



University of Michigan  
Law Library

**Introduction to Legal Research on the Web**

**UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
LAW LIBRARY**

**Reference Department  
October 2001  
By Lisa Dresner**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....	1
A. Purpose and Scope of This Guide.....	1
B. Getting Started—Answers to Common Questions .....	1
II. Gateway Sites and Search Engine Sites .....	4
A. Gateway Sites.....	4
1. Tips for Using Gateway Sites for Legal Research.....	4
2. Selected Gateway Sites for Legal Research (Table).....	5
B. Search Engine Sites .....	7
1. Tips for Using Search Engine Sites.....	7
2. Selected Search Engine Sites for Legal Research (Table).....	9
III. Evaluating and Citing Web Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism .....	10
A. Evaluating Web Sources.....	10
B. Citing Web Sources Correctly .....	13
C. Avoiding Plagiarism .....	13
Appendix A – Troubleshooting Problems with Web Searches.....	14
Appendix B -- Pros and Cons of Web-Based Legal Research.....	16
Appendix C – Handy Primary Sources to Bookmark.....	18
Constitution, Federal Cases, and Federal Court Rules .....	18
Federal Laws, Legislative History Materials, Executive Orders & Administrative Materials .....	20
Federal Agency Web Sites .....	22
Michigan Materials .....	23
Appendix D – Other Reference Sources for Legal Research on the Web .....	25

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help researchers find legal materials on the world-wide web. It outlines research strategies, describes major sources, and provides useful web addresses.

This guide covers two of the three types of information on the web: First, sources that are free to all users, regardless of location, and second, sources available from University of Michigan computers.

**This guide excludes discussion of paid electronic resources, like Lexis and Westlaw**, except inasmuch as they have free services available to the public over the web. Training in Lexis and Westlaw is available from the University of Michigan Law School's Lexis and Westlaw representatives. (Ask at the Reference Desk for contact information.) This guide also excludes coverage of electronic discussion forums – listservs, newsgroups, mailing lists, e-conferences, etc.

This guide deals primarily with United States materials, but much of the discussion applies to searching for foreign materials on the web as well.

Where no indication of another library is given, call numbers provided for paper sources are for the Law Library.

**FOR HELP, ASK A REFERENCE LIBRARIAN AT THE REFERENCE DESK ON LEVEL S-1**

### B. GETTING STARTED—ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

As you start your web research, consider the following questions:

#### **Question 1: Is the web the fastest and best source for my research needs?**

**Answer: Not necessarily.**

Ask at the Reference Desk first to see if your question would best be answered by using paper sources or web sources. Not all material is available through the web, and the web is not always the fastest way to obtain materials. If you have a specific citation to something that would be found in the Law Library's paper collections and you are at the Law Library, it may be faster to look in the paper source.

#### **Question 2: Is the material I am seeking available on the web?**

**Answer: It depends on the kind of material.**

The web can be a good source for **current** and **recent** information about a wide variety of legal materials: federal and state statutes and regulations, government forms, major court cases, background information about businesses, foreign laws, important treaties and conventions, and SEC filings. Licensed services via the web are a good source for the full-text versions of recent and older journal articles and older court cases. (The number of these materials available for free on the web is also increasing steadily.). Older legal materials and materials that have been

published in treatise format are not likely to be available on the web yet. A very few books are available on the web for free or through licensed services now, though that coverage will likely improve over the next few years.

### **What if the material is probably not available on the web?**

Do a quick check of the web just to make sure that the material is not readily available there. If it isn't, go to (or telephone) a library for further research assistance. In some circumstances, you can combine web research with traditional library research. For example, if you think you have the wrong citation to a source, sometimes a web search can get you to the correct citation. (Someone else may have cited the source correctly as part of an article or resumé posted online.) At that point, though, you may have to go to a law library to continue your research in traditional paper sources or microform sources. Likewise, if you find the information you need on the web, but it is not in a citable format, then you can take the information you obtained from the web and use it to continue your research at the law library so as to find the same information in a citable source.

### **Question 3: What kind of web site would be the best place to start?**

Decide whether the materials you seek would be most easily found through a **gateway site** (like Findlaw) or a **search engine** (like Google) or through the **site of a particular organization** (like the World Trade Organization web site).

**Gateway sites** give you access to a wide variety of other web-sites, where the path to pieces of information has already been organized by someone else. Gateway sites usually provide information to you in a menu format – you click your way down through increasingly specific choices to find the material you seek. **Search engines** require you to input search terms that you have devised, and then produce documents that contain those search terms.

**Answer: Try gateway sites for simple searches, or when you don't know search terms.**

Gateway sites are a good type of site to try first, as they keep you from having to reinvent the wheel. Gateway sites can be useful if your search terms are very common words, or if you don't know what the exact search terms should be. On the other hand, since someone else organized the gateway site based on knowledge that he or she has (as opposed to the knowledge that you have), it might not always be clear to you which menu items you should pick in this type of site.

**Answer: Try search engines for unusual words or phrases or for complex searches.**

Search engines search the web or a subset of the web for search terms that you type in. Search engines can be useful when your search terms include unusual words or phrases, or when you can formulate a complex search. They may work poorly if your search terms are very common words that will pop up on thousands of web sites.

**Answer: Try the web site of a particular organization for documents related to that organization.**

**Example:** If you are looking for a document published by the World Trade Organization, see if that document can be found on their web site at [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org).

