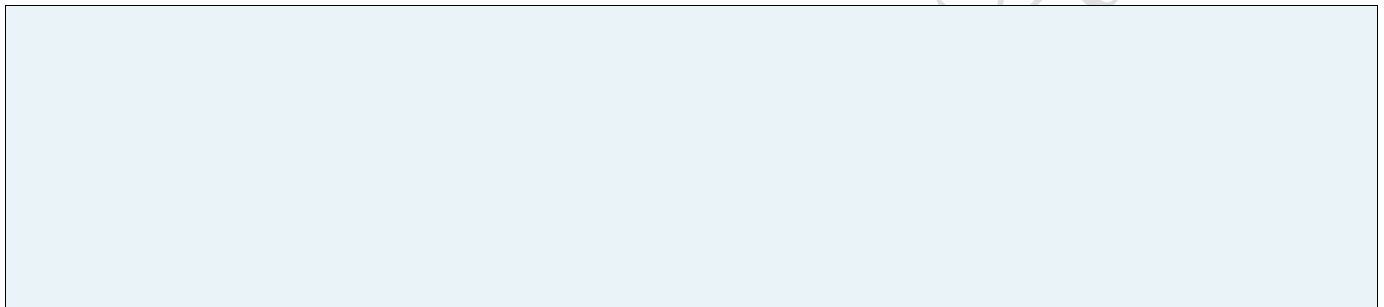


Legal Assistant Course

Legal Research

Course Element	Description
Target learner	Beginning legal assistant, legal administrative assistant, paralegal support trainee, law office support staff, or student preparing for entry-level legal office work.
Primary skill focus	Finding, organizing, validating, and summarizing legal information under attorney supervision.
Core deliverables	Research plan, source log, case/statute/regulation summaries, citator check notes, short research memo, and quality control checklist.
Important boundary	A legal assistant may help gather and organize legal information, but must not provide legal advice, select legal strategy, or communicate legal conclusions to a client unless authorized and supervised by an attorney.



Course Learning Objectives

- Explain the purpose of legal research in a law office setting.
- Distinguish primary authority, secondary authority, mandatory authority, and persuasive authority.
- Identify the correct jurisdiction before researching cases, statutes, regulations, or court rules.
- Create a structured research plan from a client fact pattern or attorney assignment.
- Use keywords, Boolean connectors, citations, indexes, tables of contents, and citators to locate legal authority.
- Read and brief court opinions for facts, issue, holding, reasoning, and procedural posture.
- Summarize statutes, regulations, and court rules accurately without giving legal advice.
- Maintain a research log and communicate findings clearly to the supervising attorney.
- Apply quality control steps to avoid outdated, irrelevant, or non-controlling authority.

Reference Source Notes for Course Accuracy

This course outline uses general U.S. legal research principles and should be adapted to the state, court, and practice area being taught. Key reference concepts are consistent with public legal education resources from the U.S. Courts, Library of Congress, and Cornell Legal Information Institute. Current platform features, court rules, and state law requirements should be checked before classroom use.

Reference Area	Course Use
Federal court structure	The U.S. Courts explain the role and structure of federal courts, including trial and appellate functions.
Primary and secondary authority	Library of Congress and Cornell LII materials distinguish law itself from commentary or research aids.
Mandatory, persuasive, and precedent	Cornell LII Wex definitions explain mandatory authority, persuasive authority, precedent, and binding precedent.
Secondary research materials	Library of Congress guides explain how secondary sources help locate and understand primary law.

Module 1: Role of Legal Research in a Law Office

A. Why Legal Research Matters

- **Supports attorney decision-making:** Research helps the supervising attorney evaluate claims, defenses, deadlines, procedural rules, and risks.
- **Reduces office risk:** Accurate research helps prevent missed deadlines, wrong-court filings, outdated arguments, and incomplete client communications.
- **Connects facts to law:** A legal assistant helps transform a factual problem into searchable legal issues.
- **Creates documentation:** Research notes, source logs, and memos preserve how information was found and verified.

