

HOW TO USE CALIFORNIA CASE CITATIONS

Research Guide

Last Updated: January 2013

Scope:

This research guide shows how to decipher the coded format of typical California case citations so that you can locate case material in the library. This Guide is limited solely to finding cases. Published court decisions can serve as precedent to guide judges in deciding later cases that involve similar issues, so you'll want to be able to find cases to strengthen your legal position. For help in determining whether a case is still good law, see our guides on Shepardizing and related.

What is a citation?

A citation, in legal lingo, is a standardized reference to a published court decision that tells you where to find it. A typical case citation includes first the volume number, then the abbreviated title of the source, then the page number on which the case begins, and the year the decision was rendered. A citation is the address that tells you where the case is located. Court cases are often published by more than one publisher, so there can be more than one citation appearing after the name of the case. For example: *Li v. Yellow Cab Co.* (1975) 13 Cal.3d 804, 119 Cal. Rptr. 858, 532 P.2d 1126. Usually the first citation given is to the official reports for a particular court, and is called the "official citation." The official reports are published by the publisher with which that court has contracted to publish its cases. The official version of this 1975 California Supreme Court case is found in Volume 13 of the California Reports, 3rd series at page 804. "Unofficial" versions appear in Volume 119 of the California Reporter and Volume 532 of the Pacific Reporter, 2nd series. The text of the opinion is the same in all sources, whether they are "official" or "unofficial."

Citation elements:

- **Case title.** Names of the parties (i.e. who is suing or prosecuting whom).
- **Reporter.** Abbreviated name of the set of books in which the case appears.
- **Series Number.** A publisher will periodically begin a new series of a reporter (e.g. 2nd series, or, 2d). These are totally new cases, not a revised edition of earlier cases. A reporter not stating a series number is always the first series.
- **Volume and page number.** A volume number *precedes* the reporter abbreviation, while the page number where a case begins *follows* the series number.
- **Date.** In California, the date of the decision in parentheses is placed immediately after the case title.

- **Parallel Citations.** California Supreme Court cases have two parallel citations. The first is to the Pacific Reporter, and the second is to the California Reporter, which started in 1959. The Court of Appeals case has one parallel citation, to the California Reporter.

Which reporters cover which cases?

California Supreme Court

California Reports = Cal. (1850 - present)

Pacific Reporter = P. (1883 - present)

California Reporter = Cal. Rptr. (1959 - present)

California Court of Appeal

California Appellate Reports = Cal. App. (1904 - present)

Pacific Reporter = P. (1904-present)

California Reporter = Cal. Rptr. (1959-present)

Superior Court

cases are not published - so no citation.

Superior Court Appellate Division

California Supplement = Cal. App. Supp. (1930 - present)

Pacific Reporter = P. (1930 - present)

California Reporter = Cal. Rptr. (1959 - present)

Additional Resources:

The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation, Harvard Law Review, et al. KF 245 .U5

Prince's Dictionary of Legal Citations, Seventh Edition, Mary Miles Prince. KF 246 .B45

Bieber's Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations, Prince's Fifth Edition, Mary Miles Prince. KF 246 .B5
2001

Legal Research - How to Find and Understand the Law, Nolo Press KF 240 .E45 2012

How to Find the Law, Hornbook Series. 1989 KF 240 .H6