Types of legal research sources

Secondary sources

Secondary sources talk about primary law.

Dictionaries

Look up meaning of words you don’t understand.
(e.g. Canadian Online Legal Dictionary from Irwin Law)

Books

(library catalogue is the best search tool)

1. Introductory level
   Get a basic understanding of area of law, leading cases, relevant legislation, etc.
   (e.g. Essentials of Canadian Law series from Irwin Law)

2. Authoritative treatises
   Scholarly texts written by experts

3. Annotated statutes
   Hybrid sources that combine the text of a statute with section-by-section analysis
   (e.g. Martin’s Annual Criminal Code or Charterpedia)

Encyclopedias

Quickly identify current Canadian law on an issue. Locate leading cases and relevant legislation, and link to their full text.
(e.g. Canadian Encyclopedic Digest in LawSource database)

Journal articles

Great for in-depth analysis of a legal issue. An article which critiques a specific case is called a “case comment.”

LawSource has the largest collection of full-text Canadian legal journals, but CanLII now includes journal articles and other commentary sources, as well.

Primary sources

The fundamental sources of Canadian law which form the basis for legal actions.

Legislation (statutes & regulations)

Laws created by elected representatives and government officials.

   e.g.
   Federal: Criminal Code, Youth Criminal Justice Act
   BC Provincial: Strata Property Act

Case Law (judges’ decisions)

Case law is the body of written decisions of judges in courts which explain their reasons for arriving at a judgment. Judges will always note the legislation and cases they considered when making their decision.

Noting up is the process of tracing when a specific case (or section of legislation) has been cited by another case.

FYI: The names of criminal cases almost always start “R v [name of accused]”

Where to look for these sources:

CriminalSource database

LawSource database

CriminalSource, LawSource & CanLII

All of these sources can be found though the KPU Library’s research guide for Law: https://libguides.kpu.ca/law

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