Searching the Westlaw database

This video will show you how to use the Westlaw legal database to find journal articles on a topic.

Library home page

This is the library homepage and here is the library web address. Library databases are password protected, so that only students and staff at Ulster can use them. To login click on login to Web Access Athens, then enter your web access username and password. The same username and password that you use for WebCT and the Portal. Once you have logged in you are ready to use the databases. Select databases on the library home page to get a complete list of all the databases the library subscribes to.

Library database list

We want to search Westlaw, so we will select W on the A to Z list. Scroll down to Westlaw on the alphabetical list, and open the database by clicking on the title.

Westlaw search

This is the Westlaw welcome screen. It's best not to use the search box on the welcome screen. Instead select the type of information you want to search for from the options along the top. We want to search for journal articles, so we will select journals. This is the journals search screen. To search for a topic enter your terms in the Free Text search box. We will search for journal articles on voluntary intoxication. If you want to search for terms together as a phrase, then enclose them in speech marks. It's also very important not to try to enter your assignment title in the search box. You can't search law database the way you search Google.   Instead you must pick out keywords to search. If you are having problems selecting keywords, why not have a look at the library information skills unit to find out more. Click search to look for your articles.

Westlaw search results

Westlaw has found 99 journal articles which contain the phrase voluntary intoxication. Scroll down to view all the journal references, as well as a paragraph highlighting the terms in context. This can help you decide how relevant the article might be. You can make the results easier to scroll through by choosing the Hide Terms in Context option.

Narrowing your search

If you get too many hits, you can narrow your search by adding another keyword. For instance, we can display only those articles which also mention manslaughter by searching within the results. This narrows our results to 34. We will return to the full results list.

Full text links

If the full text is available, click on the link to view the article. You can scroll down to view the full article on your screen or you can print, save or email the article. If there is no full text link, as in number 3, you can view a summary of the article, or an abstract, which will help you decide if it is useful. Remember, just because there is no full text link in Westlaw, does not mean the full text is not available elsewhere. The Electronic Journals video guide will show you how to find the full text of journal articles when you have a reference like this.

Now let's return to the welcome screen to find out how to use Westlaw to find journal articles on a law case. This time select cases on the welcome page, and carry out a search for the case you are interested in. Select case analysis in the search result. As well as being provided with links to the full text of the case, you can select journal articles to view references to any journal articles that have discussed the case. Where Westlaw can provide the full text, a link is included. And remember, use any footnotes and references within journal articles that you find, to guide you to further reading. We know how difficult it can be to get to grips with law resources in the library. So don't forget to contact your subject librarians if you need any help.

Thank you for watching

This video has given you some tips on searching library databases. It has shown you how to search Westlaw for a journal article on a topic, and how to search Westlaw for journal articles on a law case. It has also shown you where to get help should you run into any problems.

Quiz

Now why not try the short quiz before you finish.