WestlawNext™
How to Find Statutes

Statutes form the second category of primary legal sources; in fact, statutory law is central to many legal issues and should often be the starting point for much of your research. This quick reference guide will help you understand the legislative process and how to use WestlawNext resources to retrieve relevant statutory provisions.

What Is a Statute?
The word statute refers to a law passed by a state legislature or the U.S. Congress that commands, prohibits, or declares something. It is sometimes called legislation.

It is easy to overlook the importance of statutes in law school because most law school discussion focuses on case law. Yet state and federal court cases often involve statutory interpretation, and enactment of a statute may reverse established case law.

The tools and techniques used to research statutes can also be used to research federal and state constitutions, treaties, administrative rules, executive orders, uniform laws, local charters and ordinances, and court rules.

Where Do I Find Statutes?

Federal statutes in Print

After the U.S. Congress passes a bill and the president signs it into law, it is typically codified, i.e., placed into the United States Code (USC), the official version of federal statutory law. The USC includes 50 subject titles, which are subdivided into chapters and sections. The USC contains the codified legislation, as well as such elements as authority references, historical notes, enactment dates, cross-references, tables, and an index.

Since 1927, West has published an annotated version of the USC, the United States Code Annotated® (USCA®) (Figure 1). Annotations are summaries of published court decisions that have interpreted the section. In the USCA, the annotations follow the text of the section. The USCA and its indexes are updated more frequently than the USC—pocket part inserts and interim pamphlets are issued throughout the year.

See Figure 2 to view an excerpt from the USCA.
**State Statutes in Print**

Like federal laws, laws passed by the legislatures of the 50 states and U.S. territories, e.g., Puerto Rico, are available in unannotated form. The laws are first published chronologically as session laws and then codified into the state legislative codes. West publishes annotated codes for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Like the USCA, West annotated state statutes include cross-references to other state and federal statutes and administrative rules. They also provide historical notes; pertinent West topics and key numbers; references to law review and *American Jurisprudence 2d* (Am Jur 2d) articles; and summaries of court decisions, including those of the U.S. Supreme Court. West annotated state statutes are updated annually with pocket part inserts.

**Statutes on WestlawNext**

On WestlawNext you can retrieve the USCA, as well as annotated statutes from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In addition, WestlawNext gives you access to session laws, proposed bills, and legislative history.

**Retrieving Statutes in Print**

Since your issue may be governed by state law, federal law, or both, you will probably want to look for both federal and state statutes. Look in the index volumes of the USCA for references to statutes potentially relevant to your issue. Read each statutory provision—both in the main volume and in the supplement—and make a note of potentially valuable cross-references, law review citations, *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) references, and case citations. Follow these leads. Then check the annotated code of your state, e.g., *West’s Revised Code of Washington Annotated*, for references to statutes potentially relevant to your issue.

[Figure 2. Excerpt from the print USCA]
Retrieving Statutes on WestlawNext

There are several methods for retrieving relevant statutes on WestlawNext. The method you choose depends on what you know about the statute.

Retrieving a Statute by Citation

If you know the citation of a statute (typically consisting of the title number, the abbreviated name of the code, and the section number), type the citation, e.g., 29 usca 2614 or cal civ code 56.21, in the text box at the top of the page and click Search.

Searching for Statutes

You can search for statutes by clicking Statutes and Court Rules on the All Content tab in the Browse section of the home page. The Statutes and Court Rules page is displayed. A corresponding tabbed Statutes and Court Rules text box is displayed at the top of the page. Type your search in this text box, change the jurisdiction if necessary, and click Search.

Using the Table of Contents Service

The Table of Contents service allows you to browse the table of contents for a set of statutes, view a document in the context of the sections surrounding it, and quickly retrieve related sections. To access the Table of Contents service, use the category links in the Browse section of the home page:

• Click the All Content tab, then click Statutes and Court Rules to display the Statutes and Court Rules page. Click United States Code Annotated (USCA) to display the table of contents for the USCA (Figure 3), or click a state name to display the table of contents for that state’s statutes and court rules.

• Click the Federal Materials tab, then click United States Code Annotated (USCA).

• Click the State Materials tab to view a list of states. Click a state name, then click the link to that state’s statutes and court rules under Statutes and Court Rules.

To browse a table of contents, click the links. To retrieve a specific section, click its name. To run a search, type your search in the corresponding tabbed text box at the top of the page and click Search.

Figure 3. Table of contents for USCA
Using the Statutes Index

Use the alphabetical statutes index to retrieve sections on a specific topic. After accessing the table of contents for the USCA or a state’s statutes, click the Index link in the right column. Browse the index by clicking the letters at the top of the page. You can also type a word or phrase, e.g., patent, in the text box at the top of the page and click Search.

Browsing Consecutive Sections

When you are viewing a statute, click the arrows to the left and right of the section symbol (§) in the toolbar at the top of the document to view consecutive sections even if they were not retrieved by your search or Find request. For example, if you retrieve 29 U.S.C.A. § 2614, click the left arrow to view section 2613 or click the right arrow to view section 2615.

KeyCite® for Statutes

KeyCite Status Flags

A red flag indicates that the statute has been amended by a recent session law, repealed, superseded, or held unconstitutional or preempted in whole or in part.

A yellow flag indicates that the statute has been renumbered or transferred by a recent session law; that an uncodified session law or proposed legislation affecting the statute is available; that the statute was limited on constitutional or preemption grounds or its validity was otherwise called into doubt; or that a prior version of the statute received negative treatment from a court.

History of a Statute

Click the History tab to view the history of a displayed statute (Figure 4). Statute history includes cases, recent session laws, and proposed legislation that negatively affects the statute; prior versions of the statute; legislative history notes; bill drafts; and reports and related materials.

Figure 4. History of a statute showing negative treatment

For assistance using WestlawNext, call 1-800-850-WEST (1-800-850-9378).
For free reference materials, visit west.thomson.com/westlaw/guides.