This One L Dictionary is designed to provide easy reference to vocabulary commonly used in the legal community and to assist in your introduction to a new vocabulary; or more simply, to help you pick up the new lingo. The One L Dictionary is not designed as a substitute for a legal dictionary. For those questions we refer you to *Black’s Law Dictionary*.

**Act**

A product of a legislative body; an enacted bill; a specific statute or the name of a bill.

**Advance Sheets**

1. Series of pamphlets containing the most recently reported decisions of a court or courts.
2. Series of pamphlets published throughout a legislative session at periodic intervals containing the text of new session laws.

**Annotated**

A publication that includes value added information produced by the publisher’s editorial board to clarify, explain, or interpret text. Codes, rules, and treatises are frequently published in annotated form. Digests also include annotations to direct the researcher to relevant cases on the desired topic.

**Annotation**

1. A citation to a case or other authority that explains, construes, applies, provides the history of, or otherwise comments on a statute, rule, or rule of court.
2. A brief analytical essay on a narrow point of law illustrated by selected cases which is critical or explanatory in nature.

**Appeal**

The process used by one to request the review of a lower court ruling by a higher court or a court of appeal.

**Appellate Court**

A court with jurisdiction to review decisions of lower courts or administrative agencies.

**Black Letter Law**

Old, fundamental, well settled legal principles free from dispute or doubt.
Bluebook

The citation guide considered the authoritative reference for American legal citations. The actual title is *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation.*

Case

(1) A civil or criminal action or lawsuit between two (or more) parties.
(2) A judicial or administrative decision and the accompanying opinion.

Citation

An unambiguous reference used to identify an opinion, law review article, statute, treatise, or other resource.

Civil Law

(1) The law of civil or private rights, as opposed to criminal or administrative laws.
(2) One of the two prominent legal systems in the Western World originally administered in the Roman Empire and still influential in continental Europe, Latin America and Louisiana.

Code

A systematic subject compilation of laws or regulations.

Common Law

The body of law derived from judicial decisions, rather than from statutes or constitutions.

Criminal Law

The public law that deals with crimes and their prosecutions.

Decision

A judicial or agency determination or ruling made after consideration of the facts and the law.

Defendant

A person sued in a civil proceeding or accused in a criminal proceeding.

Descriptive Word Index

A subject index to a digest or annotated law report used to locate cases.
A collection of summaries of reported cases arranged by subject and subdivided by jurisdiction and court.

Et seq.

Latin term meaning “and the following” used in statutory citations to indicate that the referenced statute begins at a specific section and continues through an unspecified section.

Federal Reporters

Reporters containing decisions of the federal courts:

(1) United States Supreme Court - There are three separate sets that report the Supreme Court decisions: United States Reports (U.S., official), Supreme Court Reporter (S. Ct., unofficial) and United States Supreme Court Reports, Lawyers’ Edition (L. Ed., unofficial).
(2) Federal Courts of Appeals – appellate opinions are located in the Federal Reporter (F., F.2d, F.3d) and Federal Appendix (F. App’x). No official reporter has been designated for the Federal Courts of Appeals. The Federal Appendix contains opinions not designated for publication and thus not included in the Federal Reporter.
(3) Federal District Courts - opinions of the trial court or the federal district courts are located in the Federal Supplement (F. Supp. and F. Supp. 2d).

Headnote

A summary of a point of law written by the publisher’s editorial staff or the court reporter. Each point of law in an opinion will have a corresponding headnote. Headnote is sometimes referred to as a syllabus.

Hornbook

(1) A type of legal treatise or text that explains the basics of a given subject or provides an introduction to a specific topic.
(2) A general reference to a series of treatises published by Thomson West.

