

GOOGLE SCHOLAR LEGAL RESEARCH FOR FREE

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Google Scholar is a fabulous free way to do legal research. Yes, you heard me right: free legal research.

Where is this jewel of a site? You can, of course, put "google scholar" into a search box in, er, Google. Or go directly to the site, which is scholar.google.com. Either way, the Google Scholar home page has two radio buttons, articles and legal opinions. Click on legal opinions. You can put in a citation and, bam, you get the full text of the case, WITH the page breaks and of course with links to click into any case cited. You can put the name of a case in the search box and get a list of cases. Try this with "Gant" and you get the great 2009 search case *Arizona v. Gant*, from the U.S. Supreme Court, with, of course, the full text and all those links.

The only real drawback to Google Scholar is that it doesn't do Boolean searches, like "public /5 defender /5 dump truck." When you really need to do that kind of search, Westlaw or Lexis is best. But just put all your words into Google Scholar and see if you get lucky. (Try "public defender dump truck," select the Huffman case, and read footnote 2; you will laugh.) There's no "find next term" button, but you can search within a case by using the Control-F capabilities of any web browser.

Google Scholar has many fabulous features. After you do your search, Google inserts a box right under the search box which allows you to limit your search results by date. It also allows you to limit your search results by court! So you can limit the results to just California cases. When I did this with my dump truck search, Huffman came up first. This can really help you focus your search and get to your results fast.

Here's another fabulous feature. I find it annoying that every time I go to the Google Scholar home page, the default is set for articles. No! I want legal opinions. So each time I have to click that darned radio button. No more, Seymour. It turns out that there's a preference setting that allows you to set legal opinions as the default. In the Google Scholar home page there's a link in the upper right hand corner that says "settings." There are a couple of options that I don't care about, and a couple worthy of note (like how many cases you want on each page of results). But this page allows you to set your preference for the default when you arrive at the Google Scholar home page. Yep, you can pick "legal opinions" as the default. Hurrah.

In my opinion, one of the best features of Google Scholar is its speed. It takes awhile to log into Westlaw and Lexis (and every other legal research site). Save Google Scholar as a bookmark and you'll get to it in one click. Use my little trick and you won't even have to click on the legal opinion button. Type in your case name or citation or search and, bang, one second later you've got your case. Totally awesome. And fast. And did I mention free?

You can also sort by relevance or date. Frequently I'm sure that the case I need is pretty current, so if it doesn't pop up in the default relevance listing, switching to sort by date often gives me the crucial case instantly. You can also create an alert, which will generate emails whenever any case matching your search shows up in the system.

I wondered how current Google Scholar is. My staff (OK, my wonderful paralegal Tina Katz) searched for cases two months old, a month old, a week old. We found all of these. Not all had official citations yet, but the cases were already posted, available, and readable.

Recently, the issue of whether Google Scholar Shepardizes (aka Keycite in Westlaw) came up. Google Scholar doesn't literally do Shepard's or Keycite. But it does what I call the poor man's Shepard's. Here's how:

Let's take now retired L.A. County Public Defender Mark Harvis's wonderful win, *People v. Galindo*, which is at 50 Cal.4th 1. If you put "50 cal.4th 1" into Google Scholar, you get the full text of Galindo. Actually, if you put "Galindo Harvis" into Google Scholar, you get the full text.

Now try this: "Galindo '50 cal.4th 1.'" By putting the case name and the citation into the search, you get Galindo, of course, but also every case citing Galindo. I did this and found Magallan and the other cases citing Galindo since it was issued. Neither Westlaw nor Lexis found any additional cases, unless you include an unpublished cases and a federal case.

But BOTH Westlaw and Lexis yellow flagged Galindo, both saying that it was distinguished by Magallan. Wrongo. If you read the footnote they both refer to, you'll see that Magallan did NOT distinguish Galindo, which remains good law. On this little random test, Google Scholar beats Westlaw and Lexis.

I keep running into people who have never heard of Google Scholar or who have heard of it but haven't tried it. Try it. Now. I'll wait. I'm doing a lot of my legal research on Google Scholar and it's just fantastic.