Legal Assistant Task	Allowed Support Role	Must Escalate To Attorney
Gather facts	Organize documents, dates, names, court information, and client-provided records.	Deciding which facts are legally important or advising client what facts prove.
Search law	Locate statutes, regulations, cases, court rules, forms, and secondary explanations.	Determining final legal strategy or telling a client what legal outcome is likely.
Summarize sources	Prepare neutral summaries of cases, statutes, and deadlines for attorney review.	Giving a client a legal conclusion or recommendation.
Track authority	Maintain research log and note whether authority appears current.	Deciding whether authority controls the client matter without attorney review.
Prepare drafts	Draft internal research memo or cite list for attorney review.	Signing pleadings or submitting legal arguments without authorization.

Example: Proper Legal Assistant Support

Attorney assignment: "Find the current filing deadline for a motion to reconsider in Maryland circuit court and summarize the rule."

Proper response: The legal assistant locates the Maryland court rule, checks the current version, copies the relevant deadline language into a memo, notes the source and date accessed, and flags any uncertainty for attorney review.

Improper response: The legal assistant tells the client, "You have 10 days, so you should file this motion."

Module 2: Types of Legal Authority

A. Primary vs. Secondary Authority

Authority Type	Meaning	Common Examples	How Legal Assistants Use It
Primary authority	The law itself or official legal rule from a body with authority to issue law.	Constitutions, statutes, regulations, court opinions, court rules, ordinances.	Use to confirm the governing rule, deadline, test, element, or procedure.
Secondary authority	Commentary, explanation, analysis, or research aid discussing the law.	Legal encyclopedias, treatises, practice guides, law review articles, ALR annotations, Restatements.	Use to learn the topic, identify search terms, and find citations to primary law.
Non-legal background source	General information that may help understand context but is not legal authority.	News articles, agency FAQs, business websites, dictionaries, public reports.	Use cautiously for background only; do not treat as controlling law.

Research Tip: Start Broad, Then Narrow

- When the issue is unfamiliar, begin with a reliable secondary source or practice guide to learn vocabulary and structure.
- Move quickly from secondary explanations to primary authority that actually governs the case.
- Do not end research with a blog, article, or summary unless the attorney specifically requested background only.

Module 3: Mandatory, Persuasive, and Nonbinding Authority

Concept	Definition	Example	Practical Question
Mandatory authority	Authority the court must follow if it applies in the jurisdiction.	State supreme court decision binding lower state courts; federal appellate decision binding federal district courts in that circuit.	Does this authority control the court where the case is pending?
Persuasive authority	Authority a court may consider but does not have to follow.	Decision from another state, another federal circuit, trial court decision, secondary source.	Is this helpful because facts, reasoning, or issue are similar?
Binding precedent	A prior appellate decision that lower courts in the same jurisdiction must follow on similar legal issues.	Court of appeals decision binding district courts in that circuit.	Is the case from the correct court level and jurisdiction?
Dicta	Language in an opinion not necessary to the holding.	A judge discusses a hypothetical issue not required to decide the case.	Is this part of the actual holding or only commentary?

Example: Mandatory vs. Persuasive

A Maryland circuit court case involves a Maryland contract statute. A Maryland appellate decision interpreting that statute is likely stronger authority than a California trial court decision on similar contract language. The California case may be persuasive if the Maryland issue is unsettled, but it is not controlling in Maryland.

Authority Ranking Tip

- Ask: What court is handling the case? What jurisdiction's law applies? What level of court issued the authority?
- Higher court decisions in the same jurisdiction usually carry more weight than lower court or out-of-jurisdiction decisions.
- A case can be primary authority but still not mandatory if it comes from the wrong jurisdiction.

Module 4: Understanding Jurisdiction Before Researching

- **Subject matter:** What type of legal issue is involved, such as family law, contract, tax, immigration, probate, employment, or criminal law?
- **Geographic jurisdiction:** Which state, county, federal district, agency, or municipality matters?
- **Court level:** Is the matter in trial court, appellate court, agency hearing, administrative appeal, or federal court?
- **Time period:** What date matters? The law may be different at the time of the event, filing, hearing, or current review.
- **Procedural posture:** Is this intake, complaint drafting, discovery, motion practice, appeal, enforcement, or post-judgment work?

