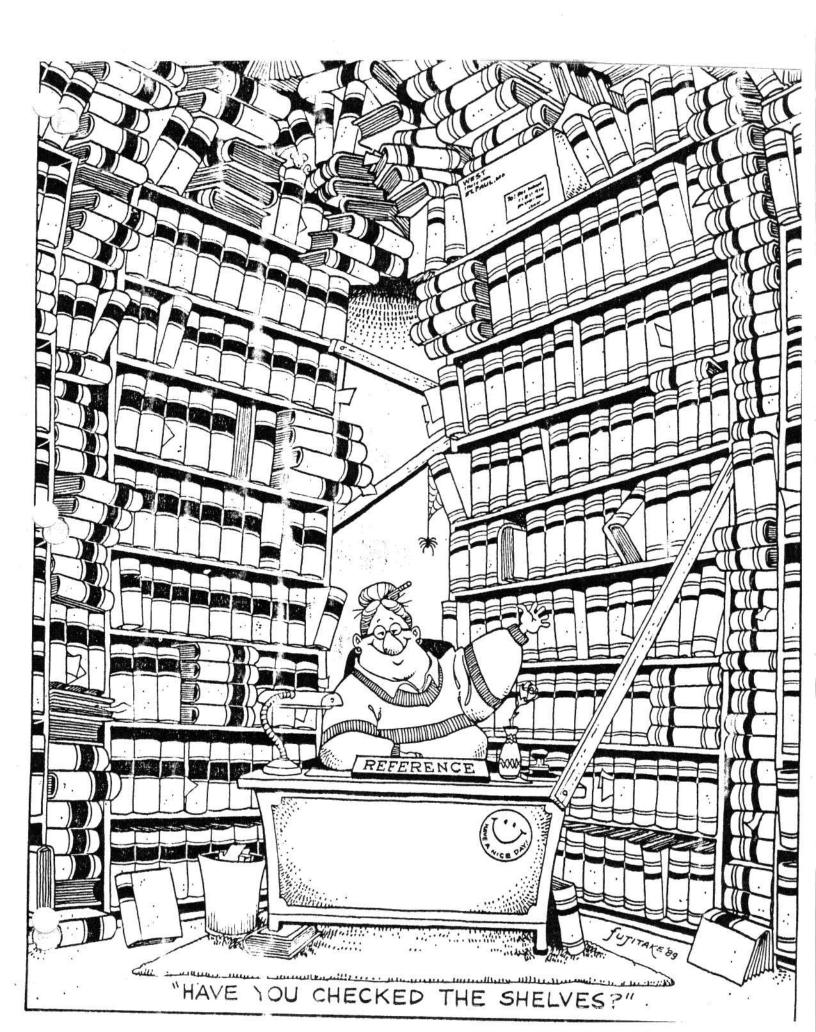
LEGAL RESEARCH

Debora Person

Debora A. Person is an associate law librarian at the George William Hopper Law Library, University of Wyoming College of Law. She supervises the library's technical and public services staff, trains and supervises the reference assistants, manages the library's reference office and monitors the library system. Ms. Person also teaches the first year legal research class of incoming law students. Ms. Person received her MLIS degree at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and her B.A. degree, summa cum laude, from Arizona State University. She is a member of the American Bar Association and the American Association of Law Libraries and WestPac, the regional chapter of AALL, serving on a number of committees for these organizations.



University of Wyoming George William Hopper Law Library

Finding a Case

Cases, or judicial decisions, are published in sets of books called reporters. To locate a case, you will need a citation. A case citation consists of the name of the case, the volume number of the reporter, the abbreviated name of the reporter, the page on which the case begins, and the year the case was decided.

Example: Webster v. Reproductive Health Services, 109 S. Ct. 3040 (1989)

Below are the most common abbreviations for reporters, the name, the location of the reporter within our library, and its coverage.

Abbreviat	ion Name of Reporter	Location	Coverage
Federal Cases			
U.S.	United States Reports	M-S-1	U.S. Supreme Court
S. Ct.	Supreme Court Reporter	M-S-1 to 2	U.S. Supreme Court
L. Ed.	Lawyers' Edition	M-N-2	U.S. Supreme Court
F.	Federal Reporter	M-S-2 to 4	U.S. Circuit Courts of Appeal
F. Supp.	Federal Supplement	M-S-4 to 6	U.S. District Courts
F.R.D.	Federal Rules Decisions	M-S-5 to 6	U.S. District Courts procedural
			questions
State Cases	(Regional Reporters)		
A.	Atlantic Reporter	M-S-7 to 8	CT, DE, MD, ME, NH, NJ, PA,
			RI, VT
N.E.	Northeastern Reporter	M-S-9 & 10	IL, IN, MA, NY, OH
N.W.	Northwestern Reporter	M-S-10 & 11	IA, MI, MN, ND, NE, SD, WI
P.	Pacific Reporter	M-S-12 to 14	AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, KS,
			MT, NV, NM, OK, OR, UT,
			WA, WY
S.E.	Southeastern Reporter	M-S-13 & 14	GA, NC, SC, VA, WV
So.	Southern Reporter	M-S-14 & 15	AL, FL, LA, MS
S.W.	Southwestern Reporter	M-S-15 & 16	AR, KY, MO, TN, TX

