Chapter 11

Recommended Publishers & Resources

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This chapter of the guide will focus on “how-to” resources and other legal research sources which are especially helpful for non-lawyers and for other legal researchers who lack access to expensive subscription databases. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list, nor is it designed to be a subject-by-subject breakdown of all available resources. Rather, it is meant to highlight recommended publishers of legal information for non-lawyers and to focus on selected high-quality individual print and online resources. Many of the listed print resources can be found in public libraries as well as in law libraries, and all of the listed online resources are available for free. Please be advised that when using any “how-to” resource, you must make sure that the information it contains conforms to the laws of your jurisdiction. Also, you must be aware that these resources may only provide you with a starting point for your legal research, and that in some cases it may still be necessary to contact an attorney for assistance with your legal issue.

PRINT RESOURCES

Print Series

American Bar Association Division for Public Education

The mission of the ABA Division for Public Education is “to promote public understanding of law and its role in society.” As part of that mission, the Division publishes a series of self-help books which are designed to give practical legal advice to non-lawyers. Sample titles include:

- The American Bar Association Legal Guide for Americans over 50, which covers topics such as estate planning, Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits, and caring for aging parents.
- The American Bar Association Complete Home Legal Guide, which provides guidance on legal issues involved in areas such as real estate, healthcare, home ownership, and retirement.

A complete list of ABA Division of Public Education titles can be found online at http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/publications/books_related_products/books.html.
Nolo

Nolo (formerly known as “Nolo Press”) is a leading publisher of “do-it-yourself” law books aimed at non-lawyers. Sample titles include:

- **101 Law Forms for Personal Use**, which includes instructions, checklists, and sample language that can help you draft an assortment of legal documents, including wills, leases, and bills of sale for buying and selling personal property.
- **Legal Research: How to Find & Understand the Law**, which guides non-lawyers through the entire legal research process and provides instruction on topics such as: the basics of the legal system; how to frame a legal issue to make your research as efficient as possible; how to find the primary and secondary sources which are needed to answer a legal question; and how to organize and use the results of a legal research project.
- **Nolo's Encyclopedia of Everyday Law: Answers to your Most Frequently Asked Legal Questions**, written by Nolo's team of attorneys, which provides concise, easy-to-understand answers on a wide range of legal questions, including assistance with debt and bankruptcy matters, divorce and child custody issues, estate planning, and landlord-tenant law.

You can view a complete list of Nolo books, including subject-specific form books and titles on topics ranging from accidents and injuries to wills and trusts, at [http://www.nolo.com/products/](http://www.nolo.com/products/).

**West’s Nutshell Series**

Nutshells are short paperback volumes which are generally used by students as study aids, but they can also help give non-lawyers a general overview of an area of law. Over 150 titles are available in the Nutshell series, ranging in complexity from basic topics such as Family Law and Wills and Estates to more complex topics such as Coastal and Ocean Management Law. There are also Nutshells that cover the topics of Legal Research and Legal Writing. A complete list of Nutshells is available online from [West Publishing’s website](http://www.westlaw.com).

**Individual Print Titles**


This reference book lists and reviews free and low-cost legal research and investigative research Web sites. However, it’s more than just a listing of links; the Guide also offers assistance on the most effective way use those sites, including screen-shots to illustrate the step-by-step directions. The Guide also demonstrates how to use several often-overlooked features of Web browsers.
Gale Encyclopedia of American Law (Gale, 2010)

Formerly known as West’s Encyclopedia of American Law, the Gale Encyclopedia of American Law is a legal encyclopedia written in easy-to-understand language, which makes it a great starting point for non-lawyers who are doing legal research. Like other legal encyclopedias, this multi-volume set provides users with a basic overview of thousands of legal topics, as well definitions of legal terms and citations to key cases and statutes.

Law Dictionary for Nonlawyers (West Legal Studies, 2000)

Legal professionals will frequently turn to legal dictionaries to understand the meaning of words and phrases they encounter. The Law Dictionary for Nonlawyers defines key legal terminology in ordinary, easy-to-understand English. For legal terms which are not in English (many legal words and phrases from other languages such as Latin are in ordinary use), phonetic pronunciations are included.


