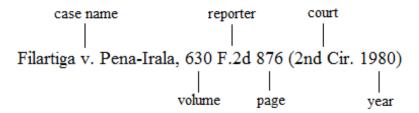
Introduction to Federal Case Law Research

Retrieving a Case by Citation

Reading Case Citations

A complete citation to a case will tell you the name of the case, where to find it in a case reporter, what court it came from, and the year of the decision. A case reporter is a series of books containing the full text of court opinions. Here's an example of a citation to a U.S. Court of Appeals case:



In a case citation, the name of the case reporter will be abbreviated. Below is a table showing the key case reporters for federal cases and their abbreviations. You can find a complete list in the *Bluebook*.

	Abbreviation	Description
United States Reports	U.S.	Official reporter for U.S. Supreme Court
Supreme Court Reporter	S. Ct.	Unofficial reporter for U.S. Supreme Court
U.S. Supreme Court Reports, Lawyer's Edition	L. Ed. or L. Ed. 2d	Unofficial reporter for U.S. Supreme Court
Federal Reporter	F. or F.2d or F.3d	Unofficial reporter for U.S. Court of Appeals
Federal Supplement	F. Supp. or F. Supp. 2d	Unofficial reporter for U.S. District Courts

The abbreviations 2d and 3d in the table above stand for second series and third series. Some reporters have more than one series, with the later series containing newer cases. The volume numbers start over again when a new series is started, so volume 999 of Federal Reporter, 2d Series is followed by volume 1 of Federal Reporter, 3d Series.

Some case citations don't identify any court in parentheses because the reporter abbreviation already indicates the court's identity. For example, readers would know that the citation *Brown v. Board of*

Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), is for a U.S. Supreme Court case because the case reporter (U.S.) includes opinions only from that court.

Retrieving a Case by Citation Using Westlaw

Although case citations are based on print case reporters, you can use them to identify and retrieve cases online.

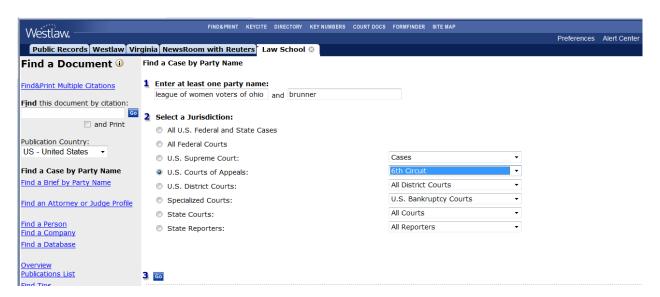
To retrieve *League of Women Voters of Ohio v. Brunner*, 548 F.3d 463 (6th Cir. 2008), on Westlaw, enter the reporter citation in the "Find by Citation" box.



If you have only the name of the case and not the reporter citation, select "Find a Case by Party Name."



Enter as much information as you can. Keep in mind that there may be many cases with the same or similar name.

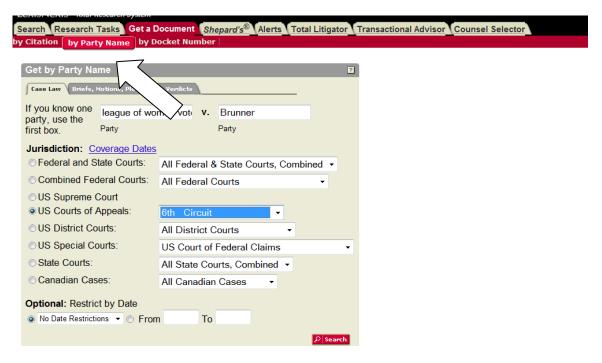


Retrieving a Case by Citation Using Lexis

To retrieve *League of Women Voters of Ohio v. Brunner*, 548 F.3d 463 (6th Cir. 2008), click on the "Get a Document" tab and enter the citation.

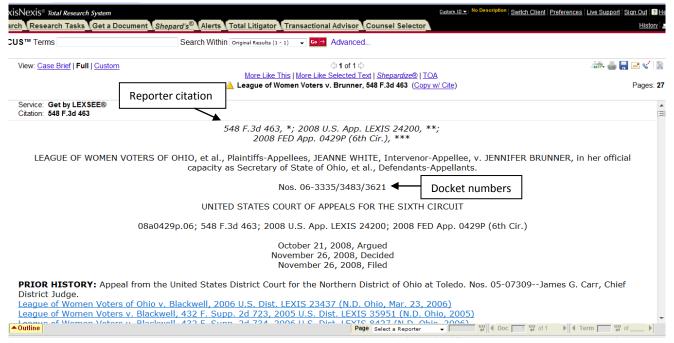


If you have only the name of the case and not the reporter citation, select "by Party Name" under the "Get a Document" tab. Enter as much information as you can.

