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Internet
Legal Research
on a Budget

Free and Low-Cost Resources for Lawyers

**ABALAW
PRACTICE
DIVISION**
The Business of Practicing Law

Introduction

WHY A BOOK ABOUT FREE ONLINE LEGAL RESEARCH?

According to the American Bar Association's 2013 Legal Technology Survey Report,[1] 96 percent of respondents report they conduct legal research online but that they are less satisfied with free resources than with fee-based resources. The 2012 Research Intelligence Group's "New Attorney Research Methods Survey"[2] found that new associates (five years or less) spend about 31 percent (14.5 hours per week) of their time conducting legal research. For those in practice less than two years, the percentage rises to 35 percent. The new associates (5 years or less) reported that they used fee-based online resources for eight of their 14.5 hours of legal research per week while spending four hours per week using free or low-cost online resources. Fee-based resources are used more often by large firm associates (74 percent frequently/always) than small firm associates (46 percent).

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1 Legal Technology Survey Report, *Online Research*, Vol. 5 (ABA Legal Technology Resource Center 2013) (http://linkon.in/ltrcsurvey).

2 Steven A. Lastres, "Rebooting Legal Research in a Digital Age," available at http://www.llrx.com/files/rebootinglegalresearch.pdf. Mr. Lastres's article is based on results from the "New Attorney Research Methods Survey," a survey of 190 law firm associates independently conducted by The Research Intelligence Group (TRiG) during December 2012. Funding was provided by LexisNexis®. The survey may not be available to the public. The statistics we refer to in this preface are derived from Mr. Lastres's article. In the survey, 190 young attorneys (equally represented by large and small law firms across a variety of practice areas) were asked questions about their legal research methods. Nearly 40 percent of the respondents were 28 or younger, in practice for five or fewer years, and a quarter of the respondents were recent law school graduates from the class of 2011 or 2012.

With cost-conscious clients scrutinizing legal bills, lawyers cannot afford to depend on fee-based resources the way they used to, especially if there are reliable free resources available. This book[3] was written to help lawyers quickly find reliable free (or low-cost) resources online and to learn to use the resources effectively so they can become more satisfied using free resources. Our goal was to write a book that would save you time and money and help you avoid frustration. We wanted to share what we have learned about the best legal research sites we have "scoped out." We have tested and evaluated each site, described how to actually use the site (often step-by-step), and included numerous screen shots to better illustrate the steps.

WHAT IS LEGAL RESEARCH?

While we know that a lawyer's research involves both investigative/background research and "pure" legal research (cases, statutes, dockets, ordinances, etc.), this book focuses primarily on "pure" Internet legal research. For those who want to learn about free and low-cost investigative/background Internet research, please read books on that topic written by Carole Levitt and Mark Rosch.[4]

THE AUTHORS OF THIS BOOK ARE UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO WRITE THIS BOOK

The authors of this book share a common background that uniquely qualifies them to write this book: We have both have had careers as lawyers as well as law librarians. Carole worked as a law librarian at corporate legal departments, law schools, and law firms in Chicago and Los Angeles, while Judy currently works as a law librarian at the University of Southern California (USC) Gould School of Law and previously at the University of San Diego Pardee Legal Research Center. We have also both taught Legal Research at law schools (Judy currently teaches at the USC Gould School of Law and Carole taught at Pepperdine University School of Law). In 1999, Carole founded Internet For Lawyers (IFL) to teach Internet research to lawyers and parale-gals at CLE seminars throughout the United States. She is still running IFL today.

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3   Some of the chapters of this book are an update and expansion of a few chapters from *The Cybersleuth's Guide to the Internet* (IFL Press 2013), and some chapters are unique to this book.

4   *The Cybersleuth's Guide to the Internet* (IFL Press 2013), *Find Info Like a Pro, Volume 1: Mining the Internet's Publicly Available Resources for Investigative Research* (ABA LPM 2010), and *Find Info Like a Pro, Volume 2: Mining the Internet's Public Records for Investigative Research* (ABA LPM 2011).

