

## Chapter 2

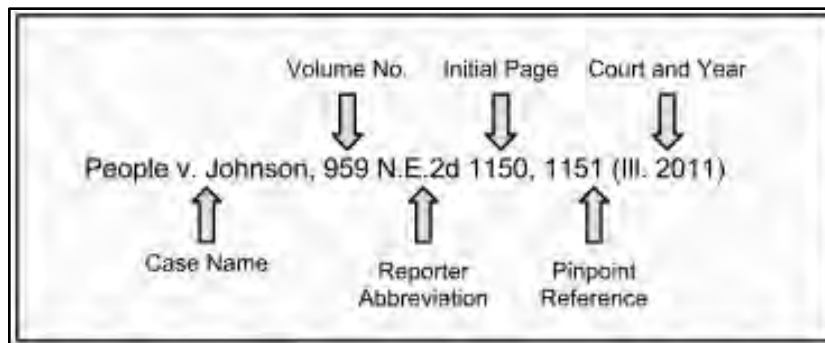
### How to Read Legal Citations

Maribel Nash  
Research and Instructional Services Librarian  
Pritzker Legal Research Center  
Northwestern University School of Law

Legal *citations*, or *cites*, are references to specific legal sources. They serve as shorthand to assist researchers in quickly identifying legal authority. A typical citation describes what is being cited, where the reader can find the information, when the information was produced, and who produced it. Citations may refer to primary law (court opinions, statutes, constitutions, or administrative rules and decisions) or secondary materials (law review articles or treatises). This chapter describes common legal citations: cases and statutes. It also provides a list of legal citation manuals for further information.

#### Case Law

A common type of legal citation is a citation to a court case, or judicial opinion. The process of case law research is described in detail in Chapter 4 of this Guide. Most citations to court cases appear as illustrated below:



Citations to court cases, or judicial opinions, generally begin with the name of the case. The complete citation to the print reporter follows. “N.E.2d” refers to the Northeastern Reporter, Second Series.<sup>7</sup> The volume number in which the opinion appears always precedes the reporter abbreviation, and the case’s initial page follows it. Therefore, *People v. Johnson* can be found in volume 959 of the Northeastern Reporter, Second Series, and the opinion starts on page 1150. A second page number, a pinpoint reference to a specific page within the opinion, may also be included in the citation. At the end of the citation, the court that decided the case -- in this case, the Illinois Supreme Court -- and the year the case was decided will appear in parenthesis.

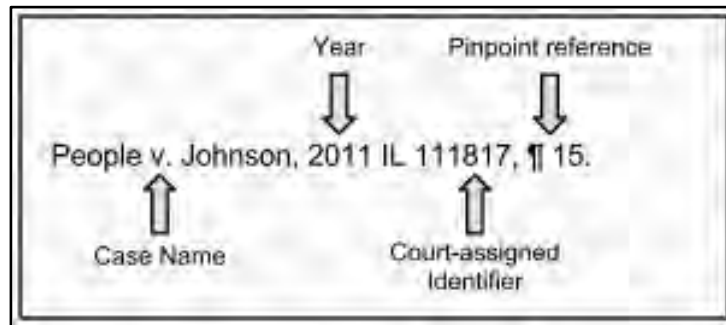
---

<sup>7</sup> The Northeastern Reporter is one of seven regional reporters in West’s National Reporter System, published by Thomson Reuters.

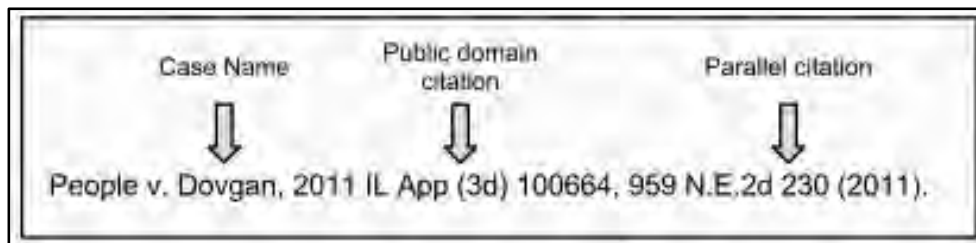
## Finding Illinois Law

---

Until 2011, Illinois state court opinions were published in official reporters: *Illinois Reports* (abbreviated “Ill.” or “Ill.2d”) for Supreme Court decisions and *Illinois Appellate Reports* (abbreviated “Ill. App.,” “Ill. App. 2d,” or “Ill. App. 3d”) for Appellate Court Opinions. Publication of these print reporters was discontinued in 2011. That year, the Illinois Supreme Court adopted a public domain citation format for Illinois Supreme Court and Appellate Court decisions. The new citation format, now adopted by about a dozen states, includes the year of the decision and a sequential number, or identifier, assigned to the opinion. Instead of pinpoint references to page numbers, a paragraph number now indicates where the cited information is located within the opinion. Using these public domain citations, researchers can easily find Illinois opinions on the [Illinois Courts website](#). An example of the new public domain citation from the Illinois Supreme Court appears below:



The Illinois Supreme Court rules allow, but do not require, parallel citation to the unofficial print reporters. Researchers may see a long citation containing multiple references to the same case. See this example of a case opinion from the Illinois Court of Appeals:



Illinois researchers frequently encounter the following abbreviations when reading cases and other legal materials. For a list of legal abbreviations, refer to citation manuals such as the Bluebook or Bieber’s Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations.

