

Legal Research Process

1. Gather facts, decide what law is controlling and relevant, and generate a list of search terms

Legal dictionaries and glossaries can help you find the right terms. A few online options are the Oregon Legal Glossary (<http://www.oregonlaws.org/glossary>), Nolo's Free Dictionary of Law Terms and Legal Definitions (<http://www.nolo.com/dictionary>), and Law.com's dictionary (<http://dictionary.law.com/>).

2. Check secondary sources for information on your topic and leads to primary law authorities

Free online secondary sources include guides and blogs (e.g., <http://www.oregonlegalresearch.com>), legal research websites (e.g., <http://www.lexiweb.com> and <http://www.law.cornell.edu>), Judicial Department and court websites (e.g., <http://courts.oregon.gov/OJD/selfhelp/Pages/index.aspx>), and the Oregon State Bar website (<http://www.osbar.org/public/>).

3. Locate constitutional provisions, statutes, administrative rules on your topic

Most of these enacted law sources are available freely online (e.g., <http://www.leg.state.or.us/ors/> and <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>). Search tools will vary among sources, from general indexes to advanced search features. Your secondary search results (#2, above) are also likely to provide citations to specific provisions.

4. Locate cases that analyze your topic using digests, annotated statutes, online databases, and/or references in secondary sources

Case law research can be done freely online through appellate court websites, the GPO's FDSYS website, legal research websites (e.g., Justia, Cornell LII, Lexis Web), and Google Scholar. More comprehensive tools for locating cases, print and electronic, are available at public law libraries.

5. Update your sources to make sure they are still good law using a citator, such as Lexis Shepard's or West KeyCite

Citator resources are available at public law libraries.

6. Stop researching when there are no gaps left and you begin to retrieve the same results again... or, when you've answered the question