! invalid! to(indemnity) /p indemnif! /s enforc! unenforc! valid! invalid! |
| search for cases with headnotes classified to more than one topic | to(406 37) /p dog canine /s deadly dangerous lethal |
| retrieve cases in which the search terms describe an issue but not cases in which the search terms merely occur | to(313a) & ford /s pinto |
| retrieve cases with headnotes classified to a particular topic in which the search terms occur in the hierarchical classification information used by West editors | to(78 /p color /s law) |
| exclude categories of cases, use the But Not connector (%) with the relevant topic numbers, e.g., to exclude cases with headnotes classified under Criminal Law (110), Habeas Corpus (197), or Searches and Seizures (349) | substitut! /s attorney lawyer counsel /s prejudic! %to(110 197 349) |
| retrieve cases with headnotes classified to a specific topic and key number that you have identified as pertinent to your issue | 29tk601 |
| search for cases with headnotes classified to a specific topic and key number that also contain specific terms | 29tk601 /p base-ball |
| retrieve cases with headnotes classified to one or more topic and key numbers | 217k1608 217k1609 217k1610 |
| retrieve cases that discuss your issue but you don't know the West topic and key number, search for your terms in the synopsis (sy) and digest (di) fields | sy,di(wild /3 horse burro) |
| retrieve nonunique rule or statute numbers, search in the headnote field (he) | he(9(e) /p inquiry /3 notice) |

Editor's note: Do not use a topic number as your sole search term; this is too general a search. Remember that West topics and key numbers (or West synopsis and digest paragraphs) are not found in slip opinions, some unpublished cases, and cases not reported by West.

ADVANCED SEARCH TIP

Stop: Words That Are Too Common to Be Used in a Search

Words that are too common to be used in a Terms and Connectors query on Westlaw are called *stop words*. These are words such as *by*, *before*, *now*, and *the*.

You can include these common words (except *the*) in your Terms and Connectors queries if they are either the first or last word in a legal term of art by hyphenating the phrase or enclosing the phrase in quotation marks, e.g.,

law +1 "of the case"

For a complete list of the stop words on Westlaw, click **Help** at the top of any page. Type **stop** in the text box at the top of the dialog box and click **Search**. Then click **What are 'stop words' on Westlaw?**

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