This book is designed to help direct non-lawyers to the best source for their need. It provides a listing of nearly 1,000 self-help books and Web sites, along with a brief summary of each listed resource. The resources are organized by topic and jurisdiction; you can also search for titles by author name or search for publisher information.

Law 101: Everything You Need to Know about the American Legal System (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Law 101 is not a “how-to” manual; instead, it provides readers with a basic overview of every aspect of the U.S. legal system. The author covers the topics a student would encounter during the first year of law school along with the civil and criminal litigation process, and refers to significant and interesting cases ranging from Roe v. Wade to the McDonald’s hot coffee case as illustrative examples.

ONLINE RESOURCES

AALL How to Research a Legal Problem: A Guide for Non-Lawyers

Created by the American Association of Law Libraries, this Guide is “intended to help a person with a legal problem find legal rules that can resolve or prevent conflict.” The Guide includes start-to-finish instructions and provides links to helpful free resources.
American Bar Association Public Resources Portal

The ABA’s Public Resources Portal includes information on consumer legal issues, links to legal research sites, educational materials, practical law guides to everyday law, and general publications about the law and the legal system. Linked resources include:

- **The Consumers’ Guide to Legal Help**
  *The Consumers’ Guide* is a portal which lists lawyer and legal aid referral services plus resources and information on foreclosures for all 50 U.S. States and the District of Columbia. The Guide also provides links to self-help resources on selected subjects for all 50 U.S. States and the District of Columbia, plus self-help resources for Canada, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- **Law Issues for Consumers**
  *Law Issues for Consumers* is a listing of practical guides to handling legal issues involving real estate, personal finance, workplace issues, health care, and more.

- **Estate Planning FAQs**
  These FAQs cover all aspects of estate planning, including wills and trusts, powers of attorney, the probate process, guidelines for executors, and information on “do-it-yourself” estate planning.

- **Real Estate FAQs**
  These FAQs provide answers to general legal questions that arise in the context of both residential and commercial real estate transactions. A glossary of real estate terms is also provided.

- **TaxTips4U**
  TaxTips4U provides information on consumers’ rights and responsibilities as taxpayers.

- **How Courts Work**
  *How Courts Work* provides an overview of the court system and legal procedures.

- **ABA Home Front**
  *ABA Home Front* provides information on legal issues faced by military families.

Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court Self Represented (Pro Se) Resources

The Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court provides this portal to information and public resources which is designed for people representing themselves in Cook County Courts. The site is organized by topic (e.g. “Going to Court”, “Family and Juvenile”, “Criminal and Traffic”, “Small Claims”), and under each topic you will find relevant forms and how-to guides.
Chapter 11: Recommended Publishers and Resources

Findlaw

Findlaw is a free online portal site which is maintained by West Publishing, a major legal publisher. Resources available in Findlaw include:

- The *Learn about the Law* tab, which provides guidance and detailed information about legal issues related to topics such as will preparation, family issues, small businesses, and workplace rights.
- The *Find a Lawyer* tab, which provides a directory of attorneys which is searchable by city, state, or legal issue.
- The *Findlaw Answers* tab, an online user community that provides answers to frequently asked questions and a forum for submitting questions for other Findlaw users to answer.
- The *Bookshelf*, a collection of free, full-text online books.

You can also use Findlaw to browse laws by state or by topic (Findlaw provides summaries of state laws as well as citations and links to relevant sections of official online statutes), and to find legal news and law-related blogs.

HALT (Help Abolish Legal Tyranny)

HALT is a non-profit organization which is “[d]edicated to providing simple, affordable, accountable justice for all.” HALT’s Web site provides free information and resources including self-help books, article, guides and brochures, and links to other self-help Web sites.

Illinois Citizen Self-Help Web Site

This list of online self-help resources was created by the official Web site of the Illinois court system.

