

Chapter 12

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 and is up-to-date with current law. 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.

Individual Print Titles

These stand-alone books will give you a good starting place for conducting legal research or learning about the law.

The Cybersleuth’s Guide to the Internet: Conducting Effective Free Investigative & Legal Research on the Web (Internet for Lawyers, 2018)

This reference book lists and reviews free and low-cost legal research and investigative research websites. However, it’s more than just a listing of links; the Guide also offers assistance on the most effective way to use those sites, including screenshots to illustrate the step-by-step directions. The Guide also demonstrates how to use several often-overlooked features of Web browsers and provides examples based on real world research scenarios.

Illinois Legal Research (Carolina Academic Press, 2009)

This detailed, yet practical book outlines all of the major sources of Illinois law and how to best use them. Some topics are the same as those covered by this guide, such as administrative law or statutes, but the book also delves into the Constitution, court rules, jury instructions, and secondary sources. Most useful to the non-lawyer may be the instructions on how to use specialized legal resources that are not common in other specialties and how to ensure a law is current.

Law 101: Everything You Need to Know about American Law (Oxford University Press, 2018)

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.

A Layperson’s Guide to Legal Research and Self-Help Law Books (New England Law Press, 2019)

There are many topical self-help books that provide information about handling legal problems without an attorney. It can be difficult to wade through the available materials to find what is relevant and reliable. *A Layperson’s Guide* reviews these books and groups them by subject area, allowing readers to narrow down what books or websites will help with their own particular legal issue. Additionally, the book includes a chapter on deciding between self-representation or hiring a lawyer.

Nolo’s Plain-English Law Dictionary (Nolo, 2009)

Legal professionals will frequently turn to legal dictionaries to understand the meaning of words and phrases they encounter. Nolo’s dictionary contains 3,800 terms and is written specifically to explain legal terms to people who are not lawyers. Many legal terms are in Latin, and the Dictionary provides simple translations for those.

Print Series

Books published by the following publishers or organizations can be considered an authoritative and accurate source of the law. Titles from these publishers will often be available in public law libraries.

American Bar Association

The American Bar Association (ABA) is a national organization for lawyers and its mission includes serving the public. Different divisions within the ABA publish self-help books which are designed to give practical legal advice to non-lawyers. These books often include easy-to-understand information, sidebars with tips, additional resources, and checklists. Look for books with “Guide” in the title, such as *Ripped Off! A Servicemember’s Guide to Common Scams, Frauds, and Bad Deals* and *You and Your Aging Parents: The American Bar Association Guide to Legal, Financial, and Health Care Issues*.

Illinois State Bar Association

The Illinois State Bar Association (ISBA) is the largest legal association in Illinois. Its mission includes “proposing and shaping legislation, educating the public, and supporting the courts and the rule of law.” Books published by the ISBA will apply to law specifically in the state of Illinois.

Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education

The Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education (IICLE) provides educational trainings for attorneys in Illinois. The organization strives to meet the needs of its constituency through “the publication of comprehensive practice handbooks designed by and for Illinois attorneys.” Despite this goal, many non-lawyers find these books a useful resource because they explain the basics of

law and include forms and filing checklists. They address wide-ranging topics with titles on family law, civil procedure, real estate, insurance law, and [more](#).

Nolo

Nolo (formerly known as “Nolo Press”) is a leading publisher of “do-it-yourself” law books aimed at non-lawyers. Check Nolo’s [website](#) for a full listing of titles, including subject-specific form books and titles on topics ranging from accidents and injuries to wills and trusts.

Sample publications:

- *Legal Research: How to Find & Understand the Law* – 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; this title 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.
- *Represent Yourself in Court* – provides guidance on filing court papers, preparing evidence and witnesses, and handling depositions and interrogatories.

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. These titles range 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. Check West Academic’s [website](#) for a full listing of titles.

Online Resources: Illinois

The following resources are all freely available on the internet and are specific to Illinois law. See [Chapter 9: Free and Low-Cost Legal Research Resources](#) for where to find primary sources of Illinois law like court opinions and statutes.

[Appellate Lawyers Association Guide to Illinois Civil Appellate Procedure](#)

In publication since 1989, this guide has been continually updated in order to help self-represented litigants making appeals in the Illinois Courts. The guide explicitly states that it will not help with writing briefs or making oral arguments, but it provides many details to guide users through the complexities of appeal procedures.

[Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court Self Represented \(Pro Se\) Resources](#)

A portal to information and public resources designed for people representing themselves in Cook County Courts. The site is organized by topic (e.g., “Going to Court” or “Small Claims”), and under each topic are relevant forms and how-to guides. [“Self Help Resources in and around the](#)

[Daley Center](#)” lists contact information for different legal aid organizations and advice desks that can assist with legal questions.

