How to Find a Case tutorial script
Fall 2019
Run time: 3:44

AUDIO: Welcome! In this video, I'm going show you how to pull up a case in Westlaw and Lexis. Here, we'll retrieve a case by its citation. There's a lot more to case law research than simply finding a case, but we'll cover more advanced research later in the fall.

Let's start with Westlaw. If you haven't bookmarked the login page yet, you can use the Quick Links page on the law library website.

The URL for Westlaw is lawschool.westlaw.com.

After you log in, look for the drop-down menu at the top of the page. This is the same menu you use to navigate to TWEN. You'll want to click “Westlaw Edge.”

You should now be at the main page for Westlaw Edge. The first thing you might notice is the large global search bar near the top. I know what you're thinking, “Mr. Law Librarian, isn't this just like Google?” Well, sort of. Westlaw supports natural language searching. But don't be fooled: Westlaw isn't just advanced Google.

So a seminal case in Torts law is *Palsgraf*, and your instructor has given you the citation 248 N.Y. 339. How do you find the case?

Well, the easiest way is to type the citation in the search box. Notice I didn't have to use the periods in the citation’s abbreviation. Westlaw also gave me predictive suggestions, but I needed to type out the citation to get what I want. Click on *Palsgraf*.

There's a lot here on this page, but I want to point out the History tab at the top of the case. This feature will show you all the published opinions in your case’s history. So if your instructor asked you to locate the lower level opinion or a subsequent appeal, you can use the History tab.
That’s Westlaw. Now let’s use Lexis. Once again, you can use Quick Links or you can type in the URL. The Lexis login page is www.lexisnexis.com/lawschool.

After you login, you arrive at the main landing page. Here, click Lexis Advance. And Lexis Advance will open in a new tab.

This is the page in Lexis where you’ll start most of your research. For the task of retrieving a case, the process in Lexis is very similar to Westlaw. Like Westlaw, you have a main search bar.

Once again, I’m going to pull up *Palsgraf* by typing the citation in the Google-esque search bar.

One note: in Lexis, without the periods in the abbreviation, the link to the case doesn’t auto-populate, but after clicking the magnifying glass icon, the search is still successful.

If you want the case history in Lexis, look to the right for “subsequent appellate history.” You’ll now see the opinions issued in your case listed chronologically.

So this was a quick tutorial on locating a case when you know the case’s citation.

If you have any questions, please ask a reference librarian. We’re located on the 1st floor of the library in room 146, and you can email us at lawref@gmu.edu.

Thanks for listening!