You may see a "2d" or "3d" following the reporter abbreviation. This indicates a new series. When the volumes of a previous series reaches a certain number, a second series is started and numbering of volumes for the new series begins over again at volume 1. It is important to look for the series on the spine of the reporter in addition to the volume number.

The first series of all the regional reporters except the Pacific Reporter and some of the federal reporters is in the basement. They are arranged on the shelves in the same order as they are on the main floor, that is, Supreme Court cases, other federal cases, then regional reporters in alphabetical order. See basement shelving ranges B-5 through B-11.

Sometimes a case is reported in more than one reporter. In that case there will be a parallel citation separated by a comma.

Example: 97 Wash. 2d 317, 646 P.2d 113 (1982)

Usually the official state reporter appears first, followed by the regional reporter citation. Except for United States Supreme Court cases and Wyoming cases, the Law Library does not have the state reporter that appears in the first part of the parallel citation. Look for the case using the second part of the parallel citation (646 P.2d 113 in the example above).

Case Name

If you have only the name of the case but no citation, use the Table of Cases at the end of the digest set for your known jurisdiction. For older cases, you may have to look in both the Plaintiff-Defendant Table of Cases, which lists the Plaintiff first, and the Defendant-Plaintiff Table of Cases, which lists the Defendant first. The digest set you use will depend on what court decided the case and the time frame of the case. The Decennial Digest includes all published cases and is cumulated every five to ten years. If you don't have an idea of when your case was heard, you may have to sort through a number of sets. Digest sets are located in the Reference area, M-N-1 to M-N-3.

For a Wyoming case, use the Table of Cases in the Wyoming Digest located on M-N-1. Follow the same process and remember to check the pocket part in the back inside cover of the book.

For very recent court cases, or for assistance locating and using these resources, ask the librarian.

Searching for cases by topic

To find cases about a topic, it is often best to find cases by looking for articles in law journals. A law journal article will not only explain the law and the cases, but also cite to cases in the footnotes. These cases can then be looked up in the reporters. The digests also act as subject access to case law. Generally it is best to look up the subject in the index to find where it is arranged within the set unless you have a knowledge of legal terms.

Online Resources

LexisNexis, available through the UW Libraries online catalog under the Academic Universe link, has a nice collection of case law searchable by citation, case name, or subject.

Other internet sources for cases are Findlaw, http://findlaw.com; Legal Information Institute at Cornell, http://www.law.cornell.edu; and Lexisone, http://www.lexis1.com. Most of these sites have U.S. Supreme Court cases back to the 1800's or earlier. However, coverage of other courts is not comprehensive, with the collection of most federal cases going back to mid-1990s. These sites will link to state resources online for state cases. Coverage for state cases varies widely. For Wyoming Supreme Court cases, see http://www.courts.state.wy.us.

WWW Popular Legal Links

There are a number of other good legal portals available on the Internet. If you don't like the four we have featured here, try www.ilrg.com; www.lexnotes.com; www.jurist.law.pitt.edu; http://gsulaw.gsu.edu/metaindex; or www.legalengine.com

Resources	Findlaw http://findlaw.com	Cornell www.law.cornell.edu	http://www.law.emory.edu/erd/in dex.html	Washlaw www.washlaw.edu
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Resources	Findlaw	Cornell	Emory	Washlaw
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Other Materials: Bar Associations	See For Law Students link		See Practice Information link	
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UW Homepage	www.uwyo.cdu
UW College of Law	uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/law
UW College of Law Library	uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/lawlib
UW Libraries	www-lib.uwyo.edu
Wyoming State and local	
Laramie municipal code	http://municipalcodes.lexisnexis.com/codes/laramic
Wyoming government and directory	http://equalitystate.org/
Wyoming State Agencies Rules and Regulations	soswy.state.wy.us/rules/rules.htm
Wyoming State and Public Libraries	www-wsl.state.wy.us
Wyoming State Bills	legisweb.state.wy.us
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