



## Legal Research: How to Find & Understand the Law (12th Edition)

[by Danielle Cohen]

Navigating through the United States legal system and translating legalese into layman's terms can be a daunting task. Fortunately, attorneys Stephen Elias and Susan Levinkind have a knack for explaining it all, and their book is especially useful whether you are trying to understand the offline world of the law library or the myriad legal resources available online.

In fact, almost everything Elias and Levinkind included in *Legal Research* seems to work toward keeping the reader from feeling overwhelmed by the law. They often encourage the researcher by offering advice on such things as how to utilize the contents of a law library; using as many alternative words as possible when conducting a search; how to find cases with facts related as closely as possible to those in your case; and--perhaps most important--making the law librarian your best ally when conducting a search.

The book is an easy read and was designed to be "of use to researchers of various levels of sophistication." While one would hope that a seasoned attorney wouldn't need such a refresher, *Legal Research* is most helpful to those individuals with some level of legal skill who are seeking assistance on a particular aspect of the law, such as law students and paralegals, and to those who are interested in a do-it-yourself approach.

Chapter 2 presents an overall method to a search, while Chapters 3 provides an overview of the legal system. Chapters 4 through 11 break down each part of the researching method laid out earlier in the book. In Chapter 12, those steps are pulled together through an example. As the authors point out, "Although the law in your state may be different, the method of research will be the same."

Elias and Levinkind supply handy-dandy review sections at the end of each chapter for quick references. Two appendices pose various legal research problems to test the newly learned search methods. A glossary toward the end of the book is also quite useful.

Throughout the book are reproductions of such things as law book indices, case opinions, and digests as examples of what can be found when using reference materials in a law library or on the Internet.

As with most types of information, legal research is now made more accessible by the Internet. Throughout the book, websites are listed to aid in searches. Among those is a little plug for publisher Nolo's law centers. One certainly useful section lists methods for wording your search when using search engines--a necessity for the successful online researcher in any field.

Library exercises are provided and are helpful for practicing what's just been read and learned. Elias and Levinkind suggest reading the book while actually in a law library or while using the Internet to gain the most benefit.

The authors go beyond simply providing information on researching the legal field by also providing information on filling out and filing documents and preparing for court.

The only annoying parts of the book are the sketches sprinkled throughout the chapters. Their corniness seems misplaced, belonging better in a children's book. Here's hoping that *Legal Research*, 13th Edition, will be sans cartoons. In the meantime, just glance past them and read on.

At the beginning of the book, readers are told that "accurate and current legal information should help you solve many of your own legal problems on a cost-effective basis." While the book is not intended to replace an attorney's advice, as is stated, Elias and

Levinkind do achieve their goal of helping readers find and understand the law.

After 12 editions, they must be doing something right.