[Illinois.gov](#)

A portal to information from the Illinois government. The homepage offers a search function that searches and sorts all services, agencies, and news. There are links for all state [government agencies](#), such as the Secretary of State or Illinois Department of Human Services. Popular services are highlighted, including information on unemployment benefits, professional licenses, and programs for firearm owners.

[Illinois Legal Aid Online](#)

ILAO aims to simplify the law so that people can resolve their problems. This organization provides articles that explain the law in plain English, access to free fillable forms, and attorney referrals:

- [Resources](#) – a library of articles containing simplified explanations of the law and court procedures, sorted into categories such as “Family & Safety,” “House & Apartment,” and “Courts & Hearings.” Most articles include comments sections where users can have questions answered, as well as links to related articles and forms.
- [Get Legal Help](#) – a form invites users to give information about their legal problem, location, and income. ILAO will offer referrals or other resources based on the submitted forms.
- [Glossary](#) – a dictionary of commonly used legal terms and their plain English definitions.

[Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice](#)

The ATJ commission is charged with promoting equal access to the civil court system. They “focus on improvements, resources, and programs within the judicial system that help self-represented litigants and limited English proficient litigants access [the] courts, assist legal aid and pro bono attorneys in representing their clients, and support the judiciary and other court staff in ensuring justice for all.”

- [Statewide Forms](#) – fillable, ADA accessible forms that are accepted in all Illinois courts.
- [E-filing Information](#) – instructions on electronic filing in Illinois, including written instructions, screenshots, and audio-visual guides.
- [Language Access Programs](#) – includes a Court Interpreter Registry that lists “certified, registered, and qualified spoken language interpreters and sign language interpreters.”
- Resources for self-represented litigants to [start a case](#) or [respond to a case](#) – for individuals representing themselves in court, this page provides forms and information about the areas of law where self-representation is most common, including eviction, family law, and small claims.
- [Resources for Self-Represented Litigants in Civil Appeals](#) – for individuals representing themselves in civil appeals, this page provides instructions on how to conduct legal research, write an appellate brief, and electronically file court documents.. The ATJ also offers instructions on submitting questions specifically about civil appeals to the [Illinois Free Legal Answers for Civil Appeals](#) program.

[Illinois State Bar Association: For the Public](#)

The ISBA provides legal information for the public as well as a portal for finding lawyers:

Finding Illinois Law

- [Illinois Lawyer Finder](#) – offers two ways to find a lawyer: an online directory and a phone number for a referral to a lawyer’s office for a low-cost 30-minute consultation.
- [Legal Information](#) – links to resource guides for a number of legal issues, including vehicles, healthcare, and your personal rights.

Online Resources: Federal & Other Jurisdictions

The following resources are freely available on the internet and apply to more general U.S. law or states other than Illinois. See [Chapter 9: Free and Low-Cost Legal Research Resources](#) for primary sources of federal law. See [Chapter 7: Researching Outside of Illinois: The Laws of Indiana and Wisconsin](#) for more information on the laws of other states.

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, including when to stop researching, and links to helpful free resources. Additionally, the publication has recommendations on making sure cases and statutes are still valid.

American Bar Association Legal Resources for the Public

The ABA’s public legal resources include information on consumer legal issues, educational materials, practical law guides, a virtual advice clinic, and general publications about the law and the legal system. Linked resources include:

- [ABA Free Legal Answers](#) – users may post questions about civil legal matters. Lawyers will answer questions for free, but they will not represent users long-term. This is a resource for getting free basic legal advice.
- [Law Issues for Consumers](#) – links to practical law guides on topics of real estate, auto and vehicle, personal finance, technology law, and more.
- [Estate Planning FAQs](#) – answers to questions about wills, trusts, power of attorney, the probate process, asset planning, and more.
- [Real Estate FAQs](#) – answers to common questions regarding residential and commercial real estate. Also includes a glossary of real estate terms and home buying resources.
- [ABA Home Front](#) – resources specifically for military families. Includes a directory of programs tailored specifically to military families and legal issue guides, such as child custody and the Service Members Civil Relief Act.

FindLaw

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

- [Find a Lawyer](#) – a directory of attorneys which is searchable by city, state, or legal issue.
- [Learn About the Law](#) – guidance on legal issues related to topics such as will preparation, family issues, small businesses, workplace rights, and others.
- [State Laws](#) – state-by-state listing of where to find laws online, as well as guidance on statutes related to specific areas of law such as education, taxes, or civil rights.
- [Blogs](#) – links to numerous blogs for the most up-to-date legal news. Blogs are categorized by general interest, legal news, business of law, and legal practice.