#### **Question 4: How should I formulate my search?**

This depends on whether you are using gateway sites or search engines.

**Answer: If you are using a gateway site, choose the menus that look most promising. If they don't work, try clicking your way through other menus.**

For more on searching gateway sites, see section II.A. below.

**Answer: If you are using a search engine site, try "advanced search."**

In general, see if you can find and use any "advanced search" features available with your search engine. These often allow you to narrow your search in ways comparable to Boolean searching. For more on search engine web searches, see section II.B. and Appendix A (on trouble shooting search engine web searches) below.

#### **Question 5: If the search fails, what next?**

**Answer: Modify your search.**

If your search does not work, modify your search (see appendix A below on trouble-shooting web searches). A different formulation of your search terms in the same search engine will produce different results.

**Answer: Try another gateway or search engine.**

If modifying your search does not work, try another gateway or search engine.

##### **Trying another gateway**

You will notice that not all gateways organize their information in the same way. One gateway may organize the information in a way that is much more comprehensible to you than another.

##### **Trying another search engine**

**The same search in different search engines can produce radically different results.** Some search engines will only give you results that contain every single search term you entered. Others will give you sites that contain some, but not all of your search terms, often ordered in terms of "relevance" (i.e., the results that match the greatest number of your search terms the most frequently are at the top of the list). Some search engines, like [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), order the results by how popular the web site is with other users.

## II. GATEWAY SITES AND SEARCH ENGINE SITES

### A. GATEWAY SITES

#### TIPS FOR USING GATEWAY SITES FOR LEGAL RESEARCH

These sites are essentially a series of menus to get you to the sources that you want. Therefore, the menu you select is very important. Sometimes, it is possible to get to the same source by several different paths, sometimes not.

**Example:** If you were looking for the statutory law of New Hampshire on wills, different paths through the same gateway (for example, Findlaw) might not lead you to the same results. One way you might find this information is by going to [www.findlaw.com](http://www.findlaw.com) and looking under “Laws: Cases & Codes,” then clicking on “states,” then clicking on “New Hampshire,” then clicking on “Primary Materials – Cases Codes and Regulations,” then clicking on “New Hampshire Revised Statutes,” then clicking on “TITLE LVI Probate Courts and Decedents' Estates,” then clicking on “Chapter 551: Wills.”

Similarly, if you went to [www.findlaw.com](http://www.findlaw.com) and clicked on “US State Resources,” then clicked on “New Hampshire,” you would be able to loop into the same path of menus that the first example used and would find the same information.

In contrast, if you went to [www.findlaw.com](http://www.findlaw.com) and clicked on “Legal Subjects,” then clicked on “Probate, Trusts & Estates,” then clicked on any of the sources you saw there about wills, you would not be able to reach any detailed information about the law of New Hampshire on this subject.

#### **Remember: If one pathway you try doesn’t work, try different pathways**

If one pathway that you try in a gateway site does not work, click your way back to an early menu and try another pathway. Remain flexible about how you search and be ready to explore new places and ways to search.

## SELECTED GATEWAY SITES FOR LEGAL RESEARCH

Name of Site	Web Address	Features
<b>The University of Michigan Documents Center</b>	<a href="http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/index.html">http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/index.html</a>	Excellent portal to local, state, federal, international, and foreign legal resources. Particularly good for finding statutes, administrative codes, and treaties. Features capsule descriptions of the nature and scope of the sources to which it provides links.
<b>Findlaw</b>	<a href="http://www.findlaw.com/">http://www.findlaw.com/</a>	This site is a comprehensive portal to information you might seek in almost any area of on-line legal research. Increasingly specific menus guide you to the sites you need. You then need to navigate those sites yourself, however.
<b>Cornell Legal Information Institute</b>	<a href="http://www.law.cornell.edu/">http://www.law.cornell.edu/</a>	Extensive links to federal and state law materials. Especially good for foreign statutory materials.
<b>Catalaw</b>	<a href="http://www.catalaw.com/">http://www.catalaw.com/</a>	Can search by region of the world or by country.
<b>Jurist</b>	<a href="http://www.jurist.law.pitt.edu">http://www.jurist.law.pitt.edu</a>	Hybrid site. Lets you click through gateway format to reach search engines in other sites.
<b>Hieros Gamos</b>	<a href="http://www.hg.org/">http://www.hg.org/</a>	Has an international focus, but includes United States materials.
<b>American Law Sources On-line</b>	<a href="http://www.lawsources.com/also/">http://www.lawsources.com/also/</a>	Good for the United States, Canada, and Mexico.
<b>Law Library Resource Xchange (LLRX)</b>	<a href="http://www.llrx.com/">http://www.llrx.com/</a>	This hybrid site has many gateways that link you to search engines for court rules, forms, and dockets, meta-search sites, and much more. Contains extensive secondary material on conducting legal research on the web.
<b>The Virtual Chase</b>	<a href="http://www.virtualchase.com/">http://www.virtualchase.com/</a>	Maintained by a corporate law librarian. Links to many search sites and much secondary material on conducting legal research on the web.
<b>Thomas Legislative Service</b>	<a href="http://thomas.loc.gov/">http://thomas.loc.gov/</a>	Library of Congress site. Thomas provides legislative history information (bills, bill status tables, reports, etc.).
<b>Lexisone</b>	<a href="http://www.lexisone.com">http://www.lexisone.com</a>	This service from Lexis provides free access over the web to cases, forms, and more – but there's a catch: you have to register with

		<p>lexisone in order to use the free resources, presumably so Lexis can track your search habits and market its fee-based products to you. This site doesn't provide anything to you that you can't get for free elsewhere on the web, <i>without</i> having to give out your personal information.</p>
--	--	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**REMEMBER: IF ONE PATHWAY YOU TRY DOESN'T WORK, TRY DIFFERENT PATHWAYS!**



## B. SEARCH ENGINE SITES

### TIPS FOR USING SEARCH ENGINE SITES

#### 1. Figure out how the search engine you are using works.

All search engines work in slightly different ways. Click on the link to “help” or “search tips.” These links tell you what types of searches your search engine accepts and how it interprets what you type in.

