



Introduction

Reading court decisions is a central part of the law school curriculum. As you've seen, however, the legal research process frequently begins with secondary sources and statutes, which can then lead you to relevant case law. With a few cases already in hand, you can next focus on searching for cases more directly and using them as a means for finding additional relevant authorities.

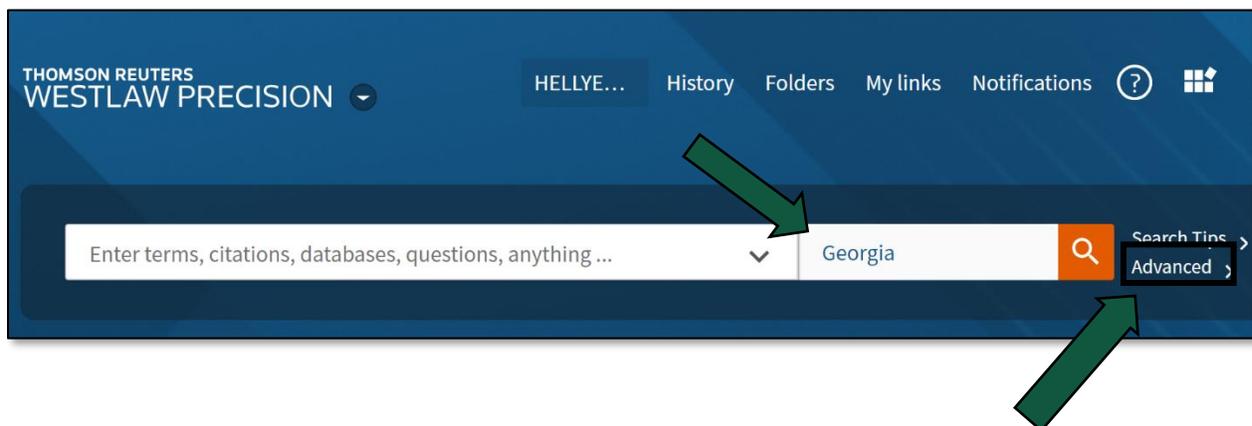
Finding Cases in Other Sources

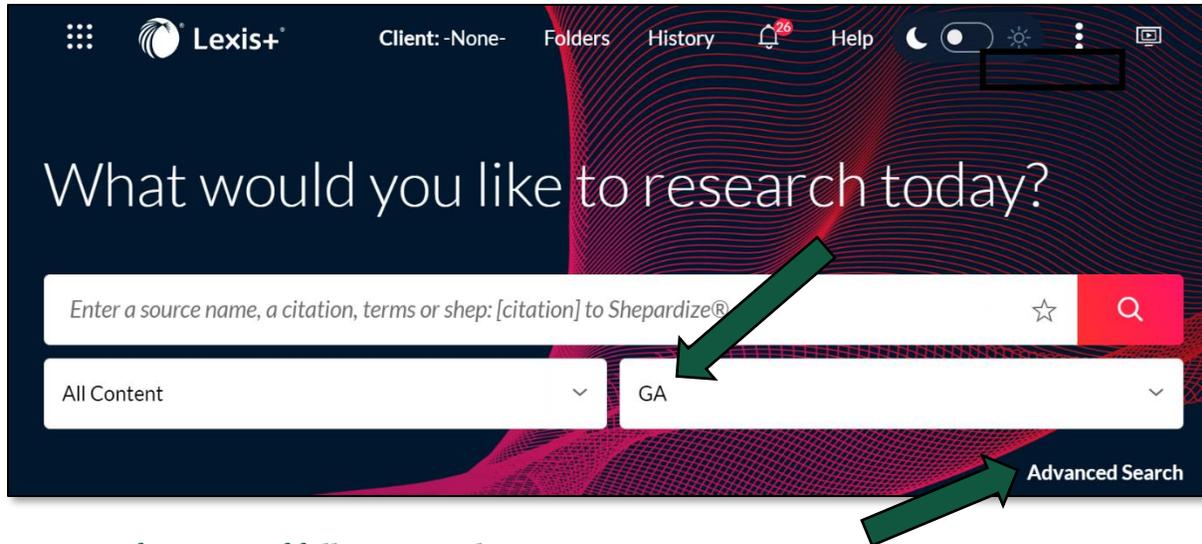
We recommend starting your research with secondary sources not only because they provide you with an overview (and sometimes an in-depth review) of the law, but also because they direct you to relevant primary sources, case law included; indeed, some secondary sources, like the *American Law Reports* and the *Restatements*, center on case law. It's always a good idea to note any potentially relevant cases as you read through secondary sources.