Because of this background, we understand how lawyers think when it comes to legal research, so we decided to put our heads together to write a current book on Internet legal research, discussing government, academic, and commercial (free and pay) websites as well as apps, blogs, Twitter feeds, and crowdsourced sites.

IS FREE ALWAYS BEST?

We know, as it is with most anything, that price is a major consideration when deciding between alternative research resources—and we all agree that all other things being equal, free is better. That said, we do make note of pay databases when they have more useful features than the free sites. Sometimes it makes sense to pay for data—especially if the pay databases have something the free ones are lacking (content or functionality), or when using the pay databases can simply save you time, and thus money.

IF YOU DIDN'T RECEIVE FORMAL ONLINE LEGAL RESEARCH TRAINING AT YOUR FIRM OR ENOUGH IN LAW SCHOOL…THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU

Fifty-six percent of the surveyed associates[5] indicated that their employer expected them to have strong legal research skills but did not provide any formal training. Only 29 percent of respondents said they received some formal training, and that percentage falls to a mere 12 percent for those in small firms. Nearly half surveyed (49 percent) feel that legal research should be a larger part of the law school curriculum. And, eight in ten feel that there was at least one area of legal research that should have been given more time. Statutory research, administrative law, and public records searching topped the list for specific areas that deserved more time or exposure.

We hope this book fills in some of the legal research training that the 190 surveyed young attorneys (and many other attorneys) felt was missing from their law firm and law school training and that it empowers you to become a more efficient and effective researcher.

5   Lastres, *supra* note 2.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

This book is primarily organized by type of material. For example, there are chapters about websites for statutes, cases, dockets, and so on. One chapter is organized by practice area, from advertising law to trademark law. That chapter includes both websites and blogs. Finally we have a chapter about general legal research (such as where to find free law review articles, forms, court rules, etc.). That chapter includes websites and apps.

We only show you the best sites. We begin each chapter with the most useful or comprehensive site for a specific topic and then discuss a few alternative sites. We include tips about the most useful aspect of each site (content and functionality) and let you know if there are any hidden functions.

CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS BOOK

Throughout the book we will use boldfaced type to indicate exact text that appears on a web page (links, buttons, dropdown menus, etc.), and italics to indicate the exact text of search terms/keywords used in sample searches we conducted to evaluate the sites we discuss.

Website URLs are accurate and up to date as of March 2014.
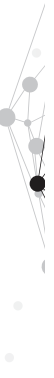
Chapter 5

GOVERNMENT, ACADEMIC, AND ASSOCIATION PORTALS AND DIRECTORIES

This chapter continues the previous chapter's explanation of legal portals and directories and will discuss Governmental, Academic, and Legal Association portals. For an overview of the characteristics of legal portals and directories, as well as a detailed discussion on assessing their quality, see the introduction to Part II.

GOVERNMENT PORTALS AND DIRECTORIES

USA.GOV

USA.gov (http://www.usa.gov), formerly FirstGov.gov, is the federal government's document search portal. USA.gov searches millions of web pages from all levels of the United States government: federal, state, local, tribal, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories (see Figure 5.1). Although results occasionally bring back court opinions, this is not the right site to search for them. Instead, see Chapters 3 (Legal Portals and Directories), 8 (Casemaker), and 9 (Fastcase), where free case law research is discussed.