#### 2. Boolean Searching

Some search engines feature Boolean searching. Boolean searching allows you to specify the relationship between your search terms using connectors like AND, OR, NOT, and NEAR.

**Example:** The search “family OR divorce AND lawyer” is a Boolean search.

It is worth learning Boolean searching to obtain precise search results. Narrowing your search using Boolean connectors will help you to obtain a manageable number of relevant search results.

#### 3. Other types of search engines

Some other search engines automatically search for all the search terms you list (in a Boolean search, that would be equivalent to connecting all of your search terms using the connector AND).

**Example:** If you select the “all of the words” option under advanced search at [www.alltheweb.com](http://www.alltheweb.com), then your search for “federal property law” will generate results that contain the words “federal” and “property” and “law.” Those words won’t necessarily be next to each other or related to each other in your results, though.

Other search engines automatically search only for the exact phrase that you list.

**Example:** If you select the “exact phrase” option under advanced search at [www.alltheweb.com](http://www.alltheweb.com), then your search for “federal property law” will only generate results with the exact phrase “federal property law.”

Other search engines automatically assume that the search terms you list are alternatives, any of which will answer your search (in a Boolean search, that would be equivalent to connecting all of your search terms using the connector OR).

**Example:** If you select the “any of the words” option under advanced search at [www.alltheweb.com](http://www.alltheweb.com), then your search for “federal property law” will generate results that contain the word “federal” or the word “property” or the word “law.”

A very few search engines let you formulate a query written in the form of a sentence. This kind of “natural language” search often produces less precise results than the same query translated into a Boolean search, however.

**Example:** The web site [www.ask.com](http://www.ask.com) allows you to put your search in the following format: “How tall is Mt. Suribachi?” Unfortunately, most of the sites that ask.com pulls up in response to this question do not actually answer the question.

For further ideas about using search engines effectively and about which search engines automatically use which types of searches, consult Diana Botluk’s excellent article on the [www.llrx.com](http://www.llrx.com) legal research website, entitled “Search Engines Comparison 2001” *available at* <http://www.llrx.com/features/engine2001.htm>

## SELECTED SEARCH ENGINE SITES FOR LEGAL RESEARCH

Name of Site	Web Address	Features
<b>Meta-Index for U.S. Legal Research</b>	<a href="http://gsulaw.gsu.edu/metaindex/">http://gsulaw.gsu.edu/metaindex/</a>	This site allows Boolean searching of a number of different sites that carry Supreme Court decisions (1937-present), Court of Appeals decisions, and legislative history sources.
<b>Lawguru.Com</b>	<a href="http://www.lawguru.com/search/lawsearch.html">http://www.lawguru.com/search/lawsearch.html</a>	This is a hybrid site. It initially acts as a gateway site, by letting you narrow down the area of your search, but then allows you to search resources via its search engine. This site is notable in that it allows you to search multiple states' (and multiple federal jurisdictions') court opinions or statutes at the same time – something most sites don't do.
<b>Google</b>	<a href="http://www.google.com/">http://www.google.com/</a>	General web search engine. Google ranks search engine results in order of the number of other pages that link to each result. This can be good (it weeds out a lot of not-very-authoritative sites, like newsgroup postings), or bad (if the web-site you need is obscure, it may be near the bottom of the list.) Has an "I'm feeling lucky" feature that gives you the single most popular web-site with your search terms.
<b>Alltheweb.com</b>	<a href="http://www.alltheweb.com/">www.alltheweb.com/</a>	Allows you to search the web for your search terms in three modes: "exact phrase," "all of the words," or "any of the words." Also has an advanced search feature that lets you filter by language and domain name and lets you perform the equivalent of a Boolean search.
<b>Metacrawler</b>	<a href="http://www.metacrawler.com/index_power.html">http://www.metacrawler.com/index_power.html</a>	Allows you to search the contents of many other search engines.
<b>Internet Legal Resource Guide</b>	<a href="http://www.ilrg.com/">www.ilrg.com/</a>	Contains Lawrunner, which allows you to search for sources that come only from within a certain country, and within that country, allows you to narrow your search to .com, .edu., .org domains.

### III. EVALUATING AND CITING WEB SOURCES AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

#### A. EVALUATING WEB SOURCES

##### Decide whether you need an official source

Depending on the purpose for which you are doing research, you may need an official source. You need an official source when finding information for inclusion in pleadings and other documents to be filed with courts (including research for clinic work), when doing research for cite-checking or writing journal articles, or when doing research to be cited in seminar papers. If you're just curious about a topic and don't need the information to be extremely current or accurate, non-official sources may suffice.

##### Evaluate the source

To evaluate a web source, look at the site's authoritativeness (who is in charge of producing the web-site?), the type of material that's presented (is it primary or secondary authority?), and the site's currency/stability (when was the site last updated, and how likely is the site to be there later?).