Illinois State Bar Association Illinois Lawyer Finder Web Site

The ISBA’s Web site provides this online lawyer referral service, which also serves as a portal to a wealth of self-help information specifically designed for Illinois residents. The site contains a *Legal FAQs* tab (with legal situations arranged by topic) and a *Legal Resources* tab, which includes the following sub-sections:

- *You and the Law*, a topical legal guide containing links to Illinois primary law and explanatory materials.
- *Rights and Responsibilities*, which provides easy-to-understand explanations of basic legal rights (e.g. the right to remain silent) and responsibilities (e.g. what consequences are there to becoming a legal adult) in the state of Illinois, along with information on jury duty and voting rights.
Finding Illinois Law

- **Legal Information**, which includes Consumer Legal Guides (a series of brief, downloadable articles on a wide variety of topics), information on Illinois laws protecting military personnel, and information on alternative dispute resolution (arbitration and mediation) in Illinois.

**Indiana Courts Self-Service Legal Center**

The Self-Service Legal Center was created to assist people representing themselves in Indiana courts by providing them access to information and forms. This site includes a guide to representing yourself in court, a searchable case records database, legal research links, an FAQ section, and information on finding low-cost or no-cost legal services.

**Justia**

Justia is a directory of legal Web sites arranged by subject. Justia also provides links to free primary law sources, free online forms (arranged by state or by topic), legal news sources, law journals, and legal blogs.

**Legal Information Institute**

Hosted by Cornell Law School, the Legal Information Institute (LII) provides users with a wealth of free legal research resources, including the full text of all U.S. Supreme Court opinions issued since 1992 (along with full text of selected older opinions), the United States Code, the Code of Federal Regulations, federal court rules, and links to online state law materials, searchable by state or by topic. The LII also sponsors Wex, a collaboratively-created free legal dictionary and encyclopedia which is edited by legal experts, and Introduction to Basic Legal Citation. In addition, you can use LII to search for lawyers by state or practice area.

**Library of Congress Guide to Law Online**

Prepared by the Law Library of Congress Public Services Division, the Guide to Law Online is an annotated guide to sources of information on government and law available online which includes selected links to useful and reliable sites for legal information. Resources are grouped by jurisdiction (International and Multinational, Nations of the World, U.S. Federal, U.S. States and Territories), and the linked material includes some sources which are written for non-lawyers.

**Nolo**

The Web site of the legal publisher Nolo (see above) includes free, practical information on a wide variety of topics. Click on the “Get Informed – Free Legal Information” tab to find articles on subjects such as bankruptcy and debt management, criminal law, real estate law, taxes, and wills and estates, all of which are written in easy-to-understand language. You can search Nolo’s List of Helpful Legal Websites or use Nolo to locate attorneys who specialize in almost any area of the law.
Public Library of Law

The Public Library of Law, a free service of the subscription database Fastcase, is a portal to a wide variety of free legal information gathered from many different Web sites, allowing users to search for different forms of state and federal law in one place. The site includes helpful video tutorials on how to search for cases and statutes, as well as guidance on how to construct searches.

SelfHelpSupport.org

Maintained by the National Center for State Courts, and supported in part by Chicago-Kent College of Law and the American Association of Law Libraries, this site acts as a clearinghouse for information on self-representation. Within the “Help” tab, you’ll find a link to Resources for Self Represented Litigants, a list of helpful web resources for litigants who are representing themselves in court.

Southern Illinois University School of Law Self-Help Center

The SIU Self-Help Center assists pro-se litigants in finding the resources they need to represent themselves. This site includes forms, links to information on specific issues such as family law, financial matters, and housing law, and how-to guides on subjects such as service of process and enforcing a money judgment.

USA.gov

USA.gov is the official gateway to online information from federal and state governments, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories. Many federal and state government agencies (e.g. the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Social Security Administration, and the Occupational Health & Safety Administration) provide basic guidance on legal matters on their Web sites, and you can find links to those agency sites on USA.gov. USA.gov’s searchable FAQs page includes answers and links to government information, plus resources on topics such as workplace issues, consumer protection, and immigration.

Wisconsin Court System Self-Help Center

The Wisconsin Court System’s self-help law center contains forms, links to resources about Wisconsin law and court procedures, and guidance on self-representation in some types of court matters.