

The process I used in conducting the research for my paper was rather extensive. I will begin by explaining the process I adopted in order to locate my sources. Then I will explain how I selected the particular sources that I used and why I decided not to use other sources. Next I will highlight the difficulties I encountered while conducting my research. Finally, I will provide the most important lessons that I learned about the research process.

I used a large variety of sources while researching my paper topic and, as a result, I used many different source databases. The first thing I did was locate the statutes that dictate my research topic. After keyciting the statutes and researching the legislative history of the statute, I was left with a list of cases and former versions of the statute that directly applied to my research topic. Afterwards, I began referencing law review journal articles that discussed a topic comparable to my own. I then looked at the footnotes at the end of the article and noticed which sources were consistently cited throughout the various articles. The consistency signaled that a source might be particularly useful to my own research. Then, I began researching articles on legal and other scholarly databases, such as Westlaw, HeinOnline, and JSTOR. Again, I noted sources within footnotes that seemed popular among the authors. I then located these frequently cited sources. From there, I used Google to find articles and news stories that related to my topic. Luckily, class discussion hinted at a few authors that seemed influential upon my specific topic. I located their books and added them to my source load.

Once I had a large variety of source types and reference materials, I began to narrow down my sources according to how relevant they were to my topic, as well as how trustworthy the material was. I ranked sources according to whether they were primary or secondary

sources. Specifically, any source that discussed the actual law itself, I placed on the top of my priority list. Other sources that discussed policy implications or other non-statute related concepts were placed on my priority list secondary to my other sources. Any source that seemed to discuss an area that failed to fit within the scope of my topic, I discarded immediately. I also discarded sources that did not appear trustworthy. I knew that, if need be, I could go back to these sources; however, it was important to compose my source load of text that was as trustworthy as possible.

The main difficulty I encountered while conducting my research was identifying when I should stop. I believe one of the hardest things to become comfortable with as a law student is knowing when to say “enough is enough.” I was finally able to reach this point when my research began leading me in circles. Specifically, when I would keycite a new case, it would reference other cases that I had already read. This confirmed that I was toward the end of my research process. However, as mentioned above, this was a point that I struggled with. You never want to turn in a paper and then come across a powerful article that could have persuaded your article to go in a different direction, or a piece of research that could have added strength to your argument. Practice is the only way to feel comfortable knowing when to stop researching.

The most important thing that I learned about the research process is that it is a skill that may be improved upon over time. It is not a blind hunt through endless literature, but rather, is a process that becomes complete if done the correct way. I also learned the importance behind using a variety of resources. Although I wrote a law school paper, I found that many of my best points were inferred from non-legal sources. Lastly, I learned that although the research process can seem overwhelming at first, the only way to tackle it is to jump right in.