Question to Ask First	Why It Matters	Example
Where is the case pending?	Determines court rules, filing deadlines, and controlling precedent.	A federal district court deadline may differ from state circuit court procedure.
Which law applies?	A case may be filed in one court but governed by another jurisdiction's substantive law.	A contract may contain a choice-of-law clause.
What is the legal issue?	Controls which sources and search terms to use.	Negligence duty, eviction notice, wage claim, probate deadline.
What date is relevant?	Statutes and regulations may be amended over time.	A 2022 event may require the version of a statute in effect in 2022.
What does the attorney need?	Prevents over-researching and focuses the work product.	Quick rule check, full memo, cite list, deadline confirmation, or procedural checklist.

Module 5: Legal Research Workflow

A. The 8-Step Legal Research Process

Step	Action	Legal Assistant Output
1	Clarify the assignment.	Write down jurisdiction, issue, deadline, format, and attorney expectations.
2	Identify known facts.	Create a fact list and timeline. Mark unknown facts.
3	Convert facts into legal issues.	Draft issue questions using who, what, where, when, and what remedy/procedure.
4	Create search terms.	List plain-language terms, legal terms, synonyms, and statute/case names.
5	Start with overview sources.	Use secondary sources, practice guides, or court guides to learn structure.
6	Locate primary authority.	Find statutes, cases, regulations, court rules, and forms.
7	Validate authority.	Check jurisdiction, effective date, amendments, negative treatment, and current version.
8	Report findings.	Prepare research log, summary, cite list, and questions for attorney review.

Avoid the “Search and Stop” Mistake

- Do not stop at the first helpful result.
- Confirm whether the source is primary or secondary.
- Check whether the law is current and controlling.
- Keep a source log so another staff member or attorney can recreate the research.

Module 6: Building Effective Search Terms

Technique	How It Works	Example Search
Plain-language search	Use ordinary words from the fact pattern.	landlord changed locks tenant property inside
Legal-term search	Use terms from secondary sources or statutes.	self-help eviction residential lease lockout
Synonym expansion	Try alternate words with similar meaning.	termination OR discharge OR fired
Element search	Search required legal elements separately.	negligence duty breach causation damages Maryland
Procedural search	Focus on rule, deadline, or filing.	motion to compel deadline federal rule civil procedure
Citation search	Search a known statute, regulation, rule, or case citation.	29 USC 207 overtime regular rate
Phrase search	Put exact phrases in quotation marks when supported by the database.	"substantial compliance" "notice to quit"
Connector search	Use AND, OR, NOT, NEAR, or proximity connectors if the platform supports them.	employee AND overtime AND "regular rate"

Example: Turning Facts into Search Terms

Fact pattern: A tenant says the landlord shut off utilities to force the tenant to leave.

Possible search terms:

- plain language: landlord shut off utilities tenant leave
- legal terms: constructive eviction, self-help eviction, unlawful detainer, retaliatory eviction
- jurisdiction terms: Maryland landlord tenant utilities lockout
- procedural terms: emergency injunction tenant utilities housing court

Module 7: Researching Case Law

A. Reading a Case Efficiently

Case Component	What to Look For	Why It Matters
Caption/citation	Case name, court, date, reporter citation, docket number.	Confirms identity and court level.
Procedural posture	Appeal from dismissal, summary judgment, trial verdict, agency decision, etc.	Shows what question the court was reviewing.
Facts	Legally relevant facts, not every background detail.	Allows comparison to client facts.
Issue	Legal question the court had to decide.	Determines whether the case is on point.
Holding	Court's answer to the legal question.	Most important rule outcome.
Reasoning	How the court applied law to facts.	Shows how to use or distinguish the case.
Disposition	Affirmed, reversed, remanded, dismissed, granted, denied.	Shows result and procedural effect.
Treatment	Whether later cases followed, distinguished, limited, overruled, or questioned it.	Validates whether it is still good law.

Case Brief Field	Student Entry Prompt
Case name/citation	What is the full case name, court, and year?
Court and jurisdiction	Is this court controlling for the assigned matter?
Key facts	What facts drove the decision?
Issue	What question did the court decide?
Rule	What legal rule/test/standard did the court apply?
Holding	What did the court decide?
Reasoning	Why did the court decide this way?
Client comparison	How are the assignment facts similar or different?
Current status	Has the case been negatively treated, limited, or overruled?
Research note	What follow-up research is needed?