##### ◆ Authority

Consider the quality of the source.

**For primary sources:** Is the web-site sponsored by an organization that is in charge of the laws, regulations or cases in question? (You can tell if a website is part of the federal government because its domain name will be ".gov" rather than a commercial domain name like ".com" or an educational domain name like ".edu").

**For secondary sources:** Is the author named? Is the author an academic in the field about which the author is writing? Is the site sponsored by a reputable university? Is the information provided footnoted or endnoted to primary source materials?

**Example 1:** Information provided about immigration regulations on the website of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, [www.ins.gov](http://www.ins.gov), is from an authoritative source.

**Example 2:** Information provided about immigration regulations on the website [www.us-immigration.com](http://www.us-immigration.com), a commercial website whose purpose is to sell do-it-yourself kits to potential immigrants, is **not** from an authoritative source.

For an interesting column on the proliferation of misinformation on the Internet, see Carl M. Cannon, "The Real Computer Virus," American Journalism Review NewsLink, available at <http://ajr.newslink.org/ajrcarlapr01.html>

##### ◆ Type of Material

Is the material primary (actual laws, cases, regulations, treaties themselves) or secondary (articles about the law)?

**Example:** Gavin Skok's article, "Establishing a Legitimate Expectation of Privacy in Clickstream Data," 6 Mich. Telecomm. Tech. L. Rev. 61 (2000), *available at* [www.mttlr.org/volsix/skok.html](http://www.mttlr.org/volsix/skok.html) is a secondary source – an analysis of the law. It does not by itself provide you with an authoritative statement of the law that you can cite, but it may give you references to important primary sources that you can look up. In contrast, Public Law 106-229 "An Act to facilitate the use of electronic records and signatures in interstate or foreign commerce" on the government printing office website [public laws are available at [www.access.gpo.gov/nara/nara005.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/nara005.html)] is a primary source of law – the statute itself.

#### ◆ **Currency/Stability**

Will the website still be there in a year or two? Some websites are more transitory in nature than others.

**Example:** Someone's personal web page may vanish in a year, but the Justice Department's web page, [www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov), is likely to be around for a while.

Look to see how recently the site you are examining has been updated. A notation to this effect is often found at the top or bottom of a web page.

**Example:** The notation as to how recently the SEC's final rules page has been updated can be found at the bottom of the page located at [www.sec.gov/rules/final.shtml](http://www.sec.gov/rules/final.shtml)

In general, **print out copies of all of your web resources**, especially if you have not found a paper or microform copy of the resource.

**Combine your assessments of the site's authoritativeness, currency, stability, and format to decide if it is a site upon which you can rely.**

**Example 1:** The description of Michigan's divorce laws found on [www.split-up.com](http://www.split-up.com) is **not** going to be an authoritative, citable source. The publisher of the web-site appears to be a non-governmental, commercial source. The law is only summarized there, not produced in full. The web-site also cautions users that the information on it is only updated yearly, and may be out of date when accessed. This is not a source upon which you can rely.

**Example 2:** In contrast, the copy of MCL 722.23 (the law which sets out the "best interests of the child" custody factors) on the Michigan Compiled Laws beta-test web-site at [www.michiganlegislature.org/law/](http://www.michiganlegislature.org/law/) is a more authoritative, accurate, and current source of law.

You can tell that this web-site is a good source because of the following facts: The web-site is a service offered by the Michigan Legislative Council, the Michigan House of Representatives, and the Michigan Senate, all official government bodies. The information presented is a copy of the law itself, not simply a summary. The web-site states that it is accurate up to a certain public law number, so users can check currency precisely.

If the information you have found is valuable, but not authoritative, use what you have learned to search for a more authoritative source, if needed. For example, if you find a citation to a useful

code section on someone's personal website, double-check the code section on the Government Printing Office web-site.

## B. CITING WEB SOURCES CORRECTLY

### Cite your source properly

Cite materials taken from the web according to *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation* (Ref Desk, S-1C, and Main Dsk Bibliog Uniform, S-2C) or according to *ALWD Citation Manual: A Professional System of Citation* (Ref Coll Bibliog A\_L\_W\_D, S-1C, and Main Desk (Bibliog A\_L\_W\_D, S-2C). Both sources contain Internet use and citation guidelines.

“Introduction to Basic Legal Citation,” Peter W. Martin, Cornell Law School (2000-2001) is a primer based on the *The Bluebook* and is available on the web at

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/citation/citation.table.html>

## C. AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

### Make sure not to plagiarize!

The ease of lifting computer text from a web-site to your document increases the risk of unwitting plagiarism. It is particularly important to indicate that the words and ideas in the secondary materials you find on the web are not your own and to give a proper citation to the source.

Following are some sites that provide guidelines for avoiding plagiarism:

“Plagiarism,” Jean Smith et al., Northwestern University

<http://www.nwu.edu/uacc/plagiar.html>

“How Not to Plagiarize,” Margaret Procter, Coordinator of Writing Support, University of Toronto (2000)

<http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagsep.html>

## APPENDIX A

### TROUBLESHOOTING PROBLEMS WITH WEB SEARCHES

**Problem 1:** My search turned up 1000 hits.

**Solution:** Narrow your search. Try using more precise search terms that describe the particular subtopic about which you are seeking information.

