

## Chapter 2 How to Read Legal Citations

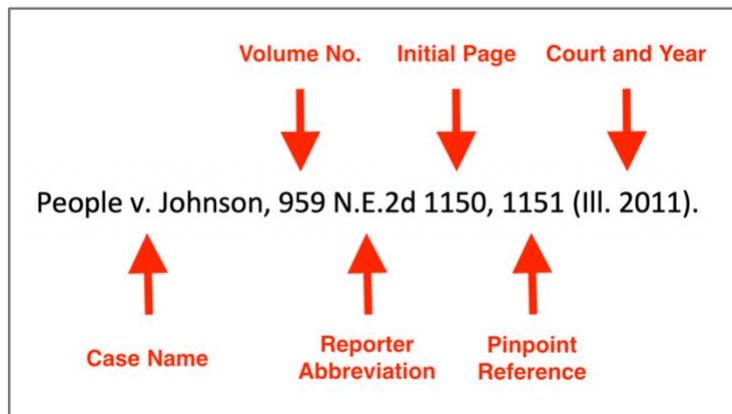
By Maribel Nash  
Senior Research Services Analyst  
Cooley LLP (2012)

Updated by Sarah Reis  
Foreign & International Law Librarian  
Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, Pritzker Legal Research Center (2021)

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 (e.g., court opinions, statutes, constitutions, or administrative rules and decisions) or secondary materials (e.g., law review articles or treatises). This chapter describes common legal citations: cases and statutes. This chapter 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: Cases](#) of this publication. 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. In the example above, “N.E.2d” refers to the *North Eastern Reporter, Second Series*.<sup>2</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 *North Eastern 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

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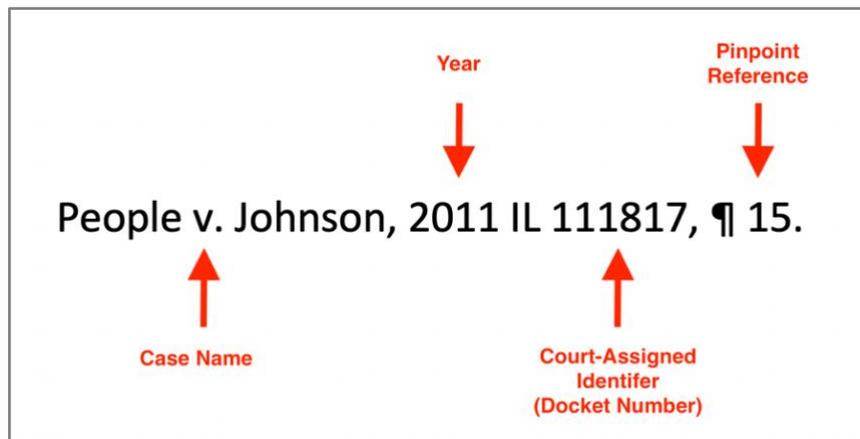
<sup>2</sup> The *North Eastern Reporter* is one of seven regional reporters in West’s National Reporter System, published by Thomson Reuters.

## Finding Illinois Law

the case—in this case, the Illinois Supreme Court—and the year the case was decided will appear in parentheses.

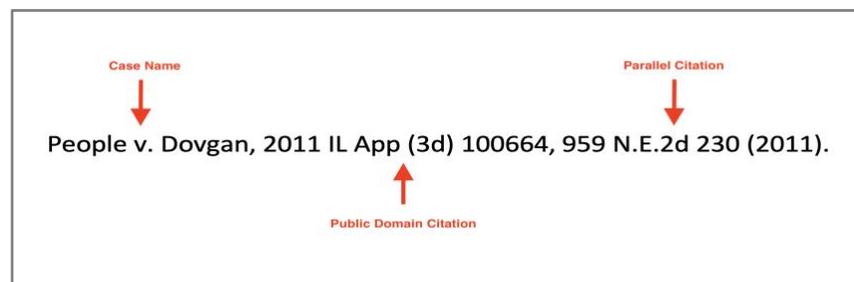
Until 2011, Illinois state court opinions were published in official reporters: *Illinois Reports* (abbreviated “Ill.” or “Ill. 2d”) for Supreme Court decisions and *Illinois Appellate Reports* (abbreviated “Ill. App.,” “Ill. App. 2d,” or “Ill. App. 3d”) for Appellate Court opinions.

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 public domain citation format 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 a 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.<sup>3</sup> Researchers may see a long citation containing multiple references to the same case.