Case Law Tip

- Do not rely only on headnotes. Headnotes are research aids, not the court's actual opinion.
- Read the section of the opinion that discusses the issue assigned by the attorney.
- Flag cases with similar facts and cases that explain the legal test clearly.
- Record negative treatment and whether the case is binding or persuasive.

Module 8: Researching Statutes

- **Statutes are enacted laws:** They may appear in codes organized by title, chapter, article, section, or subject.
- **Always check the current version:** Codes may be amended after the events in the client matter.
- **Read definitions:** Many statutes define terms that control the outcome.
- **Read related sections:** One section may provide elements, another section may provide remedies, deadlines, penalties, or exceptions.
- **Check effective dates:** The law in effect on the event date may matter, especially for claims, penalties, or filing deadlines.

Statutory Research Step	What to Do	Example
Locate the code section	Use keyword, citation, index, table of contents, or secondary source.	Find the wage payment statute by searching "final paycheck deadline Maryland."
Read definitions	Check definitions section before interpreting terms.	"Employee" or "wages" may have a statutory definition.
Read operative language	Identify required, permitted, or prohibited conduct.	Look for words like shall, must, may, unless, except.
Identify elements	Break the statute into required parts.	Who is covered? What conduct is required? What deadline applies?
Review exceptions	Look for exclusions, exemptions, safe harbors, or special categories.	Small employer exemption, government employer exclusion, time limits.
Check annotations	Use cases interpreting the statute, if available.	Cases explain how courts applied statutory terms.
Confirm currency	Check amendment history and effective date.	Make sure the section was not amended after your source was published.

Example: Statute Breakdown Method

Research question: Does a statute require written notice before terminating a lease?

Breakdown:

1. Who must give notice?
2. To whom must notice be given?
3. What form must the notice take?
4. How many days are required?
5. Are there exceptions?
6. What happens if notice is defective?
7. What court rule or form is connected to the statute?

Module 9: Researching Regulations and Administrative Materials

- Regulations are rules issued by administrative agencies under authority granted by statutes.
- Agency materials may include regulations, guidance documents, manuals, rulings, opinion letters, FAQs, decisions, and forms.
- A regulation may be binding, while informal agency guidance may be persuasive or informational depending on context.
- Legal assistants should clearly label the type of agency material found and avoid treating all agency web pages as binding law.
-

Agency Material	Typical Use	Research Caution
Regulation	Find binding procedural or substantive rule issued by agency.	Check current code version and effective date.
Agency manual	Understand agency procedures and internal processing.	May not create enforceable rights unless authority says so.
Opinion letter/ruling	Find agency interpretation for specific factual scenarios.	Check whether it has been withdrawn, superseded, or limited.
FAQ or webpage	Quick background or public explanation.	Do not treat as final legal authority without confirming statute/regulation.
Agency decision	Find administrative precedent or adjudication.	Determine whether it is precedential and binding.
Form instructions	Complete filings correctly and identify required attachments.	Instructions may change; confirm current version before filing.

Module 10: Court Rules, Local Rules, and Filing Requirements

- **Court rules control procedure:** They often govern deadlines, formatting, service, motions, discovery, filing methods, and hearing practice.
- **Local rules matter:** A statewide rule may be modified or supplemented by local court rules, judge-specific procedures, or standing orders.
- **Forms may be mandatory:** Some courts require official forms for certain filings.
- **Electronic filing rules matter:** Courts may require registration, document formatting, signatures, service certificates, and fee payments through e-filing systems.

Research Item	Where to Check	What to Record
Statewide court rule	Official state judiciary website or court rules database.	Rule number, title, effective date, deadline, service method.
Federal rule	Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Criminal Procedure, Evidence, Bankruptcy, or Appellate Procedure.	Rule number, subpart, deadline trigger, exclusions.
Local rule	Court website for district/county/division.	Local variation, formatting, page limits, filing steps.
Judge-specific rule	Judge webpage, chambers procedures, scheduling order.	Preferred motion procedure, courtesy copies, conference requirement.
Form requirement	Official court form library.	Form title, revision date, required attachments.
E-filing requirement	Court e-filing portal and administrative orders.	File type, service method, signature format, fee/payment requirements.

