

Legal Research on the Internet: Quick Tips

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Things to Remember About Legal Research on the Internet:

- **Complete legal research requires the use of both print and electronic resources!**
- Like with traditional print research as well as Lexis/Westlaw, you need to know what your research strategy is going to be at the start - the WWW is too disorganized to try to find things hit and miss.
- Like with Lexis and Westlaw, **not everything you need will be available via the WWW** - the usefulness of the WWW will depend on what it is you are looking for. Just because you don't find it with Google does not mean it does not exist.
- Your research strategy will depend on what you are looking for and are hoping to find. The Internet is best used to find specific information, materials, or documents, or to fill in gaps in your print research.
- **Primary material is more likely to be available via the WWW than secondary material.** The U.S. federal government has especially made a point of trying to get official documents available online. Secondary material is less likely to be online (for copyright, use, and cost issues) although more and more journals are beginning to be published in both paper and electronic format and there are even some projects that have digitized old law and non-law journals.
- **It is important to evaluate the web sites where you find information.** How current is the information on that site (is there a date saying when the site was last updated)? Is the information, or web site likely to disappear (important for citation purposes)? Is the web site authoritative (.gov vs. .com)? Does the web site attribute the source of the information? Is the information also given in a document format (like PDF)? Is Wikipedia really the best place to go for legal news or facts?
- **Books, Lexis, and Westlaw are still superior to the Web for broad and in depth legal research because of coverage, search accuracy, and authority.**
- Web research is ideal for facts, current news, and recent documents (especially government documents). If you need a single document or piece of information the Web is great - it is when you need the "best dozen cases" that you realize that the Web leaves much to be desired.
- Once you find a site you like, there is nothing wrong with returning time after time. Bookmarks. Bookmarks. Bookmarks.
- **Documents, databases, and even entire web sites can disappear.** The web is nothing if not ephemeral - there is no guarantee that what is there today will still be there tomorrow.
- There are no free citators to make sure that the cases or laws that you found for free on the web are still good law.
- Good places to start legal research on a given topic are online research guides and gateway and database web sites:
 - Good Sources of Online Research Guides
 - University of Michigan Law Library:
<http://www.law.umich.edu/library/students/research/Pages/default.aspx>

- Georgetown University Law Library: <http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/guides/index.cfm>
 - Cornell Legal Information Institute: <http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex/category/overview>
- Useful Free U.S. Legal Information Web Sites
 - Thomas (Library of Congress): <http://thomas.loc.gov/>
 - Catalog of U.S. Government Publications: <http://catalog.gpo.gov/>
 - EDGAR (SEC): <http://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/webusers.htm>
 - USPTO Patent Database: <http://www.uspto.gov/patft/index.html>
 - GPO Access: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html>
 - Cornell Legal Information Institute: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/>
 - Regulations.gov: <http://www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main>
 - FedStats: <http://www.fedstats.gov/>
 - Martindale.com: <http://www.martindale.com/> (require free registration)
- Remember that during the summer you have access to the resources licensed by the UM Law Library and UM University Library, e.g.:
 - HeinOnline (federal and state legal materials, law reviews)
 - LexisNexis Congressional (federal legislative history resources)
 - Foreign Law Guide (summaries of foreign legal systems and where to find the law)
 - CCH Business & Finance and OmniTax Networks (federal and state legal materials and commentary)