Additionally, you can often find cases by looking at the annotations to the relevant statutory code sections or administrative code provisions. In particular, the Notes of Decision on Westlaw and the Case Notes/Notes to Decisions on Lexis can give you some of the best cases available.

Finding Cases by Searching

Full-text searching is perhaps the most straightforward, though not always the most efficient, way of looking for cases. It's generally a good practice to set your jurisdiction first before running a search in the main search boxes on Westlaw and Lexis.





Here are a few types of full-text searches you can run:

- **Natural language searching:** simply type in keywords without connectors. Like Google, Westlaw and Lexis will search for your keywords as well as any variations and synonyms.
- **Terms & Connectors searching:** use search operators, most of which work the same on Lexis and Westlaw. On Westlaw, you may need to add *adv:* at the beginning of your search to trigger a Terms and Connectors search. See the table below for common search operators.

Operator	What It Does	Example
and/&	Requires both terms to be in document	store & shoplifting
or	Finds documents that contain either or both words	store or shop
/n	Searches for words within <i>n</i> words of each other	store /10 shoplifter
/s	Searches for words within a sentence of each other	store /s shoplifter
/p	Searches for words within a paragraph of each other	store /p shoplifter
“ ”	Searches for words as a phrase	“false imprisonment”
!	Searches for a root word plus all words formed by adding letters to it	shoplift! [retrieves words like shoplifter, shoplifted, shoplifting, etc.]

- **Advanced searching:** clicking on the Advanced Search link on Westlaw or Lexis will give you further options for more precise searching, including the use of field restrictors, which allow you to search only certain parts of a case such as the headnotes.

Finding Cases by Browsing

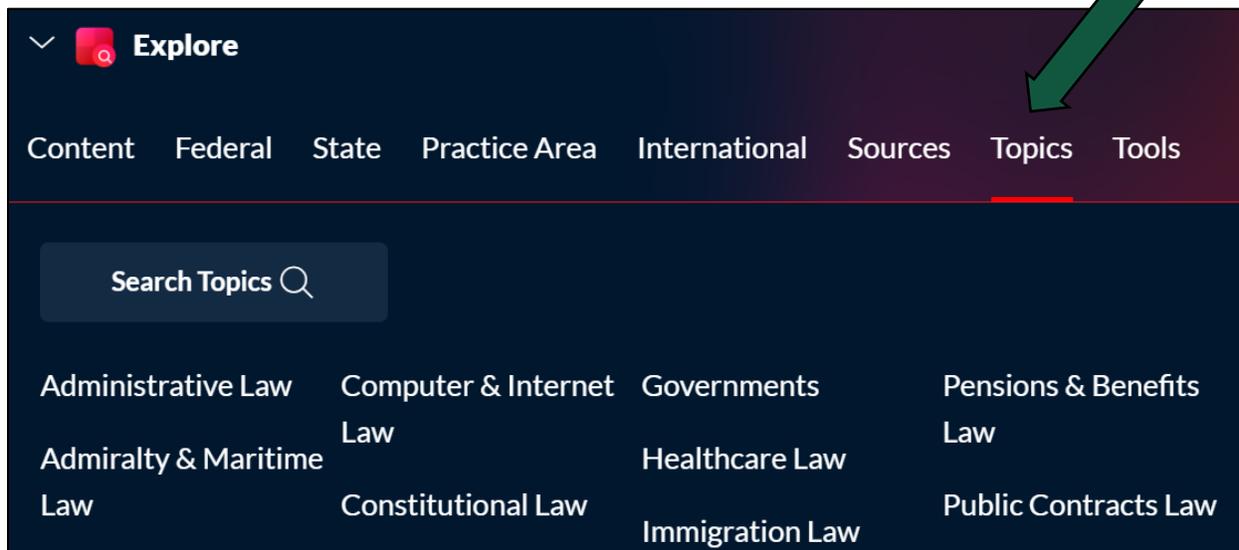
An alternative approach to finding cases is to browse cases by subject. Both Westlaw and Lexis classify cases by subject, allowing you to retrieve relevant cases with the click of a button.