Deadline Tip

- Identify the triggering event before calculating a deadline.
- Check whether weekends, holidays, service method, or court closure rules affect the deadline.
- Never give a final deadline to a client without attorney review.
- Document the rule source used for any deadline calculation.

Module 11: Using Citators and Validating Authority

- **Purpose of citators:** Citators help researchers see whether a case, statute, or regulation has later history or citing references.
- **Common results:** Followed, distinguished, explained, criticized, limited, overruled, superseded, amended, or repealed.
- **Human review required:** A citator signal is a warning tool, not a substitute for reading the later authority.
- **Record the results:** Legal assistants should note the citator used, date checked, and any negative treatment found.

Validation Question	What to Check	Red Flag
Is it still good law?	Citator treatment, later cases, amendments, repeal history.	Overruled, abrogated, superseded, repealed, vacated.
Is it controlling?	Jurisdiction, court level, subject matter, procedural posture.	Out-of-state or lower court authority presented as controlling.
Is it current?	Effective dates, amendment notes, date of source.	Old unofficial source without current update.
Is it on point?	Facts, issue, holding, rule, procedural posture.	Case mentions keyword but decided a different issue.
Is it complete?	Related sections, exceptions, definitions, local rules.	Only one statute section reviewed when several are cross-referenced.
Is there contrary authority?	Cases reaching different result, split of authority, minority view.	Research memo cites only favorable sources.

Example: Citator Note

Research log entry: "Smith v. Jones, 245 Md. App. 100 (2021), checked on [date]. Later Maryland case Brown v. White distinguished Smith on facts but did not overrule it. Smith remains potentially useful, but Brown should be reviewed because the client facts involve similar notice language."

Module 12: Free and Paid Legal Research Resources

Resource Type	Examples	Best Use	Limitations
Official government websites	Court websites, legislature websites, agency websites, federal/state code sites.	Current rules, statutes, forms, filing instructions, agency regulations.	Search tools may be limited; historical versions may be harder to find.
Public legal information sites	Cornell LII, Justia, Google Scholar, CourtListener, FindLaw resources.	Background, case searching, statute access, quick definitions.	May not include full citator tools or complete current law validation.
Subscription platforms	Westlaw, Lexis, Bloomberg Law, Fastcase, vLex, Practical Law.	Advanced searching, citators, annotations, practice tools, forms.	Requires training, account access, and cost control.
Law library resources	State law library, county law library, law school library public terminals.	Access to treatises, reporters, databases, librarians.	Access rules, hours, and remote availability vary.
Court dockets and records	PACER, state e-filing portals, clerk records, docket systems.	Case history, filings, orders, party information.	Fees, privacy restrictions, sealing rules, and incomplete online records may apply.

Cost-Control Tip for Subscription Research

- Use free sources or secondary overviews to plan search terms before logging into expensive databases.
- Avoid repeated broad searches that generate irrelevant results.
- Save useful documents and cite lists according to office policy.
- Ask the attorney or supervisor before accessing high-cost reports, dockets, or out-of-plan materials.

Module 13: Research Logs and Source Organization

- A research log prevents duplication and helps the attorney evaluate the reliability of findings.
- Record both successful and unsuccessful searches.
- Use consistent file naming for downloaded cases, rules, statutes, and forms.
- Keep client confidential information out of file names when possible.

Research Log Field	Purpose	Example Entry
Date/time	Shows when research was performed.	July 1, 2026, 10:30 AM
Assignment question	Keeps research focused.	Deadline to respond to motion to compel in federal civil case.
Jurisdiction	Identifies controlling law.	U.S. District Court, District of Maryland.
Source searched	Allows recreation of research.	Federal Rules of Civil Procedure; local rules website.
Search terms/citation	Shows methodology.	"motion to compel response deadline local rule"
Authority found	Captures useful result.	Local Rule ___ regarding motion briefing schedule.
Status/currentness	Shows validation step.	Checked official court website; page revision date noted.
Notes/questions	Flags issues for attorney.	Scheduling order may modify default rule; ask attorney to review docket.