47

Figure 5.1 USA.gov's Home Page
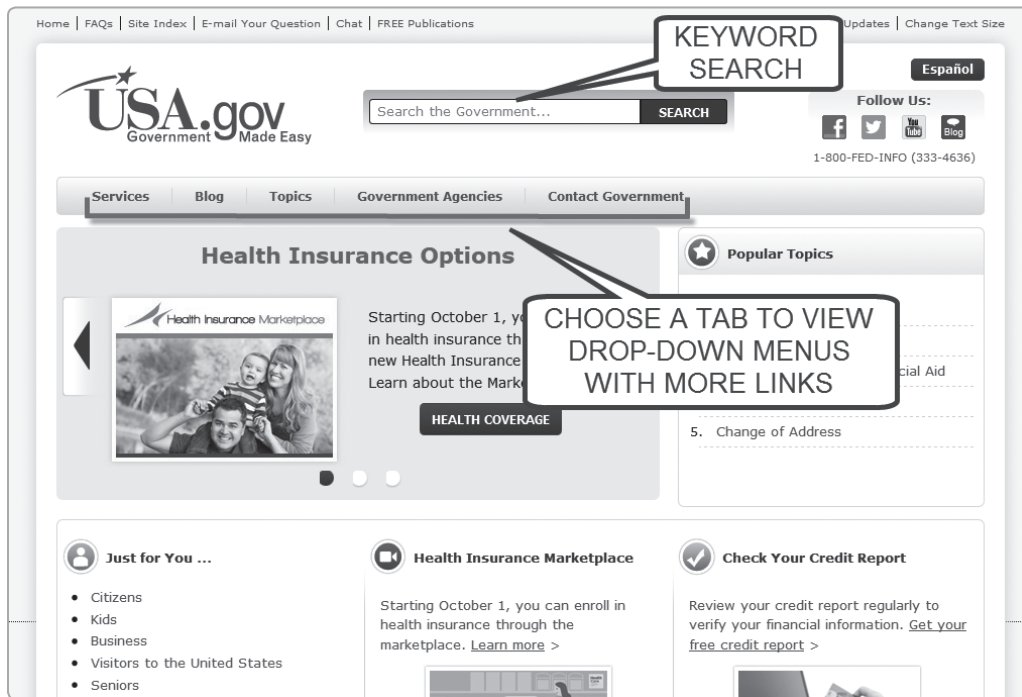
In addition to offering keyword searching, USA.gov offers the ability to browse by a government service, topic, agency, or government contact. To browse (instead of keyword searching), select one of the five tabs listed below the search box on USA.gov's home page: **Services**, **Blog**, **Topics**, **Government Agencies**, and **Contact Government**. Once you select one of these tabs, such as the **Government Agencies** tab, for example, a drop-down menu appears where more links are revealed.

If you select the **Services** tab, you will see that USA.gov also serves as a forum in which to conduct business online with government agencies. For instance, you can change your address, apply for a passport, shop government auctions, e-file your taxes, and more.

USA.gov's internal search engine (the search box on USA.gov's home page) is powered by **Bing**. You can use the search box to keyword or phrase search government documents. Unfortunately, USA.gov provides no search tips about how to construct a search and use Boolean connectors and we were unable to find any at Bing (at least not easily).

However, on USA.gov's **Advanced Search** page (which you can only find once you run a search or if you visit http://search.usa.gov/search/advanced), there is a

link to Bing's search tips. To find the tips on USA.gov's **Advanced Search** page you will need to scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the **You can also use advanced search operators to help limit and focus your searches** link. Then you will be taken to the **Advanced search keywords** page at Bing. But that page only explains how to use various instructions such as how to limit your search to a specific file type (http://onlinehelp.microsoft.com/en-us/bing/ff808421.aspx). The more useful help page, where you learn how to search with Boolean connectors, is found by clicking the **advanced search operators** link at the bottom of the Advanced search keywords page, or just use this URL: http://onlinehelp.microsoft.com/en-us/bing/ff808438.aspx (see Figure 5.2). We will provide a brief Bing/USA.gov tutorial.

Figure 5.2   Bing's Advanced Search

Just like Google, Bing/USA.gov uses Boolean connectors to link keywords and phrases, and the default Boolean connector is *AND*. Leaving a space between words automatically connects your keywords/phrases with the *AND* Boolean connector so there is no need to type the word *AND*. And, just like Google, Bing/USA.gov offers phrase searching if you surround your phrase within quotation marks.