Westlaw offers subject browsing through its **Key Number System**, which includes hundreds of broad legal topics that are each divided into many more subtopics, often very narrowly. You can access the Key Number System from Westlaw’s home page:



Once you’re in the Key Number System, you can select an individual key number to see headnotes (i.e., points of law) from relevant cases. You can change your jurisdiction to see additional cases. Once you have a list of headnotes, you can filter them by keyword, court, or date.

Lexis also allows you to browse cases by subject through its **Topics** feature, which you can access from the Lexis home screen:



The Lexis topics are broader than West’s key numbers, which means there are fewer topics and more cases per topic. On Lexis, you’ll have to rely more on filtering your results by keyword, court, date, publication status, or practice area.

Using a Relevant Case to Find More Cases

Once you've located at least one relevant case, you can use that case to find additional relevant cases. The most obvious way is to review the decisions the court cites. Another way is to use the headnotes that the editors at Westlaw and Lexis have added to the opinion. Each headnote covers a specific point of law in the opinion, and each headnote has been categorized in either the Westlaw Key Number System or the Lexis Topics. Each headnote may be classified under multiple key numbers or topics.

On Westlaw, you can find additional cases by clicking on any of the topics from the Key Number System to the right of the headnote or by clicking the link that says "Cases that cite this headnote."

West Headnotes (5)

1 **False Imprisonment**
 "False imprisonment" requires unlawful detention of person, for any length of time.
 O.C.G.A. § 51-7-20.

5 Cases that cite this headnote

Here, 168 is the broad legal topic, and 168k1 is the key number. You can click on any level to see cases.

168
 168I
 168I(A)
 168k1

False Imprisonment
 Civil Liability
 Acts Constituting False Imprisonment and Liability Therefor
 Nature and Elements of

Make sure to select the Grid View so that you can see where the headnote has been classified in the Key Number System.

Each headnote on Lexis has one or more legal topics above the text of the headnote. Each topic is arranged with increasing specificity from left to right. To view more cases, click on the topic and then select "Get documents" from the drop-down menu. You can also click on the link beneath the headnote that says "*Shepardize* – Narrow by this Headnote" to find cases that cite to that headnote or click on the "More like this Headnote" link to see cases that have language similar to this headnote.

The topics read left-to-right, from broad to more specific.

Torts > [Intentional Torts](#) > [False Imprisonment](#) > [Elements](#)

[View more legal topics](#)

HN1 False Imprisonment, Elements

The essential elements of the cause of action for false imprisonment are a detention of another for any length of time, and the unlawfulness of that detention. *Ga. Code Ann. § 51-7-60* detention need not consist of physical restraint, but may arise out of words, acts, gestures, or the like, which induce a reasonable apprehension that force will be used if plaintiff does not submit; and it is sufficient if they operate upon the will of the person threatened, and result in a reasonable fear of personal difficulty or personal injuries. In addition, *Ga. Code Ann. § 51-7-60* precludes a recovery for false imprisonment when it is shown that the owner or operator of a store reasonably believed the person detained was engaged in shoplifting. *Ga. Code Ann. § 51-7-60* thus implicitly recognizes the right of a shop owner to protect himself from shoplifting by detaining a customer who has acted in a suspicious manner. Where a detention occurs its reasonableness is a jury question. However, there is no issue for the jury where there is no detention. [More like this Headnote](#)

[Shepardize® - Narrow by this Headnote\(13\)](#) 1

Click on the down arrow for any topic and then on “Get documents” to see cases.

