

FINDING CASES WITH DIGESTS

Digests are used to look up cases by topic. They may be thought of as indexes to the reporters. The Clark County Law Library carries the *Supreme Court, Federal, Bankruptcy, Pacific, California, General, American Law Review*, and *Decennial Digests*. Each digest coincides with a specific level of court. The Federal Digest refers to Federal Court cases. The Pacific Digest has state Supreme Court cases in the Pacific Region (covering 15 states, including Nevada and California).

Digests contain many useful research tools; these tools are described below:

West Key Numbers

West Key Numbers are numerical subtopic designators within a subject. For example, the subject *Searches & Seizures 183* may be titled “*Knowledge of Rights; Warnings and Advice*”. Case citations listed below the Key number 183 would pertain to *Searches & Seizures*, the subtopic *Knowledge of Rights*, and the additional subtopic *Warnings and Advice*.

The West Key Number System is used not only in digests, but many other books by West Publishers and their subsidiaries. It is, however, worth noting that Key Numbers can change over time and that other publishers do not use the West Key Numbering System.

Table of Cases

The table of cases is used to find citations to the reporters by finding the names of parties involved in a case. For example, in the case *Nixon v. Sirica*, Nixon is one party to the case and Sirica is another party to the case. By looking up either

Nixon or Sirica in the table of cases volume, the citation 487 F2d 700 will be found.

Descriptive Word Index

The descriptive word index lists various topics and subjects under which cases are organized in topical order. Using these volumes allows an individual to search for cases by subject rather than by case name. Cases may be listed under one specific subject heading or under various subject headings, so when searching subject areas be sure to exhaust all possible subject searches to find a case. Additional search terms may be found by using a legal thesaurus or the library’s set of *Words and Phrases*.

An example of this technique is a search for the topics *search & seizure, illegal drugs, narcotics, and arrest* for cases dealing with illegal drug seizures during arrest. While this may not be a complete search, it shows how to search for cases using the descriptive word index part of the digest. The words searched by subject list cases by subject abbreviations, which are subdivided by Key Numbers.

Once the topic has been located, the page will list subject areas to search. These subjects will list abbreviations in bold and a West Key Number. Look up the abbreviation in the front of the book to find out what it stands for and locate the full name of the subject on the spine of the digest volume. When the subject is located at the top of the page in the book, match the number that follows the key symbol to the cases listed.

Subjects such as *Search & Seizure* may be abbreviated as *Searches* and have up to 1,000 Key Numbers by subdividing the Key Number into narrower subjects with the use of decimal numbers 1.1, 1.2 and/or parenthesis (1)(2).

Words and Phrases

The Words and Phrases volumes allow for searches by a certain word or phrase used within a case. An example of this would be a search for cases that used the phrase “*writ of habeas corpus*”, or “*unlawful detainer*”. These words and phrases will point to certain cases where the words were used or subject areas that include these words or phrases.

Other Materials Containing West Key Citations

State and federal laws, regulations, codes, & cases may refer to West Key Numbers. The Nevada Revised Statutes, Pacific Reporter, US Code, and *American Jurisprudence 2nd* are examples of materials that have West Key Number references.

Legal encyclopedias, such as the *American Jurisprudence 2nd* or the *Corpus Juris Secundum* are good resources for information about unfamiliar legal topics and are located in the Reference Section of the library.

To understand legal terms or phrases, *Black’s Law Dictionary* is available at the Reference Desk, or the set entitled *Words and Phrases*, Permanent Edition is located in the Reference Section of the library.

Further Assistance

When working with digests, Key Numbering and topics can change over time as new editions and volumes are added to titles. It is often useful to check the Index or Table of Contents in the volume used if material is not readily found. Please check with the library staff at the Reference Desk if further assistance is needed.