**Example:** Instead of searching for “endangered species,” try searching for “spotted owl.”

Also, if the search engine you are using allows Boolean search connectors (AND, OR, NOT), consider adding another relevant search term using the “AND” command.

**Example:** Instead of searching for “Violence Against Women Act,” try searching for “Violence Against Women Act AND civil damages.”

**Problem 2:** My search turned up only two hits.

**Solution:** Expand your search. Think up synonyms for your search terms, and then include them in your search.

**Example:** Instead of searching for “domestic relations,” try searching for “domestic relations OR family law.”

Alternately, remove the more obscure parts of your existing search terms.

**Example:** Instead of searching for “wildcat strike,” try searching for “strike.”

**Problem 3:** My search turned up a lot of hits that contain both my search terms, but the terms are in different parts of the document and have nothing to do with each other.

**Solution:** If possible, specify the proximity of your search terms to each other.

**Example:** If the search engine allows you to do so, instead of searching for “fruit AND poisonous tree,” try searching for “fruit w/5 poisonous tree” or “fruit NEAR poisonous tree.” [“w/5” means “within five words of”].

Unfortunately, these features are **not** available for all search engines; look at “Advanced Search” and “Help” features where available to see if you can do something approximating this technique.

**Problem 4:** My search turned up a really long case, and I can’t find the relevant part.

**Solution:** On the web, pressing “Ctrl” and “F” at the same time will give you a “find” feature that lets you find your search terms (or any other distinctive words) in the text you’re reading. Unfortunately, this “find” feature does not work well in PDF documents and some other documents. You may want to test the feature for any particular document by trying to find a word you know is on the first page. Alternately, click on “help” to see if your site has any features that let you search within documents. If the document is long and not easily searchable



on the web, you might also consider coming to the library and searching the document in paper, as it is much faster to skim paper documents than electronic documents.

**Problem 5:** My search has a combination of the above problems. I'm not finding good hits.

**Solution:** Combine some of the above search techniques.

**Example:** Try a search like "cramdown AND secured OR preferred NEAR creditor" if you're working with a web site that allows Boolean searching.

If the first search doesn't work – try, try again until you produce a reasonable amount of relevant hits.

Also, make full use of your search engine's help feature: Most search engines are similar, but they do have slight variations in syntax that require slight changes in the way you type in your search for the computer to process the search correctly.

**Problem 6:** My search turned up the information I need, but not in an official, citable format.

**Solution:** Use the information you *were* able to get to find the authoritative, citable information you need – either elsewhere on an authoritative web-site or at a library.

**Example:** You may find a useful reference to an old California statute on someone's personal web page.

This source is not authoritative enough for you to cite in any term paper, journal article, or court document, however. Therefore, don't cite to the web page.

Instead, use the citation and year of the statute you found from the web to look in the Law Library's collection of old statutes so that you can verify the information you have and get a citable source.

**Problem 7:** My searches didn't find any useful information at all.

**Solution:** Go to (or telephone) the law library and ask a reference librarian for assistance. If the information you seek is available on the web, the librarian should be able to help with your web searching so you can find it. If the information you seek is not available on the web, the librarian should be able to help you identify other sources that contain the information.

**The Golden Rule(s):** Experiment! Fine-tune! Be creative!

## **APPENDIX B**

### **PROS AND CONS OF WEB-BASED LEGAL RESEARCH**

#### **PROS**

- ◆ Very current information is available on the web. If there are major recent developments in a news story, information on the web may be much more up to date than information from print sources.
- ◆ Access regardless of your physical location – wherever there's Internet access, you can do computer-assisted legal research.
- ◆ Access at any time of day or night, when libraries you might otherwise rely upon are closed.
- ◆ When computer-assisted legal research works well, it is very quick.
- ◆ Computer search engines often have very good keyword search capabilities (as well as many other ways to retrieve information). As you develop your research capabilities, you may be able to find something faster by using the computer than by using the index to a paper source.
- ◆ Computers allow you not only to search for relevant texts, but also to search within those texts – so you don't have to read the whole case to find the paragraph you need.
- ◆ There is now a wide variety of primary and secondary sources available on the Internet, and the on-line sources available multiply daily.
- ◆ Computer search results sometimes link you directly to cross references in other sources or other parts of the same source, which can save you a lot of time.
- ◆ Information you find on line can often be cut and pasted directly into your document (with proper citation and attribution, of course.)
- ◆ Internet sources provide a host of non-legal information that would be difficult to find in the paper sources at many law libraries.

#### **Cons**

- ◆ Web-sites and/or your computer can crash, just when you need them the most.
- ◆ If you don't learn to expand and focus your searches effectively, you may waste time by retrieving too much or too little material. (See Appendix A above on troubleshooting web searches).
- ◆ Material errors (misspelled case names, incorrect citations) can creep into on-line sources, due to the vagaries of the scanning/retyping process.
- ◆ Web-sites are not always updated in a timely manner. You must be certain that the information you are retrieving is current.

- ◆ On-line secondary sources may be (but are not necessarily) less reliable or authoritative than printed secondary sources.

**Example:** Anyone can put up a personal web-site, but it's difficult to get an article published in the *Harvard Law Review*.

- ◆ You still need to go to a law library to Shepardize cases (unless you have access to Lexis or Westlaw or their fee-for-service plans over the web).
- ◆ If you leap directly to cross-references on the computer, you might not read the original text carefully enough before proceeding.
- ◆ If you search the text on the computer and only read the text immediately surrounding your keywords, you might miss other relevant parts of cases or statutes.
- ◆ It is more difficult to skim text on a computer screen than in a paper source.
- ◆ Computer searches sometimes make it difficult to browse the materials surrounding your search results. This reduces the chances that you will serendipitously find some great piece of information next to the item you were seeking.

