

Legal Research Teaching Modules

Clare Willis & Scott Vanderlin

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These legal research teaching modules are designed to provide point-of-need training by librarians in Legal Writing I classes. Instructors are offered a basic “menu” of lectures to choose from, or research librarians are prepared to tailor individual lectures to the needs of each instructor. This provides both the instructor and the research librarians the flexibility to schedule classes as they see fit, with the goal of reaching students at the ideal time with each lecture.

Modules Available

- **Getting Started**
 - Reading an assignment
 - Getting started with secondary sources
 - Case law
 - Terms and Connectors
 - Statutes
- **Intermediate research tasks**
 - Free and low-cost legal research
 - “Prepare to practice”
 - “Proving a negative”

Sample Modules:

Case law

Student learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Remember that secondary sources can lead to cases
- Remember the editorial enhancements for cases (headnotes, Key Numbers) and understand what they do
- Understand the importance of Shepard’s/Key Cite as well as how to use the results to find additional cases and secondary sources

Suggested pairing of assignment/time in the semester

Following vendor training

After assignment of open memo

Teaching Activities

Librarian asks students to explain what the vendors said about headnotes and Key Numbers, correcting any misconceptions

Librarian gives a lecture with visual aids to demonstrate how to fully and effectively use a case (reading it, Shepardizing it, and using headnotes/Key Numbers). Librarian also emphasizes the importance of where a case sits in the hierarchy of authority.

Students take a case that they have already found in their research for the first memo and use Shepard's/Key Numbers to find another helpful case.

Expected Time

20-25 minutes

Terms and Connectors

Note: this session cuts across types of authority, but uses case law as the main example because filters can be easier to understand with case law.

Student learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Understand the difference between natural language and terms and connectors
- Evaluate in what situations each search style is appropriate
- Remember some basics of search operators
- Create and modify a terms and connectors search based on results
- Understand filters and how they may or may not be helpful for research

Suggested pairing of assignment/time in the semester

Following vendor training on terms and connectors.

Teaching Activities

Instructor asks students to explain what the vendors said about terms and connectors searching

Class discussion about when each style might be appropriate

Instructor shows the connectors on the advanced search page on Westlaw, points out basics (&, OR). Runs a basic search and shows what filters do, points out that they may filter out relevant material if your initial search starts too broad. Uses caselaw as an example because the filters are easiest to grasp.

Students work in small groups or alone to run a search as natural language and terms and connectors, comparing the results. They then modify their terms and connectors search to try and refine their results to find something more relevant.

Expected Time

10-15 minutes