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Research Guide

Searching LegalTrac

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Scope:

LegalTrac is a database containing citations to over 1 million articles (some with abstracts, some with the full text of the article included) from over 1800 legal publications, including law reviews, legal newspapers and journals and international legal journals (English, Scottish and Australian). LegalTrac also has abstracts of law-related articles from over 1,000 business or general-interest publications. It does not, however, include many local publications, such as the San Diego Daily Transcript, Dicta, or San Diego Lawyer. LegalTrac began indexing articles in 1980, and the database is updated daily.

The library subscribes to many, but not all of the periodicals indexed in LegalTrac. For example, we carry the L.A. Daily Journal and the National Law Journal, but not the New York Law Journal, New Jersey Law Journal, Chicago Daily Bulletin or American Lawyer. In addition, the library has cancelled its subscriptions to the printed versions of many of its traditional law reviews and journals, but they are still available to our patrons online through Hein Online, Westlaw or Lexis.

Access:

There are several ways to access LegalTrac:

1. From the library computers, click on the link to "Legal Research Databases." Once this screen opens, click on the link to "LegalTrac."
2. From the Law Library Home Page (www.sdcpll.org), click on "Online Catalog," then click on "LegalTrac."
3. While at the library's online catalog page, click on "LegalTrac," on the left-side navigation bar.

If you are in the library, the library's password will be entered automatically, and you will be taken to the Keyword Search screen. From that point, you can use the Keyword Search or choose

other search methods. If you are outside the library, you will be prompted to enter your library card's barcode number before you can access LegalTrac.

Search tips:

This sheet provides a brief description of the four methods of searching this database.

1. **Basic Search:** This screen allows you to search by “Keyword,” “Subject” or “Entire Document.”
 - Use “Keyword” to find words that appear in the author, title, periodical name, abstract or summary or subject headings of each document. You can use the AND or other logical connectors (OR, NOT) to match words in the same record. For example, if you search for “dog and bite” in a keyword search, the database will return only those document entries in which the word “dog” and the word “bite” both appear somewhere in the title, abstract, periodical name or subject terms. Results will *not* be ranked in order of relevance; instead, the most recently published items will be listed first.
 - Use “Subject” when looking for a specific topic that you can express in just a few words. This is the equivalent of searching the subject entries of a library catalog. This search is more difficult because you need to know the exact words LegalTrac uses in its subject headings.
 - If you choose “Entire Document,” you will search for words in the entire text of all documents in the database. This may get you thousands of documents, but is useful if you are searching for a specific phrase or sentence, and can limit your search to a certain range of dates.

2. **Subject Guide Search:** This is the same search method which is available from the “Basic” search screen. Use “Subject” terms when looking for a specific topic that you can express in just a few words. This is the equivalent of searching the subject entries of a library catalog. This search is more difficult because you need to know the exact words LegalTrac uses in its subject headings.

3. **Publication Search:** Use this screen to determine whether a particular journal is indexed in LegalTrac, and if yes, for how long it has been indexed.

4. **Advanced Search:** This search lets you direct the database to search for a term only in a certain field, such as the title, date, journal name, subject, author, or abstract. This is a useful search when you want to determine whether a particular person has written any articles, when you want to search for articles only in one publication, or when you want to limit your search to a certain date.

Other Useful Search Tips:

“More Search Options”: If you click on this link in the “Basic Search” screen, you can search for articles in only a particular date range or only in a particular publication, or in certain types of publications, or those covering certain subjects.

Wildcards: Wildcards help you find both singular and plural forms of a word, search for words beginning with the same root, or search for words which might be spelled more than one way. LegalTrac uses three kinds of wildcards:

An asterisk (*) replaces any number of characters. Useful for finding all words with same root (e.g. incorporat* to get incorporation, incorporating, etc.).

A question mark (?) replaces one character. Useful if uncertain of spelling (e.g. capitali?ation to get capitalization or capitalisation).

An exclamation point (!) is used for one or no characters. Useful to get singular and plural of a word (e.g. writ! to search for writ, writs or write).

Logical and Proximity Operators: AND, OR, and NOT can be used in LegalTrac. You may also use proximity operators including “w/n” (e.g. “dog w/3 bite,” which would search for the word bite within three words *after* dog) and “n/n” (e.g. “dog n/3 bite,” which would search for the word bite within three words in either direction of the word dog).

Printing or e-mailing results: You may mark the citations you want to save by clicking in the “Mark Record” box in front of each. You can print either the list of marked citations or, if available, the full text of the marked articles, by clicking on the “Print” icon on the upper left of the screen. You can also e-mail the citation list or full text of articles to your home or office e-mail, by clicking on the “E-mail” icon on the upper left of the screen. At this time it is not possible to download citations or articles to a disk.

You can also search for periodical articles using Westlaw, Lexis and Hein Online, all of which are available on the library’s public access computers.