The OR Boolean connector must be upper case at Bing/USA.gov and Google, but Bing/USA.gov treats the Boolean connector *OR* differently than Google in one instance only: when you are combining your *OR* search with other Boolean connectors in a search. For example, to search for the phrase *"homeland security"* and the keywords *nevada OR oregon*, Bing requires you to enclose your *OR* terms in parentheses (Google does not). Your search would look like this:

"homeland security" (nevada OR oregon)

If you are only searching the keywords *nevada OR Oregon*, your Bing/USA.gov search would be the same as a Google search and would look like this:

nevada OR oregon

If you are excluding a word at Bing/USA.gov, you would place a minus sign(-) before the word without any space, just as you would at Google. One difference is that Bing/USA.gov also recognizes the Boolean connector *NOT*, and Google does not. However, *NOT* must be in upper case (see Figure 5.3). So to search at Bing/USA.gov for the phrase *"homeland security"* and the keywords *nevada NOT oregon*, your search would look like either one of these examples:

"homeland security" nevada -oregon

"homeland security" nevada NOT oregon

Figure 5.3   USA.gov Simple Search Results
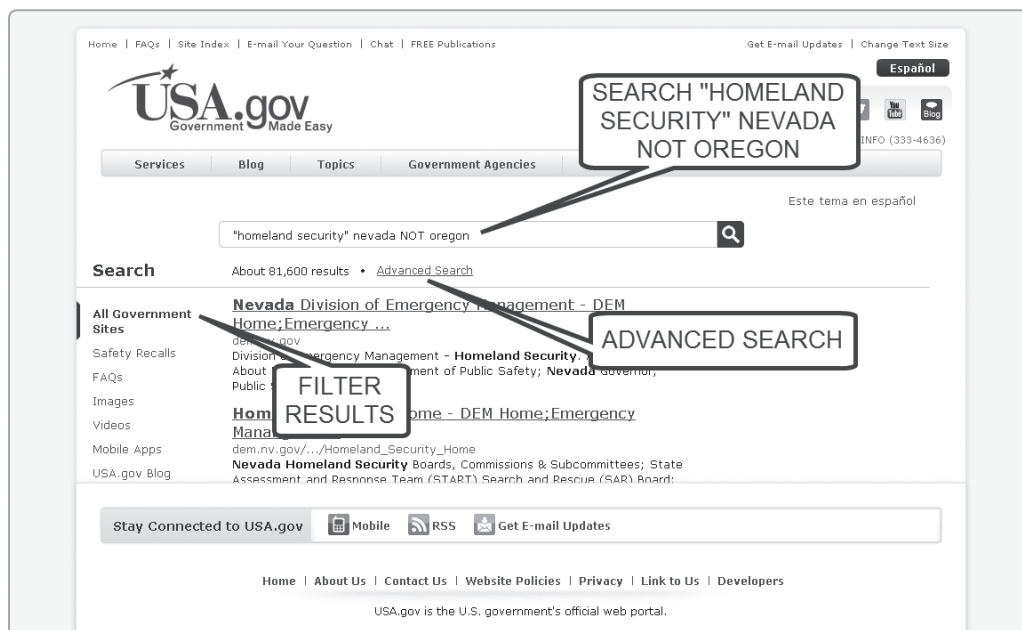
The link to the **Advanced Search** was taken off the home page a number of years ago, much to our disappointment, and it is only visible after you run your search and receive results (as shown in Figure 5.3), or it can be reached directly at http:// search.usa.gov/search/advanced. To use the feature, click **Advanced Search** after you have run an initial search (see Figure 5.4). You must enter something into the search box, or you will receive an error message telling you to enter search terms until you do so.

Figure 5.4   USA.gov Advanced Search

Once you reach the **Advanced Search** at Search.USA.gov, you will then be able to construct your search in the following ways:

- Enter keywords into the following search boxes:
  - **All of these words**
  - **This exact phrase**
  - **Any of these words**
  - **None of these words**
- Select the **File Type** drop-down menu to limit search results to the following formats:
  - PDF
  - Excel

- PowerPoint
- Word
- Text

If you are looking for a quick overview about a topic, sometimes limiting your search results to a PowerPoint presentation is a useful tactic.

FDSYS (FEDERAL DIGITAL SYSTEM)

The **Government Printing Office** (GPO) maintains a website called the **Federal Digital System** (**FDsys**), which is a database that provides free online access to official publications from all three branches of the Federal Government. The FDsys website arranges its database into Collections, which include **Budget of the U.S. Government, Code of Federal Regulations, Congressional Bills, Congressional Hearings, Federal Register, Statutes at Large, U.S. Code**, and **U.S. Court Opinions**, among others.

