



Searching LegalTrac

Research Guide

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Scope:

- LegalTrac is a database containing citations to over 1.5 million articles (some with abstracts, some with the full text of the article) from approximately 875 titles of legal publications, including law reviews, legal newspapers and journals and international legal journals (English, Scottish and Australian). This database covers 1980 – 2010 and is updated daily.
- LegalTrac also has abstracts of law-related articles from over 1,000 business or general-interest publications. It does not include many local publications, such as the San Diego Daily Transcript, Dicta, or San Diego Lawyer.
- The library subscribes to many, but not all of the periodicals indexed in LegalTrac. For example, we carry the L.A. Daily Journal and the National Law Journal, but not the New York Law Journal, New Jersey Law Journal, Chicago Daily Bulletin or American Lawyer.
- Most law reviews and journals are available on our electronic databases available from any library computer, including Hein Online, Westlaw or Lexis. As such, we have cancelled subscriptions to the printed versions of many of our traditional law reviews and journals.

Access:

There are several ways to access LegalTrac:

1. From any Law Library computer, click on the “Legal Research Databases” folder on the desktop. Once this screen opens, click on the link to “LegalTrac.”
2. From any Law Library computer, click on “E-Resources” in the left-hand column under “Resources,” then click on “LegalTrac” from the list of resources available.
3. From the Law Library Home Page (www.sdcppl.org), click on “Online Catalog” then click on “LegalTrac.”
 - If you are in the Law Library, you will automatically be directed to LegalTrac’s default search screen.
 - If you are outside the library, you will be prompted to enter your Law Library card’s barcode number before gaining access to LegalTrac.



Search:

There are four (4) searching methods available for this database:

1. **Basic Search**: This is the database's default home page
 - a. This screen allows you to search by "Keyword," "Subject" or "Entire Document."
 - i. Use "Keyword" to find words that appear in the author, title, periodical name, abstract or summary, or subject headings of each document.
 - ii. Use "Subject" when looking for a specific topic that you can express in just a few words. This is the equivalent of searching the subject entries of a library catalog. This search is more difficult because you need to know the exact words LegalTrac uses in its subject headings.
 - iii. If you choose "Entire Document," you will search for words in the entire text of all documents in the database. This may get you thousands of documents, but is useful if you are searching for a specific phrase or sentence, and can limit your search to a certain range of dates.
 - "More Search Options": This appears under the search box at the top of the screen in the Heading area after you have conducted an initial search.
 - If you click on this link in the "Basic Search" screen, you are taken to the "Advanced" Search page.
 - Results: Your results list will default to the most recent "published" documents
 - You can change this feature to the most "relevant" documents listed first
2. **Subject Guide Search**: This is the same search method which is available from the "Basic" search screen.
 - a. You can use "Subject" terms when looking for a specific topic that you can express in just a few words. This is the equivalent of searching the subject entries of a library catalog. This search is more difficult because you need to know the exact words LegalTrac uses in its subject headings.
 - b. You can also "Browse" the subjects available using the alphabet list at the top. The list of subjects for each letter is also in alphabetical order and there's no way to jump to the end. You have to click through each page. The list also shows the number of results for each subject heading.
 - i. You can hover over the name of the subject and view more information or click on the name to search within it.
3. **Publication Search**: Use this screen to determine whether a particular journal is indexed in LegalTrac and for how long it has been indexed.
 - a. You can also "Browse" the publications available using the alphabet list at the top. The list of publications for each letter is also in alphabetical order and there's no way to jump to the end. You have to click through each page. The list also shows the type of publication named.
 - i. You can hover over the name of the publication and view more information or click on the name to search within it.



4. **Advanced Search**: This search lets you direct the database to search specific features or a combination of features.
 - a. You can search for a term in a certain field, such as the title, date, journal name, subject, author, or abstract. This is a useful when you want to determine whether a particular person has written any articles, when you want to search for articles only in one publication, or when you want to limit your search to a certain date.

Useful Search Tips:

- **Boolean**: Boolean search tools, such as AND, OR, and NOT may be used to match words in the same record. For example, if you search for “dog and bite” in a keyword search, the database will return only those documents in which the word “dog” and the word “bite” both appear somewhere in the title, abstract, periodical name or subject terms.
- **Wildcards**: Wildcards help you find both singular and plural forms of a word, search for words beginning with the same root, or search for words which might be spelled more than one way. LegalTrac uses three kinds of wildcards:
 - An asterisk (*) replaces any number of characters. Useful for finding all words with same root (e.g. incorporat* to get incorporation, incorporating, etc.).
 - A question mark (?) replaces one character. Useful if uncertain of spelling (e.g. capitali?ation to retrieve either: capitalization or capitalisation).
 - An exclamation point (!) is used for one or no characters. Useful to get singular, plural or other forms of a word (e.g. writ! to search for writ, writs or write).
- **Logical and Proximity Operators**: This feature allows you to search for words within a certain number of other words using:
 - “w/n” – e.g. “dog w/3 bite,” which would search for the word bite within three words *after* dog; and
 - “n/n” – e.g. “dog n/3 bite,” which would search for the word bite within three words in *either direction* of the word dog.

Printing, E-mailing, or Saving results: You may mark the citations you want to save by clicking in the “Mark Record” box in front of each item. With this, you can:

- You can “print,” “email” or “download” either the *list* of marked citations or, if available, the full text of each of the marked articles.
- Click the “Marked Items” tab at the top right of the screen;
- From there, either choose to:
 - **Print**: Place a check in the box of the articles you want; click the “Print” icon at the top right; choose your citation format; click “print.”
 - **Email**: Click on the “E-mail” icon at the top right; fill in your email information and other options; click “send.”



- Download/Save: Check the articles you wish to download; click the “download” button; choose HTML or Plain text; click “download” again – you will have to copy and paste your retrieved item to a word document before saving.
- Citation Tools: This feature allows you to choose a specific citatory format. Click on the “citation tools” icon at the top right; choose your options; click “save.”

Please consult a Law Librarian for further assistance.