Free Law Project

The goal of this non-profit is “to make the legal world more fair and efficient.” The website includes details on a number of projects, including:

- [Court Listener](#) – a free legal research website with millions of legal opinions from federal and state courts.
- [RECAP Archive](#) – access to documents and dockets from federal courts. RECAP is a crowd-sourced archive of documents from PACER, a fee-based government system. Not everything from PACER will be found here, but the archive does include every free PACER opinion and converts PDFs to text.

Georgetown Law Library: Research Guides, Treatise Finders, & Tutorials

Georgetown Law Library provides an extensive list of research guides based on geography and legal topic. There is a guide for each U.S. state with sections such as “Statutes & Legislation,” “Regulations & Agencies,” “Cases & Courts,” and “Local Government.” Additional topical guides outline different formats for finding information: books, newsletters, organizations, etc. Additional resources include:

- [Treatise Finders](#) – treatises are books that cover specific legal subjects. Find extensive subject lists sorted by topic from this page.
- [Tutorials](#) – video tutorials on a variety of subjects, including case law research, administrative law, and strategies for legal research.

Indiana Courts Information for the Public

The portal for information related to the Indiana Courts. Locate resources for finding legal assistance, obtaining records, and guides on topics such as child support and orders of protection. Also links to Indiana’s [Self-Service Legal Center](#), which contains court forms and referrals to legal aid agencies.

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, the Uniform Commercial Code, and links to online state law materials, searchable by state or by topic. In addition, LII also sponsors several useful features:

- [Wex](#) – a collaboratively-created free legal dictionary and encyclopedia which is edited by legal experts.
- [Introduction to Basic Legal Citation](#) – a short guide on how to cite legal resources with accompanying video tutorials.
- [Lawyers](#) – search 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 online sources of information on government and law. It 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 Indigenous Law), and the linked material includes some sources which are written for non-lawyers.

[National Consumer Law Center](#)

The National Consumer Law Center is a nonprofit which works “for consumer justice and economic security for low-income and other disadvantaged people, including older adults, in the U.S.” The “For Consumers” tab of their website provides guides, brochures, and fact sheets on issues related to debt, disaster relief, taxes, and credit.

[Nolo](#)

The website of the legal Publisher Nolo (see “Nolo” in the “Print Series” section above) includes free, practical information on a wide variety of topics. Click on the “Legal Articles” tab to find articles on subjects such as bankruptcy, criminal law, real estate law, taxes, and wills and estates. All are written in easy-to-understand language. Explore the other free tools on the website, including:

- [Dictionary](#) – plain-English definitions for legal terms.
- [Calculators](#) – individual calculators for specific topics such as home financing, personal financing investment, retirement, and lease. Each calculator addresses a question, such as “How long will my retirement savings last?” or “How much will my fixed rate mortgage payment be?”
- [Law Firms & Lawyers](#) – search by practice area and state.

[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 websites, and you can find links to those agency sites by searching for them on USA.gov. The [Laws and Legal Issues](#) section provides guidance on reporting crimes, scams and frauds, voting and elections, disability rights, and other topics.

[Wisconsin Court System Self-Help Law Center](#)

This center is “designed to help you find forms, learn about Wisconsin law and court procedures and represent yourself in some court matters.” Some of the informational topics include divorce and family law, restraining orders, and probate. The website also links to the [Wisconsin State Law Library](#) and pathways to seek assistance from reference librarians.

Online Resources in Other Languages

[Abogado](#)

Attorney referrals and legal resources in Spanish. Topics include family law, immigration, labor law, and more. The video library provides guidance on topics ranging from general guidance on how to prepare for a meeting with a lawyer, to all sorts of specific legal issues such as tax law or foster care.

Illinois Attorney General

The Illinois Attorney General website provides some articles and legal referral information in [Spanish](#). [Select resources](#) are also available in Chinese, Korean, Polish, and Vietnamese.

Illinois Legal Aid Online

All the same resources listed above, in [Polish](#) and [Spanish](#).

Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice

The same website as above, in Spanish. The ATJ has also enacted several programs to assist Limited English Proficient individuals:

- [Legal Glossaries](#) – terms are defined in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Urdu, and Vietnamese.
- [Forms](#) – commonly used forms are available in Spanish Polish, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Korean. Availability varies.

USA.gov

All the same resources as listed above, in Spanish.

Wex: Español

The Legal Information Institute's collaboratively created legal dictionary, in Spanish.