**APPENDIX C**  
**HANDY PRIMARY SOURCES TO BOOKMARK**

**Constitution, Federal Cases, and Federal Court Rules**

<b>Source Name</b>	<b>Web Address</b>	<b>Comments</b>
United States Constitution	<a href="http://wwwsecure.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.overview.html">wwwsecure.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.overview.html</a>	Via Cornell University; constitution and amendments.
	<a href="http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/constitution/toc.html">www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/constitution/toc.html</a>	Via Government Printing Office; annotated version of the constitution, with case annotations available from 1992.
United States Supreme Court Cases	<a href="http://www.findlaw.com/casecode/supreme.html">www.findlaw.com/casecode/supreme.html</a>	Via Findlaw; Supreme Court Decisions from 1893-present; browsable by year and volume; searchable by citation and party name; full-text search available.
	<a href="http://Supct.law.cornell.edu:8080/supct/">Supct.law.cornell.edu:8080/supct/</a>	Via Legal Information Institute at Cornell University; Supreme Court decisions from 1990 to the present.
United States Supreme Court Rules	<a href="http://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/supct/overview.html">www.law.cornell.edu/rules/supct/overview.html</a>	Via Legal Information Institute at Cornell University; available in PDF format.
United States Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals Cases	<a href="http://Findlaw.com/casecode/courts/6th.html">Findlaw.com/casecode/courts/6th.html</a>	Via Findlaw; searchable by party name, docket number, and full-text search; court opinions from 1995-present.
	<a href="http://www.law.emory.edu/6circuit/index.html">www.law.emory.edu/6circuit/index.html</a>	Via Emory Law School; searchable by keyword, party name, and month of decision; court opinions from 1995-present.
	<a href="http://www.michbar.org/opinions/home.html?content.cfm">www.michbar.org/opinions/home.html?content.cfm</a>	Via Michigan Bar website; court opinions from 1998-present.

Source Name	Web Address	Comments
Local Court Rules for Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals	<a href="http://pacer.ca6.uscourts.gov/rules/rulespg.htm">pacer.ca6.uscourts.gov/rules/rulespg.htm</a>	Via 6 <sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals.
Eastern District of Michigan Cases	<a href="http://www.michbar.org/opinions/home.html?content.cfm">www.michbar.org/opinions/home.html?content.cfm</a>	Via Michigan Bar website; federal district court opinions from mid-1999-present.
Western District of Michigan Cases	<a href="http://www.michbar.org/opinions/home.html?content.cfm">www.michbar.org/opinions/home.html?content.cfm</a>	Via Michigan Bar website; federal district court opinions from mid-1999-present.
	<a href="http://www.miwd.uscourts.gov/">www.miwd.uscourts.gov/</a>	Via Western District of Michigan website; “notable opinions” only.
Local Court Rules for Eastern District of Michigan	<a href="http://www.mieb.uscourts.gov/index1.html">www.mieb.uscourts.gov/index1.html</a>	Via U.S. Bankruptcy Court for E.D. Michigan.
Local Court Rules for Western District of Michigan	<a href="http://www.miwd.uscourts.gov/Policies/Rules/RULES698.PDF">www.miwd.uscourts.gov/Policies/Rules/RULES698.PDF</a>	Via U.S. District Court for Western District of Michigan; PDF format.
Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure	<a href="http://pacer.ca6.uscourts.gov/rules/rulespg.htm">http://pacer.ca6.uscourts.gov/rules/rulespg.htm</a>	Via 6 <sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals; PDF format.
Federal Rules of Civil Procedure	<a href="http://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/frcp/overview.htm">www.law.cornell.edu/rules/frcp/overview.htm</a>	Via Cornell Legal Information Institute; menu-based; browsable by section and rule.
Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure	<a href="http://www.law.ukans.edu/research/frcrimX.htm">www.law.ukans.edu/research/frcrimX.htm</a>	Via University of Kansas Law School; browsable.
	<a href="http://www2.law.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/frcrm?">www2.law.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/frcrm?</a>	Via Cornell.
Federal Rules of Evidence	<a href="http://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/fre/overview.html">www.law.cornell.edu/rules/fre/overview.html</a>	Via Cornell Legal Information Institute; menu-based; browsable by article and rule.

## Federal Laws, Legislative History Materials, Executive Orders, & Administrative Materials

Source Name	Web Address	Comments
United States Code	<a href="http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/index.html">www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/index.html</a>	Via Cornell University; full-text search capability; search by citations; popular name table.
	<a href="http://uscode.house.gov/usc.htm">uscode.house.gov/usc.htm</a>	Via United States House of Representatives; full-text search; search by specific citation; search by concept.
	<a href="http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/cong013.html">www.access.gpo.gov/congress/cong013.html</a>	Via Government Printing Office; search by citation; search by popular name; search by Public Law Number; search by Statutes at Large Citation; search for all Legislation amending a particular U.S. Code Section.
Bills, Bill Histories, and Committee Reports	<a href="http://thomas.loc.gov">thomas.loc.gov</a>	Via Thomas; bill histories available 1973-present; searchable by word/phrase, subject, bill/amendment number, stage in legislative process, date of introduction, sponsors, and committees; bill texts available 1989-present; committee reports available 1995-present.
Congressional Record	<a href="http://thomas.loc.gov/home/crquery.html">thomas.loc.gov/home/crquery.html</a>	Via Thomas Legislative Service; 1989-present; searchable by word, phrase, member of Congress, and date; issues browsable by date and section.
	<a href="http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces150.html">www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces150.html</a>	Via Government Printing Office; 1995-present; Boolean search available; search limitable by year; specific pages downloadable in PDF format.

