How to research statutes

Retrieving a Statute Using a Citation

When you have a specific statute citation you’d like to find on Thomson Reuters Westlaw™, type the citation into the search box at the top of any page.

- To retrieve a statute using a citation, enter the citation, e.g., 29 usca 2614 or cal civ code 56.21, in the search bar at the top of the page and hit Enter or click the Search button.
- To retrieve multiple statutes by citation, enter each citation in the search bar, separating each citation with a semicolon, e.g., 29 usca 2614; cal civ code 56.21. You can type up to 30 citations in the search bar at a time.

Browsing Statutes Using the Table of Contents

In your statutory research, you may only have a topic or a statute’s popular name, rather than its specific citation. One way to quickly explore statutes is by using the Table of Contents for the United States Code Annotated or a state code.

- On the Content Types tab, click Statutes & Court Rules. Click United States Code Annotated (USCA) to display the Table of Contents or click a state name to display the Table of Contents for that state’s statutes and court rules. You can also use the search box to navigate to these resources by typing in USCA or your state’s statutes and court rules to quickly access that content.
- On the Federal Materials tab, click United States Code Annotated (USCA). On the right sidebar, you’ll see several additional tools and resources that can help you search for a relevant statute. Learn more about these tools below.
- On the State Materials tab, you can select a state to view its statutes and court rules.

Once you’ve navigated to a Table of Contents, you can run a search restricted to that set of content using the search bar at the top of the page.
Linking to Other Tools and Resources

While viewing a Table of Contents, you can click the links under Tools & Resources to access other useful materials, including:

- Alphabetical statutes index
- Popular name table
- Orders updating court rules
- Historical statutes
- Legislative history
- 50 state statutory survey
- State court rules

These tools allow you to quickly locate resources without a specific citation. Let’s review a few of these tools in more depth.

Retrieving Statutes Using an Index

When you’re looking for statutes on a specific topic, you can utilize the alphabetical index. While viewing the Table of Contents for the USCA or a state’s statutes, click the Index link in the Tools & Resources section in the right column.

Browse the index by clicking the letters at the top of the page. You can also enter a word or phrase, e.g., patent, in the search bar. A list of topics containing that word or phrase is displayed. Click a topic to view the relevant sections. To retrieve the full text of a section, click its citation.

Retrieving Statutes Using the Popular Name Table

When you know the popular name of an act, you can use the Popular Name Table to retrieve the statute sections under which the act is codified. Under the Tools & Resources section in the right column click Popular Name Table, which lists the acts in alphabetical order. To see the statutory sections under which an act is codified, click the act’s name.
As an example, you may know the federal healthcare law by the popularly used name “Obamacare.”
By navigating to “O” in the alphabetical list, you can locate Obamacare and be taken directly to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. You can then access all the statutory sections under which this act is codified.

**Keyword Searching for Statutes**

If you have key words to start your statutory research:

1. Enter either a plain language search or a Boolean Terms and Connectors search in the search bar at the top of any page.
2. Click the jurisdiction box to the right of the search bar to select your jurisdiction(s). Click Save. You can select up to three jurisdictions.
3. Click Search or hit Enter to search all core legal content, including statutes.

You can limit your search to statutes by clicking Statutes and Court Rules on the Content Types tab on the home page. The search bar at the top of the page becomes a Statutes and Court Rules search bar. Enter your query in this search bar, change the jurisdiction if necessary, and click Search or hit Enter.

You may also click Advanced to conduct a Boolean Terms and Connectors search with an easy-to-use template.

**Viewing Your Search Results**

After you run a search, the result page is displayed. Browse the Overview page or select Statutes in the left column to display the results page for statutes. By default, results are ranked by relevance and include the most on-point documents – even if they don’t reference the specific terms used in your search. You can also sort by other categories like Date, Most Cited, or Table of Contents.

For example, you may be interested in citing to the specific authority most often cited in a particular jurisdiction.
Results Page Options
The results page allows you to customize your view to your research preferences. Opt to see more or less details as you review your research results.

• Click the View Detail icon (⋮) on the results page to select one of three levels of detail. Details may include the section numbers and names, major statutory headings, and search terms in context.
• To change the number of statutes that are displayed on the result page, select a number from the drop-down list at the bottom of the page.

Related Documents
When you are viewing the result page, a list of related documents from secondary sources, briefs, and trial court documents is available to the right of your results.

Searching Within Results
To narrow a search result by searching within the result, enter your terms in the Search within results box in the left column and click Search. For example, you may want to focus on a particular term or phrase such as “reasonable expectation” or “trade secret.”

Search within results uses Boolean Terms & Connectors rules, so when you are searching for more than one word, you will want to use quotations around the phrase, or use connectors between words. Sample searches are provided within the search box to help you.
Both your original search terms and the terms used to narrow your result are highlighted in the statutes. To undo a search within a result, click the Clear button in the left column.
Filtering Results

At any time during your research, you can narrow a search result by selecting a filter in the left column. To undo the filters you have added, click Clear. You can also restore previous filters by clicking the Restore previous filters button. For example, you can filter by statute title, results you’ve previously viewed, saved, annotated, or not annotated. Filter options vary depending on the content type you are viewing and are designed to help you find on-point resources quickly, so you can get the answers you need to serve your clients.

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