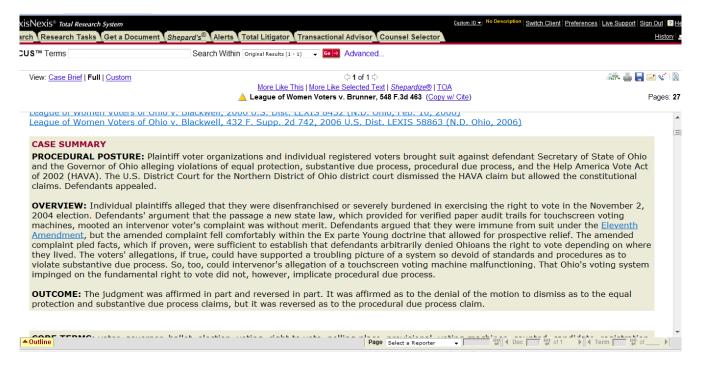


Reading the Parts of a Case

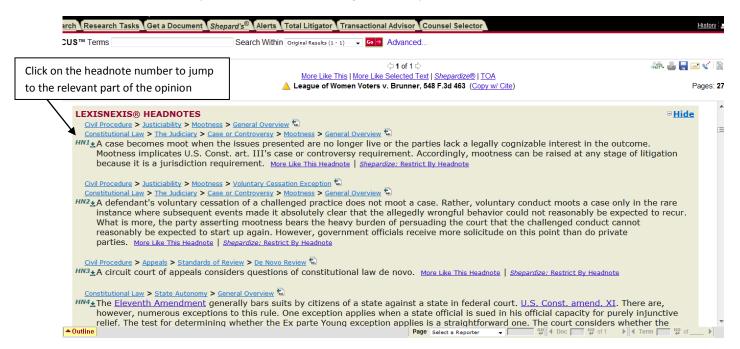
At the beginning of each case, you'll see the reporter citation(s), the full case name, the docket number(s), the name of the court, and the date decided. A docket number is assigned by the court when a case is filed; multiple docket numbers indicate that cases were consolidated.



A summary of the case is usually provided. The summary is written by an editor, not the judge, and has no legal authority.



Below the summary you'll see the headnotes. Each headnote summarizes a ruling of law from the case. Most cases have multiple headnotes because a case will usually address several different points of law. You can click on a headnote number to jump to the relevant part of the opinion. Like the summary, the headnotes are written by an editor and have no legal authority.



Below the headnotes, the attorneys for each side are identified, followed by the judge(s). The judge who wrote the opinion is usually named and then the text of the opinion begins. When citing to a case, always cite to the text of the opinion—not the summary or the headnotes. Only the text of the opinion carries any legal authority.

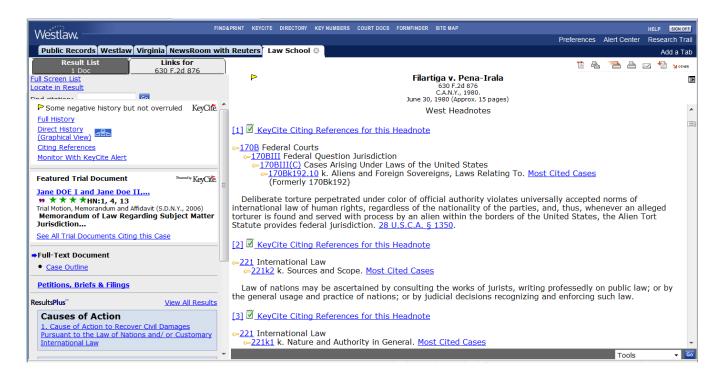
Usually the opinion begins with a discussion of the procedural history and facts of the case, followed by a discussion of the law. When citing to a specific part of an opinion, you should provide a pinpoint citation—i.e., tell the reader the exact page of the opinion you're citing to. Page numbers are inserted into the text of the case to tell you where the page breaks are.



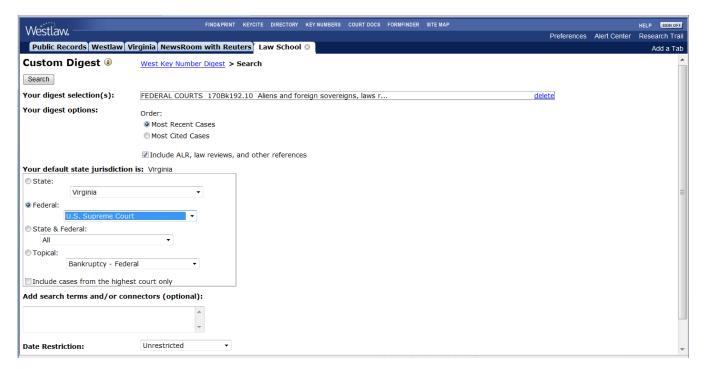
Using Headnotes to Find Other Cases

Each headnote is associated with specific legal topic(s). Once you've identified a relevant headnote, you can use it to find other cases on the same topic.

Lexis and Westlaw each have a hierarchical classification of legal topics; on Westlaw, this classification is known as the Key Number System. In the screenshot below, the first headnote has been classified as Federal Courts > Federal Question Jurisdiction > Cases Arising Under the Laws of the United States > Laws Relating to Aliens and Foreign Sovereigns. Each of these topics and subtopics is assigned a number in the Key Number System. You can click on the hyperlinked key numbers next to any of these topics or subtopics to retrieve headnotes from other cases. Clicking on the "most cited cases" link will retrieve the same set of headnotes as the "170Bk192.10" link, but with the cases cited most often for that key number listed first.



After you've selected a topic or subtopic, you'll see a screen like the one below asking you to select a jurisdiction. You have the option of adding additional search terms.



After selecting a jurisdiction, you'll see relevant headnotes from other cases in that jurisdiction.