Source Name	Web Address	Comments
Presidential Executive Orders	<a href="http://www.nara.gov/fedreg/eo.html#top">www.nara.gov/fedreg/eo.html#top</a>	Via National Archives and Records Administration; text of executive orders available from 1995-present; (currently, prior years only have table of disposition of the executive orders, no links to text).
Code of Federal Regulations	<a href="http://www4.law.cornell.edu/cfr/">www4.law.cornell.edu/cfr/</a>	Via Cornell University; search table of contents; search by citation; search index of all section headings; full text search.
	<a href="http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html">www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html</a>	Via Government Printing Office; full-text keyword search; ability to “browse” specific titles of C.F.R.
Federal Register	<a href="http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html">www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html</a>	Via Government Printing Office; 1995-present.

### Federal Agency Web Sites

Organization/Agency	Web Address	Comments
Environmental Protection Agency	<a href="http://www.epa.gov/">www.epa.gov/</a>	Contains laws and regulations on the environment.
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	<a href="http://www.fdic.gov/">www.fdic.gov/</a>	Contains laws and regulations relating to the FDIC.
Federal Election Commission	<a href="http://www.fec.gov/">www.fec.gov/</a>	Contains campaign finance reports.
Federal Trade Commission	<a href="http://www.ftc.gov/">www.ftc.gov/</a>	Contains advisory and staff opinions, consumer protection information and identity theft information.
FedWorld	<a href="http://www.fedworld.gov/">www.fedworld.gov/</a>	Hybrid site allowing gateway & keyword searches of federal sites.
FirstGov	<a href="http://www.firstgov.gov/">www.firstgov.gov/</a>	Extensive gateway to federal information. Allows keyword searching also.
Government Printing Office	<a href="http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/">www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/</a>	The Government Printing Office provides links to official on-line versions of U.S. govt. docs.
Immigration and Naturalization Service	<a href="http://www.ins.gov/graphics/lawsregs/index.htm">www.ins.gov/graphics/lawsregs/index.htm</a>	Contains laws and regulations concerning immigration.
Internal Revenue Service	<a href="http://www.irs.gov/">www.irs.gov/</a>	The IRS website has tax forms, publications, and regulations; very user-friendly.
National Archives and Records Administration	<a href="http://www.nara.gov/">www.nara.gov/</a>	The National Archives collects government records and documents.
Securities and Exchange Commission	<a href="http://www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml">www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml</a>	Contains information about companies' filings with the SEC. The electronic filing system is called EDGAR.
Social Security Administration	<a href="http://www.ssa.gov/">www.ssa.gov/</a>	Contains links to relevant laws, rules, regulations, and rulings (SSA's interpretations of laws, rules, and regulations translated into policies); some cross-references are hyperlinked.



### Michigan Materials

Source Name	Web Address	Comments
Michigan Constitutions	<a href="http://www.migov.state.mi.us/Constitution/">www.migov.state.mi.us/Constitution/</a>	Via Michigan governor's office; browsable via menu.
Michigan Supreme Court and Michigan Court of Appeals Opinions	<a href="http://www.michbar.org/opinions/home.html?content.cfm">www.michbar.org/opinions/home.html?content.cfm</a>	Via Michigan Bar website; court opinions covering the Michigan Court of Appeals and the Michigan Supreme Court from 1998-present.
Michigan Court Rules	<a href="http://www.icle.org/michlaw/#rules">www.icle.org/michlaw/#rules</a>	As of this writing, Michigan Court Rules are not all available free on-line. The ICLE web-site does list all Michigan Court Rules amended or added since May 1, 1995, however. You might make do with a paper copy of the court rules from 1995 or later if you check the ICLE website carefully for updates to any sections you use.
Michigan Compiled Laws (M.C.L.)	<a href="http://www.michiganlegislature.org/law/">www.michiganlegislature.org/law/</a>	Via Library of Michigan for Michigan State Legislature; available in beta test format only; can't browse; "Advanced Search" feature allows searches by MCL Section Number; Statute Number, Popular name, Michigan Statutes Annotated (M.S.A) Number, and Public Act Number; full-text search also available.
Michigan Executive Orders	<a href="http://www.state.mi.us/migov/gov/ExecutiveOrders/index.htm">www.state.mi.us/migov/gov/ExecutiveOrders/index.htm</a>	Via office of the governor; from 1991-present; searchable by year only.
Michigan Administrative Code	<a href="http://www.state.mi.us/orr/">www.state.mi.us/orr/</a>	Via Michigan Office of Regulatory Reform; searchable by department (i.e., state agency) or by code section number.
Michigan Register	<a href="http://www.state.mi.us/orr/">www.state.mi.us/orr/</a>	Via Michigan Office of Regulatory Reform; from