Module 14: Preparing a Research Memo or Attorney Update

Memo Section	Purpose	Practical Tip
Question Presented	States the legal issue in one clear sentence.	Include jurisdiction and key facts.
Brief Answer	Gives a short neutral answer for attorney review.	Avoid overconfident conclusions if research is incomplete.
Facts Considered	Lists the facts used in research.	Separate known facts from assumptions.
Applicable Law	Summarizes statutes, cases, regulations, and rules.	Use citations and explain weight of authority.
Analysis Notes	Connects law to the assigned facts under attorney supervision.	Flag similarities, differences, and unresolved issues.
Research Limits	Discloses scope and limitations.	State if only free sources were searched or if citator was unavailable.
Recommended Next Steps	Identifies follow-up tasks for attorney approval.	Do not advise the client; recommend attorney review or additional research.

Example: Attorney Update Email Format

Attorney,

I researched whether a residential landlord may change locks before completing the required eviction process in [jurisdiction]. I located the applicable landlord-tenant statute, two appellate cases interpreting self-help eviction, and the current court form instructions. The strongest authority appears to be [Case/Statute], but I recommend attorney review because one case distinguishes commercial leases from residential leases. I saved the sources in the matter folder and included a research log.

Module 15: Common Legal Research Assignments by Practice Area

Practice Area	Common Research Assignment	Sources to Check	Example Output
Civil litigation	Motion deadline, service rule, pleading standard, discovery rule.	Court rules, local rules, cases, scheduling order.	Deadline memo and rule checklist.
Family law	Custody factors, filing forms, support guidelines, service requirements.	State statutes, court forms, local rules, cases.	Issue summary and form list.
Immigration	Form instructions, eligibility category, filing location, agency policy.	USCIS instructions, statutes, regulations, policy manual.	Document checklist for attorney review.
Tax	Tax Court rule, IRS procedure, penalty authority, filing deadline.	IRC, Treasury Regulations, IRS publications/procedures, Tax Court rules.	Authority summary and deadline note.
Employment	Wage/overtime rule, discrimination deadline, agency filing process.	Statutes, regulations, agency guidance, cases.	Claim element chart.
Probate/estate	Filing requirements, notice rule, personal representative duties.	State probate code, court forms, local rules.	Procedure checklist.
Real estate	Recording rules, deed requirements, title issue, landlord-tenant rule.	County recorder, statutes, court rules, cases.	Source packet and issue summary.

Module 16: Ethics, Confidentiality, and Unauthorized Practice of Law Boundaries

- **Confidentiality:** Treat research assignments, client names, facts, documents, and strategy as confidential office information.
- **Supervision:** Legal assistants work under attorney direction and should ask questions when a legal conclusion is needed.
- **No legal advice:** Do not advise clients on rights, remedies, risks, deadlines, or strategy unless the attorney specifically authorizes a scripted administrative communication.
- **Accuracy:** Do not hide uncertainty. Flag conflicting authority, outdated sources, unclear jurisdiction, and missing facts.
- **Source integrity:** Do not alter, misquote, or selectively summarize authority to make it appear stronger than it is.
- **Technology caution:** Do not upload confidential client facts into unapproved research or AI tools.

Client Question	Unsafe Response	Safe Legal Assistant Response
"Do I have a case?"	"Yes, the law is on your side."	"I cannot give legal advice, but I can take your information and have the attorney review it."
"What deadline applies?"	"You have 30 days."	"I will confirm the documents and ask the attorney to review the deadline before anyone relies on it."
"Should I file this motion?"	"Yes, that is your best option."	"That is a legal strategy question for the attorney. I can help schedule a call."
"What does this case mean for me?"	"It means you will win."	"I can summarize the case for the attorney, but the attorney will explain how it applies to your matter."

Module 17: Quality Control Checklist

Checklist Item	Yes/No	Notes
Did I confirm the jurisdiction and court level?		
Did I identify whether the issue is substantive, procedural, or both?		
Did I use both plain-language and legal-term searches?		
Did I move from secondary sources to primary authority?		
Did I check definitions, exceptions, and related statutory sections?		
Did I check court rules, local rules, and judge-specific procedures if relevant?		
Did I verify currentness and negative treatment?		
Did I record unsuccessful searches?		
Did I distinguish mandatory from persuasive authority?		
Did I flag conflicts, uncertainty, or missing facts?		
Did I save sources according to office naming policy?		
Did I avoid giving legal advice or conclusions to the client?		