The same search protocols (keyword/phrase/citation searching and Boolean and proximity connectors) are used throughout the FDsys Collections. Results can be displayed and sorted in the same way throughout all of the Collections, so we will use this section to explain how to search FDsys, in general. However, a different menu of search criteria options appropriate for each Collection will pop up after you choose to search a specific Collection. For example, if you choose the **U.S.C. Collection**, its search criteria would include a search by **Title**, **U.S. Code Amendment**, or **U.S. Code Future Amendments** (among others), while the Collection of **U.S. Court Opinions** would include much different search criteria options, such as **Party Name** or **Court Name** (among others). Because of these differences and because there are Collections that focus on different topics, we will discuss them individually in later chapters and then refer you back here for a refresher on general FDsys search protocol strategies.

FDsys researchers can keyword or phrase search through all of FDsys's Collections from the search box on FDsys's home page at http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/home.action. Another option is the **Advanced Search** at http://linkon.in/y2uMZC. Researchers can also browse Collections or retrieve a document by citation via links available on the home page.

Whether you are performing a simple or Advanced Search, you can create simple or complex queries. We will highlight some of the search queries available at FDsys, but for more detailed information and examples, see the **FDsys Help** page (http://linkon.in/I6uqKF).

According to the documentation at FDsys, its simple queries are similar to "typical search engine such as Google" because FDsys uses the same Boolean connectors (*AND*, *OR*, and a minus sign) and phrase searching (using quotation marks) as Google. There are some differences, though: (1) FDsys researchers can use the Boolean connector *AND* or leave a space in between words (but Google scolds you if you type *AND* in between words), (2) Boolean connectors are case insensitive at FDsys (while the *OR* Boolean connector must be in uppercase at Google), (3) FDsys researchers can also use *NOT* instead of the minus (-) sign—they are interchangeable at FDsys (but not at Google), and (4) FDsys allows for additional types of complex queries not found at Google such as:

- Proximity connectors (near/#, adj, before/#)
    - *adj* specifies that one word is adjacent to another.
    - *before/#* (e.g., *handgun before/3 protection*) specifies that the first word is within whatever number of words that you select of the second word and that the first word must precede the second word.
    - *near/#* (e.g., *handgun near/10 protection*) specifies that the first word is within whatever number of words that you select of the second word and in any order.
- Wildcards, which are indicated by:
    - the question mark symbol (?) to replace one character before, within, or after a search term.
    - the asterisk symbol (*) to replace one or more characters before, within, or after a search term.
    - Typing *int*city* into the search box indicates a search for any word that begins with *int*, is followed by any two characters, and then ends with *city*. The search results might include the words *intercity* or *intracity*, or both words.
    - Typing *amend** into the search box indicates a search for the word *amend* and any word that begins with *amend*, such as *amendment, amending,* or *amends.*

- Parentheses, which should be used when creating complex searches such as those where you use multiple proximity connectors and/or multiple Field operators. The following is an example:

  (congressional OR executive) AND hearing AND (member:mcconnell)

Figure 5.5 shows a simple search and a simple query. We have entered two keywords (*negligence entrustment*) separated with a space into the simple search box. This will search all of the FDsys Collections together for both words.

Figure 5.5   FDSys's Simple Search

FDsys also allows you to construct a complex query on the simple search page by using Field operators. Field operators, which allow you to restrict your keywords to specific metadata fields (parts of a document), such as:

- Congress Member: To search by this field, enter your search this way: *member:mcconnell*
- President: To search by this field, enter your search this way: *president:Obama*
- You can search using multiple Fields, such as *title:homeland* and *member:smith*

Commonly used field operators that apply to all or most of the Collections can be found at http://linkon.in/HvLIjA (and links to each Collection's unique Field

operators can also be found at this URL if you scroll down to **Metadata Fields and Values by Collection**).

Figure 5.6 shows how your search results are displayed, and how you can do the following:

- **Narrow Your Search** by re-sorting results by **Collection, Date Published, Government Author, Organization, Person, Location**, or **Keyword** (see the left-side column).

- Search **Within Results** by clicking into the box to the right of the search box. This allows you to enter one or more keywords and re-run your search within your original search results to narrow down your search further.