Source Name	Web Address	Comments
		4/17/00-present; PDF format. Contains proposed administrative rules, proposed and adopted agency guidelines, governor's executive orders, attorney general opinions.
Michigan Rules of Professional Conduct	<a href="http://www.michbar.org/opinions/ethics/">www.michbar.org/opinions/ethics/</a>	Via Michigan State Bar; browsable by table of contents.
Michigan Ethics Opinions	<a href="http://www.michbar.org/opinions/ethics/">www.michbar.org/opinions/ethics/</a>	Via Michigan Bar website; database of all Ethics opinions, both under the Code and the Rules; searchable by opinion number, by subject, and by full-text search; list of all of the ethics opinions concerning a particular rule of professional conduct.
Michigan Code of Judicial Conduct	<a href="http://www.michbar.org/opinions/ethics/">www.michbar.org/opinions/ethics/</a>	Via Michigan State Bar.
Institute of Continuing Legal Education	<a href="http://www.icle.org/">www.icle.org/</a>	Contains recent Michigan Supreme Court and Court of Appeals cases, legislative updates, and information on continuing legal education.

## APPENDIX D

### OTHER REFERENCE SOURCES FOR LEGAL RESEARCH ON THE WEB

The following sources also contain discussions of legal research on the web and/or useful web-site information:

Association of Research Libraries, Office of Scholarly Communication, **Directory of Scholarly Electronic Journals and Academic Discussion Lists** (latest year only) (Ref Coll Direct Director, S-1C)

Contains multitudinous listings of journals available on the web (free and paid) and of listservs – discussion lists on a particular topic.

Diana Botluk, **The Legal List: Research on the Internet** (latest year only) (Ref Coll Bibliog Legal\_li, S-1C)

This work includes web-sites for many legal research starting points, federal and state administrative law resources, business research sites, judicial opinions, state bar associations, international law resources, ethics rules and opinions, and more. Its strong point is in including many generalized sites that are good springboards to more specialized web-sites.

Arlene L. Eis, **The Legal Researcher's Desk Reference 2000-01** (1999) (Ref Desk, S-1C).

This work includes web-sites for U.S. Senators and Representatives; state codes, reporters, regulations, and registers; state attorney general offices; federal departments; executive offices; independent governmental agencies; international governmental organizations; European Union institutions; legal publishers, general law-related web portals; state bar associations.

T.R. Halvorson et al., **Law of the Super Searchers: the Online Secrets of Top Legal Researchers** (L415 O3sup 2000, S-3W)

Although this work mainly contains the author's interviews with expert legal researchers, its appendix A contains lists of websites for legal research, federal agencies, academia, British Commonwealth countries, legal publishers, search engines, news sources. It also contains a list of legal research listservs.

Erik J. Heels & Richard P. Klau, **Law, Law, Law on the Internet: The Best Legal Web Sites and More** (1998) (Ref Coll Bibliog Heels, S-1C)

This work includes web-sites for major law firms, full-text on-line law reviews, legal publishers, law schools, state bar associations, state governments, and federal agencies, offices, and courts.

J. Myron Jacobstein et al., **Fundamentals of Legal Research** (1998) (Ref Desk, S-1C)

This work contains an appendix of "selected law-related Internet sources" of various types.

Ken Kozlowski, **The Internet Guide for the Legal Researcher**, 3d Edition (Ref Coll, Bibliog Kozlowski, S-1C)

Includes information on finding legal dictionaries, portals, indexes, search engines

Don MacLeod, **The Internet Guide for the Legal Researcher** (1997, with looseleaf updates) (Ref Coll Bibliog MacLeod, S-1C)

Main text offers detailed guidance on different types of searches and search engines. Web-sites for states, federal agencies and departments, congressional information, legislative history

information, federal Courts of Appeals, branches of the military, administrative law, regulations, legislation. The updates to this source are in newsletter format, and are stored in a stiff-sided binder box next to the main text. The updates contain reviews of a variety of legal research web-sites as well as news on new developments in legal research on the web.

Antje Mays, **Legal research on the Internet: A Compendium of Websites to Access United States Federal, State, Local, and International Laws** (1999) (Bibliog Legal\_re ... v. 33 1999, S-1N)

This work has a particularly good list of websites for finding treaties and international documents, laws of foreign countries, comparative law. Also some state and federal web-sites.

Greg R. Notess, **Government Information on the Internet** (latest year only) (Ref Coll Bibliog Governme, S-1C)

This work includes web-sites for cities and counties, federal agencies, intergovernmental organizations, military organizations, and foreign countries, as well as web-sites arranged under the topics of agriculture, business, statistics (including the census), education, environment, health, libraries, science, social services, and technology.

Kent C. Olson, **Legal Information: How to Find It, How to Use It** (1999) (Ref Desk, S-1C).

Various tables in this work list web-sites for the U.S. Courts of Appeals, state legislative codes, state administrative codes, state attorney general opinions, and state court opinions.

Two excellent legal research web sites contain extensive secondary information on doing on-line legal research:

**Law Library Resource Xchange**, at [www.llrx.com/](http://www.llrx.com/)

and

**The Virtual Chase**, at [www.virtualchase.com/](http://www.virtualchase.com/)

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Margaret Leary, Barb Garavaglia, Kincaid Brown, Beatrice Tice, Jenny Selby, Andrew Larrick, David Peters, and Sarah Heineman for sharing their suggestions and insights on web research. I am highly indebted to Margaret Leary's course on Advanced Legal Research as the inspiration for several sections of this handout, including the sections on getting started, evaluating web sources, the pros and cons of web-based research, and troubleshooting problems with web searches.—Lisa M. Dresner