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Understanding Legal Citations

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LEGAL CITATIONS

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What are legal citations?

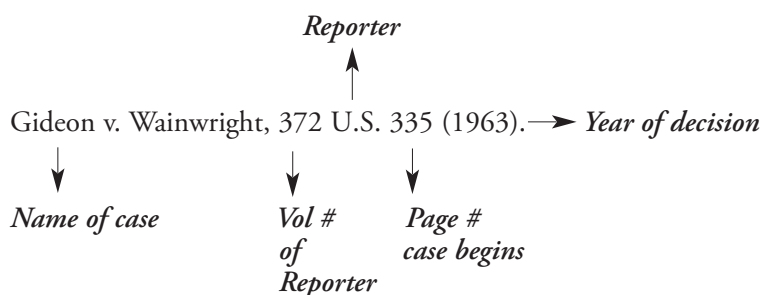
Legal citations are references to legal authorities such as cases, statutes, regulations, law journal articles and books. By rule and custom, correct citation form is required by courts, law firms, law journal articles and law schools to identify and locate legal authority.

Legal citations consist of three parts:

1. The name of the case, statute, article or rule.
2. A description of where the authority can be found in legal authority, in this order:
Volume number Name of publication Page number
3. Date

CASES

The structure of a citation for the United States Supreme Court is:



In plain English, the decision *Gideon v. Wainwright* will be found in volume 372 of the official reporter of the Supreme Court of the United States, known as *United States Reports*, beginning on page 335. The court handed down the decision in 1963.

Cases may also be published in several different sets of books, and citations to more than one set may be available. These are called parallel citations. Parallel citations to *Gideon* look like:

372 U.S. 335, 83 S. Ct. 792, 9 L. Ed. 2d 799 (1963).

This means that you would find the *Gideon* decision in the *United States Reports* and also in volume 83, page 792 of the *Supreme Court Reporter*, published by West, and in volume 9, page 799 of the *Lawyer's Edition*, 2nd Series, published by Lexis. Reporters published by private companies may include topical explanations of the case, called headnotes. West Publishing headnotes are organized into the West Key Number system by topic.

Reporters

Other sets of books also contain cases, and are organized by jurisdiction or region. These include:

Federal Reporters

The abbreviations F., F. 2d, F. 3d cover the Circuit Courts of the United States and are published by West. The Federal Supplement covers the cases from the District Courts of the United States, with the abbreviations F. Supp., and F. Supp. 2d.

Regional Reporters

These report cases from a group of states. Abbreviations for these sets include A. and A. 2d (Atlantic); N.E., and N.E. 2d (North Eastern Reporter); N.W. and N.W. 2d (North Western Reporter); S.E., and S.E. 2d. (South Eastern Reporter), S.W., and S.W. 2d. (South Western Reporter) and P., P. 2d and P. 3d. (Pacific Reporter). All are published by West.

State Reporters

These report cases from a specific state. (Md., Va.). Not all states have their own reporters; cases from the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia are published in the Atlantic Reporter.

Session Laws

Abbreviated title of book
(Statutes at Large)

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Pub. L. No. 91-190, 83 Stat. 852 (1970).

Popular name of law *Public Law #* Vol. # Page # Year Enacted

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, 42 U.S.C. §4321 et seq. (2001).

 <i>Popular name</i>	 <i>Title # (by subject)</i>	 <i>Section # or Part #</i>
 <i>Title of book (United States Code)</i>	 <i>Year of compilation</i>	

Title of publication

LAW REVIEW ARTICLES

Secondary sources, such as law review articles help explain and analyze the law

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title of Article</i>	<i>Year of Publication</i>
Robert G. Vaughn,	America's First Comprehensive Statute Protecting Corporate Whistleblowers,	57 Admin. L. Rev. 1 (2005).
		Vol # Journal Name Page #

LEGAL ENCYCLOPEDIAS

These are large sets that help explain legal concepts in a general way and may contain citations to cases that further interpret the law. The two most often cited are Corpus Juris Secundum (C.J.S.) and American Jurisprudence 2d (Am. Jur. 2d).

<i>Vol #</i>	<i>Sec. #</i>	
↓	↓	
88	C.J.S. Trial § 192	(1955). → <i>Year of publication</i>

Title of set Topic

<i>Vol #</i>	<i>Sec. #</i>	
↓	↓	
17	Am. Jur. 2d Contracts § 74	(1964). → <i>Year of publication</i>

Title of set Topic

Common Legal Abbreviations

A., A.2d	Atlantic Reporter	N.W., N.W.2d	North Western Reporter
A.L.R.	American Law Reports	P., P.2d, P.3d	Pacific Reporter
Am. Jur. 2d	American Jurisprudence (encyclopedia)	S. Ct.	Supreme Court Reporter
C.F.R.	Code of Federal Regulations	S.E., S.E.2d	South Eastern Reporter
C.J.S.	Corpus Juris Secundum (encyclopedia)	S.W., S.W.2d, S.W.3d	South Western Reporter
D.C. Code	District of Columbia Code	So., So. 2d	Southern Reporter
D.C. Mun. Regs.	District of Columbia Municipal Regulations	Stat.	Statutes at Large
D.C. Reg.	District of Columbia Register	U.S.	United States Reports
F., F.2d, F.3d	Federal Reporter	U.S.C.	United States Code
F. Appx.	Federal Appendix	U.S.C.A.	United States Code Annotated
F. Cas.	Federal Cases	U.S.C.S.	United States Code Service
F.R.D.	Federal Rules Decisions	Va.	Virginia Reports
F. Supp., F. Supp. 2d	Federal Supplement	Va. Ct App.	Virginia Court of Appeals
Fed. Reg.	Federal Register	VA. Code Ann.	Code of Virginia
L. Ed., L. Ed. 2d	Lawyers' Edition Supreme Court Reports	VA Admin. Code	Virginia Administrative Code
N.E., N.E.2d	North Eastern Reporter	Va. Reg. Regs.	Virginia Register of Regulations
Md.	Maryland Reports		
Md. Ct. Spec. App.	Maryland Court of Special Appeals		
MD Code Ann.	Maryland Code Annotated		
MD Code Regs.	Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR)		
MD. Reg.	Maryland Register		

Note: 2d indicates second series, 3d indicates third series. The series number is an essential part of the title.

For additional abbreviations, consult *The Bluebook, A Uniform System of Citation* or *ALWD Citation Manual : a Professional System of Citation* (Both on Reserve at KF 245).