Anatomy of Basic Legal Citations

Citations to legal materials (such as cases, statutes, regulations, books and journal articles) generally follow a standard format that enables the reader to identify what kind of material the text refers to, and to find the cited material in a library or using library databases.

What kinds materials are cited in the footnotes at the right?


4 FRANCES LISA BAER, RESISTANCE TO PUBLIC SCHOOL DESSEGREGATION 38 (2008).


What is it? Footnote 1 cites two different cases—the U.S. Supreme Court case, Brown (along with the District Court of Kansas case that the Supreme Court reversed), and a Kansas Supreme Court case, Londerholm (including a parallel citation). A semicolon appears between the two cases cited.

How can you tell? Most case citations start with the party names, with a “v.” (for versus) between them.

Where can you find it? Many databases allow you to find a case “by citation,” using the volume-reporter-page information.

What is it? Footnote 2 cites a federal statute, and provides three locations for it—Public Laws, Statutes at Large, and United States Code. Usually you only need one of these to find it.

How can you tell? Most statute citations give a code title and section number (§).

Where can you find it? Many databases allow you to find a statute “by citation,” using the title-code-section information.
### REGULATIONS

**What is it?** Footnote 3 cites two federal regulatory sources—a final regulation codified in the *Code of Federal Regulations*, and a proposed regulation in the *Federal Register*—and a state regulation.

**How can you tell?** Federal regulations are published in these two publications, abbreviated as C.F.R. and Fed. Reg.; state regulatory sources often have a title that includes abbreviations like “Reg[s].”

**Where can you find it?** In some databases you can find a regulation “by citation,” using the title-source-section or volume-source-page information.

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### BOOKS

**What is it?** Footnote 4 cites a book.

**How can you tell?** Usually the author and title of the book are given in LARGE AND SMALL CAPITAL letters; sometimes the author name is given in Plain Type, with the book title in Italics instead.

**Where can you find it?** You can look up books at the Law Library on LawCat, using the title.

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### ARTICLES

**What is it?** Footnote 5 cites a journal article.

**How can you tell?** The author name is given in Plain Type, with the article title in Italics and the journal title in LARGE AND SMALL CAPITAL letters. Citation to a chapter in a book may look similar, but with the word “in” after the italic title (the title of the chapter).

**Where can you find it?** Many databases allow you to find a journal article “by citation,” using the volume-journal-page information; if not available online, you can look up the journal title on LawCat, to see if the Law Library has the volume/year you need.