The following is an example of a citation to an opinion from the Illinois Court of Appeals:



<sup>3</sup> Rule 6 states: “Citation of Illinois cases filed prior to July 1, 2011, and published in the Illinois Official Reports shall be to the Official Reports, but the citation to the North Eastern Reporter and/or the Illinois Decisions may be added. For Illinois cases filed on or after July 1, 2011, and for any case not published in the Illinois Official Reports prior to that date and for which a public-domain citation has been assigned, the public-domain citation shall be given and, where appropriate, pinpoint citations to paragraph numbers shall be given; a citation to the North Eastern Reporter and/or the Illinois Decisions may be added but is not required.”

## Chapter 2: How to Read Legal Citations

Illinois researchers frequently encounter the abbreviations in the following chart when reading cases and other legal materials. For a list of legal abbreviations, refer to the tables in *The Bluebook* or *Bieber's Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations*.

Court	Abbreviation	Reporter
U.S. Supreme Court	U.S. / S. Ct. / L. Ed.	United States Reports (official) / Supreme Court Reporter (West) / United States Supreme Court Reports, 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 / F. Supp. 3d	Federal Supplement [First, Second, or Third Series] (West)
Illinois Supreme Court	IL / Ill. / N.E. / Ill. Dec.	Illinois public domain citation format (official) / Illinois Reports (official) / North Eastern Reporter (West) / Illinois Decisions (West)
Illinois Court of Appeals	IL App / Ill. App. / N.E. / Ill. Dec.	Illinois public domain citation format (official) / Illinois Appellate Reports (official) / North Eastern Reporter (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: Statutes](#). Illinois statutes are published in the *Illinois Compiled Statutes* (abbreviated "ILCS"<sup>4</sup>). An example of a citation to an Illinois statute appears below:

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<sup>4</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 (2020).

## Finding Illinois Law



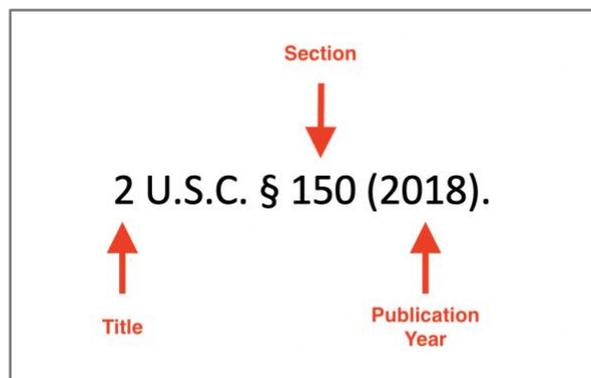
The *Illinois Compiled Statutes* are organized, by topic, into Chapters. The topical chapters are then subdivided into Acts and Sections. West publishes an annotated version of the ILCS, the *Smith-Hurd Illinois Compiled Statutes Annotated* (abbreviated “Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann.”). A citation to the print version of the unofficial annotated statutes also includes a reference to the publisher in the parentheses as well as the year of the print publication: 750 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 5/505 (West 2019).

For a citation to the unofficial annotated statutes from a commercial electronic database such as Westlaw or Lexis, the parentheses should include the name of the database and information about the currency of the database as provided by the database itself: 750 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 5/505 (West, Westlaw through P.A. 101-619 of 2019–2020 Legis. Sess.).

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

Official publication of federal statutes is in the *United States Code*. The official edition of the United States Code is printed by the U.S. Government Printing Office every six years with annual supplements. Both Thomson Reuters (West) and LexisNexis publish unofficial annotated versions of the United States 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 date of code edition cited appears in the parentheses, but the 21st edition of *The Bluebook* made the inclusion of the date of code edition optional.



## Chapter 2: How to Read Legal Citations

Examples of federal statutory citations are listed in the chart below. Note that the section numbers for the U.S.C.A. and U.S.C.S. correspond to the same section numbers in the United States Code.

	Citation
<b><i>United States Code (official)</i></b>	2 U.S.C. § 150 (2018).
<b><i>United States Code Annotated (unofficial – bound print volume)</i></b>	2 U.S.C.A. § 150 (West 2016).
<b><i>United States Code Annotated (unofficial – commercial database)</i></b>	2 U.S.C.A. § 150 (Westlaw through Pub. L. No. 116-140).
<b><i>United States Code Service (unofficial – bound print volume)</i></b>	2 U.S.C.S. § 150 (LexisNexis 2016).
<b><i>United States Code Service (unofficial – commercial database)</i></b>	2 U.S.C.S. § 150 (LEXIS through Pub. L. No. 116-140).

### Citation Manuals

For further information on citations, consult the following sources:

- *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation* (21st ed. 2020).
- [Introduction to Basic Legal Citation \(Legal Information Institute 2020\)](#).

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* (21st ed. 2020).