FOUNDATIONS OF LEGAL INFORMATION AND RESEARCH

Part 2: Applying the Foundations OR Tackling Legal Reference Questions

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Someone has thought about this before.

A secondary source is anything that discusses, summarizes, identifies, explains, or analyzes primary authorities AND/OR helps someone to identify legal issues AND/OR helps to understand how the law works AND/OR provides a roadmap of how to deal with the problem AND/OR even answers the question!

(not all secondary sources are created equal)
The goal of broad initial secondary research is to find the language and context for more specific searches.

Do you book or do you Google? *

- The object here is to find terminology or words most likely used in primary legal authorities by finding a site that uses everyday language and associates it to those more formal terms.
- Books for laypeople on a legal topic (Nolo)
- Open-minded approach: go for news sources like MLive, public radio, local news (including government meeting minutes)
- Social media: what’s got your researcher worried?
- If you think you might know the source of the law, try using “MCL” or “USC” as a search term.

*or Dogpile, or Yahoo, or Safari?
No place for popups: Sifting through the noise

You want a resource that’s CURRENT and COHERENT and maybe even leads to PRIMARY AUTHORY

- May be found by using .org, .edu, .net in the search
- Advocacy groups
- University-sponsored websites or clinics
- Publications produced by non-profits
- Professional organizations
- The Good Dot Coms - law firm blogs and presentations and trade groups
- Put them through the CRAAP test
Looking for the Rosetta Stone: Legal assistance websites and government mini libraries

- State and Federal Government (.gov, .org)
  - Government mini-libraries for links to codes, regs, summaries, forms, FAQs
  - Michigan.gov, USA.gov searches across websites
  - MCL, USC in search string
- Local
  - County offices
  - Municipal ordinances
  - Court websites with links to procedures and forms
- Legal aid and assistance websites
  - Michigan Legal Help (civil)
  - State Appellate Defender Office (criminal)
- Information for the Bench and Bar
  - Bar websites (State, local, American Bar Association)
  - Judicial and professional organizations for information on disciplinary matters
  - Michigan Judicial Institute
Tracking down the Primary Authority

Many websites link to statutes, codes, cases, regs, and forms – go to the source for the official text. Portals can help you to get there.

- **Law Libraries**
  - State Law Library, [“Statutes, Regulations, and Decisions”](#)
  - State Law Library, [“Common Legal Citations and Where to Find Them”](#)
  - [Law Library of Congress](#), “Guide to Law Online”

- **Government Portals**
  - [GovInfo.gov](#)
  - [Michigan Courts: One Court of Justice](#)
Referrals: Getting your researcher to the next step on the legal help continuum

More informational resources

- State Law Library (10-5 M-F): 517-335-1480
- State Law Library reference email: lmlawlib@michigan.gov
- The Library of Michigan is also open on Saturdays from 10 am to 4 pm. Law Librarians may be working on the Main Reference Desk on any given Saturday.
- Michigan eLibrary for Nolo books, legal forms and articles, and MeLCat for borrowing materials from libraries with legal collections.

Legal aid and free clinics

- Michigan Legal Help: Guide to Legal Help

Lawyer referral

- State Bar of Michigan Legal Resource and Referral Center
- Local and special purpose bar associations
- Lawyer directories
- Michigan Limited Scope Representation
- Additional directories
This is not legal advice

“I can look for information on this for you!”
If it’s the same answer for everyone, it’s information, not advice.
Don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know.”
“It depends ...” is not a lawyer dodge – the need for analysis and research is real.
Looks like, sounds like, smells like – there could be a million facts why this ISN’T like what happened to you.
“They sent you for what?” Reach out to your community partners.
Thank you!
- Julie and Kim

For more information:

Library of Michigan / State Law Library
lmlawlib@michigan.gov
517-335-1480
M-F 10 am to 5 pm

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Examples of resources are provided by following links incorporated into the information above. Examples of places to find primary authority (cases, codes, regs, court rules) may be found in the screen shots below.
Michigan Court Rules: MCR
Michigan Public Act: PA

Michigan Public Act as codified in the Michigan Compiled Laws: MCL
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS


PART 1. GENERAL PROVISIONS

R 408.6199 Rescission.
Rule 199. R 408.201 to R 408.206 of the Michigan Administrative Code appearing on pages 3164 to 3169 of the 1979 Michigan Administrative Code, are rescinded.

Michigan Administrative Rules: MAC R

Michigan Supreme Court and Court of Appeals Cases: Mich or Mich App
Michigan Trial Court case example from Business Court

Docket search example for a Michigan circuit court
Federal Courts, including procedural rules (FRCP) and forms

Filings/Dockets in Federal cases: PACER