- **Sort by Relevance**, **Date** (New to Old or Old to New), or **Alphabetically** (Z to A or A to Z).

Figure 5.6   FDSys's Simple Search with Complex Query

The **Advanced Search** page (http://linkon.in/y2uMZC) is illustrated in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7 FDsys's Advanced Search

According to FDsys's **Help** page (http://linkon.in/fdsysadvsearch), the Advanced Search page "uses a form based on metadata (information about the documents) to construct a search query" in the following ways:

- Limit the Publication Date of documents retrieved in results (using the **Publications Date** box at the top of the Advanced Search page).

- Broaden the Publication Date by selecting **All Dates** (All Dates is the default date listed on the Publications Date box at the top of the Advanced Search page).

- Accept the **All Collections** choice already displayed in the **Selected Collections** box (it is the default) if you want a broad search. If you choose another collection(s), the **All Collections** choice will be replaced. Limit the search to one (or multiple) Collections from the **Available Collections** drop-down menu.

- Conduct a broad keyword search by selecting **Full Text of Publications and Metadata** from the **Search in** drop-down menu.
- Conduct a narrower search by selecting up to five search criteria. In Figure 5.7, we have chosen **Title** as our search criteria. We could also change this to **Branch**, **Category**, **Citation**, **Government Author**, **Series**, or **Sudoc Class Number** from the **Search in** drop-down menu. (Remember, the search criteria noted here is for the **All Collections** search but will vary from Collection to Collection if you narrow your search to just one Collection.) By clicking **Add more search criteria** (see bottom left-side of Figure 5.7) you can choose up to four more of the criteria listed above (**Branch**, etc.).

If you opt to search multiple (or all) Collections, you will only be able to use a limited number of generic search criteria options (e.g., ones that are not Collection-specific).

Those who prefer to search by a known citation should choose the **Retrieve by Citation** link from the FDsys home page (to the right of the search box in Figure 5.5). From the **Retrieve by Citation** page, you must first choose a Collection from the **Collections** list. For example, in the Figure 5.8, we chose the **Code of Federal Regulations** Collection.

After choosing the **Code of Federal Regulations Collection**, the search menu that is appropriate for searching that particular Collection is displayed.

Figure 5.8 FDsys's Retrieve by Citation Collection
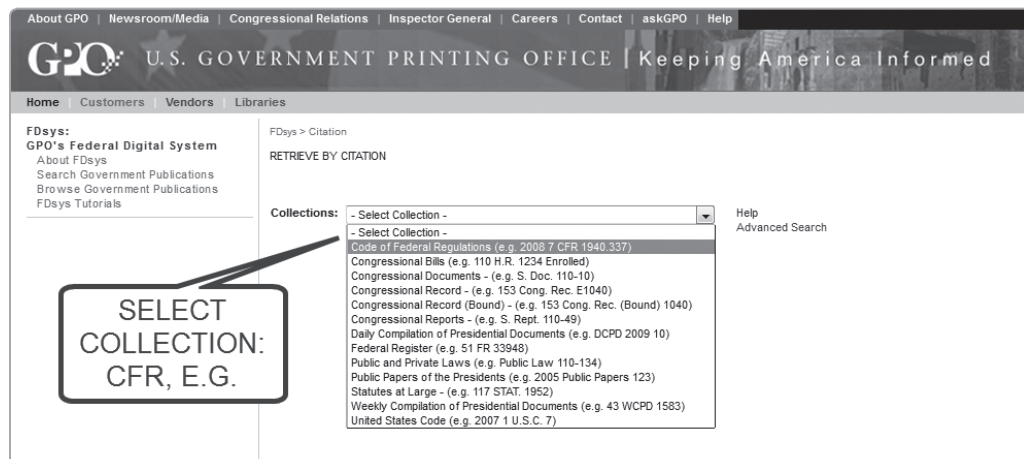
To browse specific FDsys Collections, click the **Browse All** link on FDsys's home page (see Figure 5.5). The **Browse Collections** page also offers four browsing

options: **Collection, Congressional Committee, Date**, and **Government Author** (See Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9 FDsys's Browse Collections