Key Number

The key number is a West Publishing feature to promote the location of materials. Key numbers correspond to designated points of law. Each point of law in a given opinion has a headnote which is assigned to the appropriate topic and key number within the overall classification scheme. As topics and key numbers are uniform throughout the American Digest System and the West publishing empire, once a key number is located it can be used to locate additional resources of interest in any West product.
Loose-leaf

A type of law book having pages that are periodically replaced with updated pages. The term refers both to treatises and services.

Nutshell

A paperback book that provides a concise explanation of the law on a specific topic.

Official

Denotes publication (online or in print) of a reporter, statutes, codes, session law or other legal publication that is authorized by the government or is designated as official by the government.

Opinion

The written explanation of a court’s decision that usually includes a statement of the facts, procedural history, holding, and resulting decision. Only a fraction of opinions are published; only those designated for publication are collected into Reporter volumes. Varying types of opinions are written in addition to the majority opinion. They are:

1. Dissenting Opinion – an opinion by one or more of the panel of judges that disagrees with a decision reached by the majority.
2. Per Curiam Opinion – an opinion handed down by an appellate court without identifying the judge who authored the opinion.
3. Concurring Opinion – an opinion that agrees with the judgment (usually as expressed in an opinion by another judge) but often through a different line of reasoning.
4. Plurality Opinion – an opinion lacking enough judges’ votes to constitute a majority, but receiving more votes than any other opinion.

Parallel Citation

A cross-reference to a case that has been reported in more than one reporter.

Pinpoint Citation

The page on which a quotation or relevant passage appears, as opposed to the page on which the case or article begins.

Plaintiff

The party that initiates a lawsuit against another.

Pocket Part

A supplemental pamphlet inserted usually in the back cover of a law book to update the material in the text.
Popular Name Table

A law book or a table in a law book that lists statutes and cases by their popular or well known name and includes their citation.

Precedent

A decided case that furnishes a basis for determining later cases involving similar facts or issues. Precedent is binding on the same court or on a lower court in the same jurisdiction. See also “stare decisis.”

Primary Source or Authority

The actual law itself whether constitutional, statutory, administrative (regulation), or case law.

Regulation

A rule or an order issued by a government agency or chief executive, authorized by statute, to carry out the intent of the law.

Reporter

A published volume of judicial decisions by a particular court or a group of courts. Reporters may be official or unofficial. See Federal Reporters and State Court Reports.

Restatements of Law

Restatements are influential treatises published by the American Law Institute which describe law in a given area and guide in the development of that law. Restatements, though frequently cited in cases, are not binding in a court unless it has been officially adopted as law by the jurisdiction’s highest court.

Secondary Authority

A source that analyzes, explains, or interprets primary source information. Secondary authority is not considered primary in nature and does not originate from a branch of government. Examples of secondary sources are law review articles, encyclopedias, and treatises.

Session Laws

Compilations of all slip laws (public, private, special, permanent, and temporary) enacted by a legislature during a legislative session. Session laws are the full text of the law published in chronological order by the date passed.
Shepard’s

Shepard’s is a type of citator available in print and online allowing researchers to determine the validity or subsequent treatment of cases, statutes, regulations, and other authorities. Shepard’s may also be used as a research tool to locate additional cases on a point of law.

Slip Law

A slip law is an unbound pamphlet that contains the text of an individual statute (both public and private) enacted by a legislature. Slip laws are the first form of a statute and usually appear shortly after enactment.

Slip Opinion

A court opinion that is published individually after being rendered and then collected in advance sheets before being released for publication in a reporter.

State Court Reporters

Decisions of various levels of state courts are reported in official and unofficial Reporters and in the National Reporter System which consists of regional reporters. Regional reporters collectively publish most of the appellate courts of the 50 states.

Statute


Topic

Topic, as used in the West digest system, refers to the subject category in which an issue is placed. The West digest system is made up of over 400 topics ranging from Abandonment to Zoning.

Tort

Tort is a civil wrong, other than a breach of contract, for which a remedy may be obtained usually in the form of damages.

Treatises

A text that provides interpretive, evaluative, or foundational material on an area of law.