Student Practice Activities

Activity 1: Create a Research Plan

Scenario

A client says a former employer failed to pay the final paycheck after termination. The attorney asks you to research the deadline for final wage payment and any available penalty in the client's state.

- Identify jurisdiction and missing facts.
- List 10 possible search terms.
- Identify likely primary and secondary sources.
- Create a research log with at least five entries.
- Prepare a short attorney update with sources found and questions for review.

Activity 2: Case Brief Practice

- Locate one appellate case assigned by the instructor.
- Complete the case brief fields: facts, issue, holding, reasoning, procedural posture, and current status.
- Write two sentences explaining whether the case appears mandatory or persuasive for the assigned fact pattern.
- Flag any negative treatment or uncertainty.

Activity 3: Statute Breakdown Exercise

- Find an assigned statute section.
- Identify definitions, required conduct, deadlines, exceptions, and remedies.
- Create a one-page element chart.
- List related regulations, cases, or court forms that should be reviewed next.

Appendix A: Research Assignment Intake Template

Field	Entry
Attorney/Supervisor	
Matter Name/Number	
Date Assigned	
Deadline	
Jurisdiction/Court	
Issue Presented	
Known Facts	
Missing Facts/Questions	
Requested Deliverable	Quick answer / cite list / memo / source packet / deadline chart
Sources Required or Prohibited	
Cost Limits or Database Instructions	
Final Attorney Review Needed By	

Appendix B: Short Research Memo Template

Section	Prompt
Question Presented	State the legal question, including jurisdiction and key facts.
Brief Answer	Provide a short, neutral answer for attorney review.
Facts Considered	List the facts used and mark any assumptions.
Sources Reviewed	List statutes, cases, rules, regulations, secondary sources, and database/platform.
Applicable Law	Summarize key authority with citations.
Analysis Notes	Explain how the authority may relate to the facts. Do not overstate conclusions.
Contrary or Limiting Authority	List conflicts, negative treatment, exceptions, or uncertainty.
Research Limitations	State what was not searched or what needs attorney review.
Next Steps	Suggest follow-up research or attorney decision points.

Quick Reference: Legal Research Do's and Don'ts

Do	Do Not
Clarify jurisdiction, issue, and deadline before researching.	Assume the first search result is correct.
Use secondary sources to understand unfamiliar topics.	Rely on blogs or summaries as final authority.
Move to primary authority before reporting findings.	Treat persuasive authority as binding.
Check currentness, amendments, and negative treatment.	Ignore later cases or statutory changes.
Read the relevant section of cases and statutes.	Rely only on headnotes or snippets.
Keep a research log and source trail.	Research without recording search terms and sources.
Flag uncertainty and conflicting authority.	Hide weak points or contrary authority.
Send legal conclusions to the supervising attorney.	Give clients legal advice or strategy recommendations.

Appendix C: Public Reference Sources for Instructor Review

- U.S. Courts - Court Role and Structure: <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/court-role-and-structure>
- U.S. Courts - Comparing Federal and State Courts: <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/court-role-and-structure/comparing-federal-state-courts>
- Library of Congress - Legal Research: A Guide to Secondary Resources: <https://guides.loc.gov/law-secondary-resources>
- Cornell LII Wex - Primary Authority: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/primary_authority
- Cornell LII Wex - Secondary Authority: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/secondary_authority
- Cornell LII Wex - Mandatory Authority: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/mandatory_authority
- Cornell LII Wex - Persuasive Authority: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/persuasive_authority
- Cornell LII Wex - Precedent: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/precedent>
- Cornell LII Wex - Binding Precedent: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/binding_precedent

Final Course Reminder

- Legal research is not only finding law; it is verifying that the law is current, controlling, relevant, and accurately summarized.
- A strong legal assistant documents the path of research so the attorney can evaluate, rely on, or redirect the work.

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