## Chapter 2: Legal Citations

---

Court	Abbreviation	Reporter
U.S. Supreme Court	U.S. / S. Ct. / L. Ed.	United States Reports (official) / Supreme Court Reporter (West) / Supreme Court Reporter, Lawyers' Edition (Lexis)
U.S. Courts of Appeals (Federal appellate level)	F. / F.2d / F.3d	Federal Reporter [First, Second, or Third Series] (West)
U.S. District Courts (Federal trial level)	F. Supp. / F. Supp. 2d	Federal Supplement [First or Second Series] (West)
Illinois Supreme Court	IL / Ill. / N.E. / Ill. Dec.	Illinois public domain citation (official) / Illinois Reports (official) / Northeastern Reporter [First or Second Series] (West) / Illinois Decisions (West)
Illinois Court of Appeals	IL App / Ill. App. / N.E. / Ill. Dec.	Illinois public domain citation (official) / Illinois Appellate Reports (official) / Northeastern Reporter [First or Second Series] (West) / Illinois Decisions (West)

### Statutes

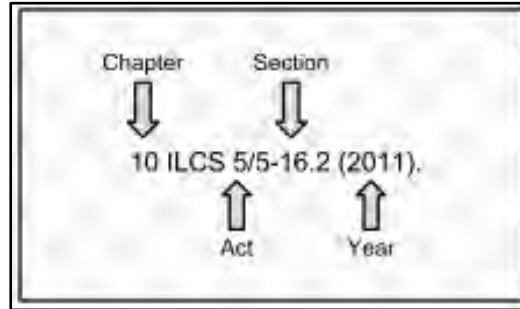
Researchers are also likely to encounter citations to statutes. The process of statutory research is described in detail in Chapter 3 of this Guide. Illinois statutes are published in the *Illinois Compiled Statutes* (abbreviated “ILCS”<sup>8</sup>). An example of a citation to an Illinois statute appears here:

---

<sup>8</sup> The Bluebook requires the abbreviation “Ill. Comp. Stat.,” but that abbreviation is not in compliance with Illinois law. See 25 ILCS 135/5.04 (2012).

## Finding Illinois Law

---



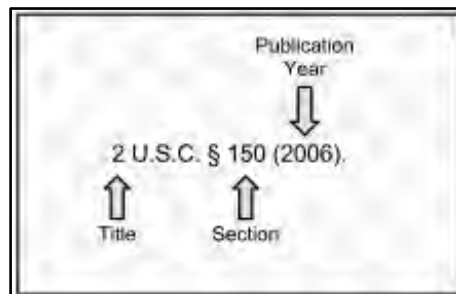
The *Illinois Compiled Statutes* are organized, by topic, into Chapters. The topical chapters are then subdivided into Acts and Sections. West publishes an annotated version of the ILCS, the *Smith-Hurd Illinois Compiled Statutes Annotated* (abbreviated "Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann."). A citation to the unofficial annotated statutes also includes a reference to the publisher in the parenthesis, as well as the year of the print publication:

10 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 5/5-16.2 (West 2010).

Notice that statutory citations, unlike case law citations, do not include parallel citations.

Official publication of federal statutes is in the *United States Code*. Both Thomson Reuters (West) and LexisNexis publish unofficial annotated versions of the U.S. Code. West publishes the *United States Code Annotated* (abbreviated "U.S.C.A."), and LexisNexis publishes the *United States Code Service* (abbreviated "U.S.C.S.").

Federal statutes are organized, by topic, into Titles. Within the statutory citation, the title number precedes the U.S.C. abbreviation. The next number in the citation is the statutory section. The year of publication appears in the parenthesis (in addition to the publisher, for the unofficial codes.)



## Chapter 2: Legal Citations

---

Examples of federal statutory citations follow. Note that the section numbers for the U.S.C.A. and U.S.C.S. correspond to the same section numbers in the U.S.C.

	Citation
<i>United States Code (official)</i>	2 U.S.C. § 150 (2006).
<i>United States Code Annotated (unofficial)</i>	2 U.S.C.A. § 150 (West 2006).
<i>United States Code Service (unofficial)</i>	2 U.S.C.S. § 150 (LexisNexis 2006).

### Citation Manuals

For further information on citations, consult the following sources:

*The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation* (19th ed. 2010).

Introduction to Basic Legal Citation (Legal Information Institute 2011):

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/citation/>

For more comprehensive lists of legal abbreviations, consult:

Mary Miles Price, *Prince's Bieber Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations* (6th ed. 2009).

Abbreviation tables in *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation* (19th ed. 2010).

Acronyms and Abbreviations (University of Washington Gallagher Law Library 2006):

<http://lib.law.washington.edu/pubs/acron.html>