Finally, citators are another way to find additional relevant cases. Both KeyCite on Westlaw and Shepard’s on Lexis allow you to see all the cases that cite to the decision you’re reading. You can filter the cases by headnote to limit the citing decisions only to those relevant to particular points of law.

Validation of Cases

After finding relevant cases, it’s important to validate them to make sure they’re still good law. Citators are a useful tool for validating cases because they’re designed to list any negative treatment your case has received.

The citator on Westlaw is known as KeyCite and uses a series of flags to indicate a case’s validity:

KEYCITE STATUS FLAGS

-  A red flag warns the case or administrative decision is no longer good law for at least one of the points it contains.
-  A yellow flag warns the case or administrative decision has some negative history, but has not been reversed or overruled.
-  A blue-striped flag warns the case has been appealed to the US Court of Appeals or the US Supreme Court (excluding appeals originating from agencies).
-  An Overruling Risk warning indicates a case or administrative decision may no longer be good for at least one point of law based on its reliance on an overruled or otherwise invalid prior decision.

Lexis's citator is called Shepard's and uses a variety of different signals to illustrate the validity of cases. As the following graphic points out, a red stop sign in Shepard's (or, for that matter, a red flag in KeyCite) does not necessarily mean that you can't rely on that case:

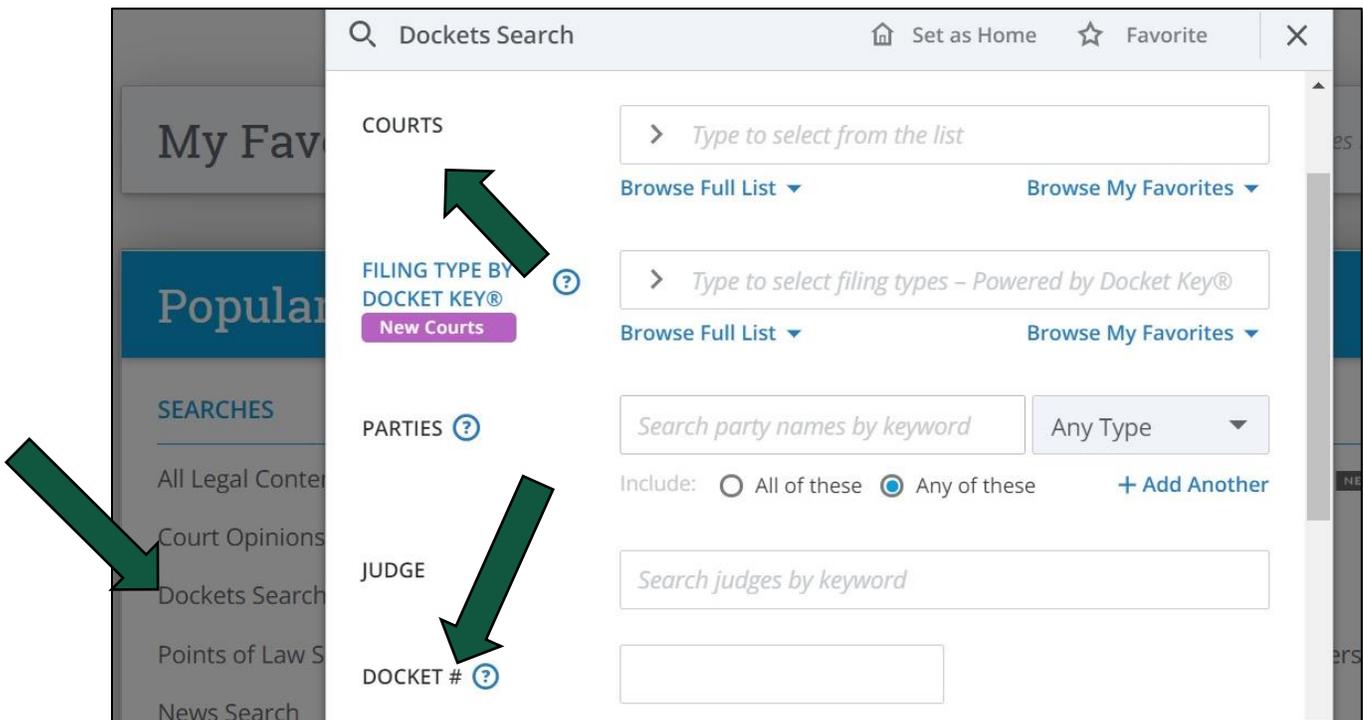
-  **Red Stop Sign:** Warning - Negative treatment indicated
Note: A red *Shepard's* signal does not always mean the case is not good law. It is to alert you that there is possible negative history or treatment and needs review. For example, a case can be reversed in part where the parts of the case that are not reversed may still be applicable.
-  **Red Exclamation Mark in White Circle:** Negative case treatment indicated for statute
-  **Orange Square:** Validity questioned by citing references
-  **Yellow Triangle:** Caution - Possible negative treatment indicated
-  **Green Diamond:** Positive treatment indicated
-  **Blue Circle with A:** Cited and neutral analysis indicated
-  **Blue Circle with I:** Cited references available

When considering whether a case is still good law, you should also check to see if the authorities it relies on are still valid. Westlaw's Overruling Risk flag is one way to tell if any of the decisions cited by the case are no longer valid (which could render the case you're reading invalid), but you should also verify that the statutes cited by the case are still in force.

Finally, thoroughly reading appropriate secondary sources is another way to ensure that there have been no major changes in the law that might render your case invalid.

Dockets

While Westlaw and Lexis make available some court filings, the best way to access court dockets while in law school is through Bloomberg Law. The dockets search is available on the Bloomberg Law home page:



The screenshot shows the Bloomberg Law Dockets Search interface. On the left is a sidebar with navigation options: "My Favorites", "Popular", and "SEARCHES". Under "SEARCHES", there are links for "All Legal Content", "Court Opinions", "Dockets Search", "Points of Law Search", and "News Search". The "Dockets Search" option is highlighted with a green arrow. The main search area has a search bar and several filters: "COURTS" (with a dropdown menu and "Browse Full List" and "Browse My Favorites" buttons), "FILING TYPE BY DOCKET KEY" (with a dropdown menu and "Browse Full List" and "Browse My Favorites" buttons), "PARTIES" (with a search box for "Search party names by keyword" and a dropdown for "Any Type"), "JUDGE" (with a search box for "Search judges by keyword"), and "DOCKET #" (with a search box). There are also "Include:" options for "All of these" and "Any of these" with a "+ Add Another" button. The interface is clean and professional, with a light blue and white color scheme.

The easiest way to retrieve a docket is to enter the name of the court and the docket number, although you can locate dockets with other pieces of information. Bloomberg Law provides excellent coverage for federal dockets and more selective coverage for state court dockets. Once you pull up the docket sheet, make sure that the docket is current; if not, click on the Update Docket button. Click the “Track Docket” link at the top of the page to receive email notifications about any changes to the docket.

United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit
Docket for Case #: 17-11589

Code Revision Commission, et al v. Public.Resource.Org, Inc.

GENERAL INFO
Current As Of
Aug. 23, 2023
5:44 PM EDT

Track Docket Update Docket

Update Docket

Individual filings can be retrieved from the entries on the docket sheet. If the filing is already available through Bloomberg Law, the link under the PDF column will say “View”; otherwise, you will need to click the “Request” link and wait a minute or two for the filing to become available.

<input type="checkbox"/> BL-51	Jun. 26, 2017	View	Email - Attorney for Amicus Curiam. Bhandari, Duan, Malone, Pearlman; Attorney for Appellants: LaFantano, Rader, Rosenberg; Attorney for Appellees: Askew, Pavento, Thomas; US mail - Attorney for Amicus Curiae: Sollazzo.
<input type="checkbox"/> BL-52	Jun. 30, 2017	View	Appellee's Brief filed by Appellees Code Revision Commission and State of Georgia. (ECF: Anthony Askew)
<input type="checkbox"/> BL-53	Jul. 03, 2017	Request	Received paper copies of EBrief filed by Appellees Code Revision Commission and State of Georgia.