

Appellate Section, State Bar of Texas
Free Lunch & Learn Webinar

Using the Texas State Law Library

<https://www.sll.texas.gov>

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Texas State Law Library

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Using the State Law Library

I. Introduction

Originally established as the library for the Texas Supreme Court, the State Law Library split off as a separate government agency in 1971. Today, while the library still serves the high courts of Texas, it also provides free access to legal information resources for attorneys and *pro se* litigants all across the state.

To better serve parties all across Texas, the library established its Remote Access Program in 2013. Through this program, anyone who registers for a free library account has access to thousands of online resources like e-books and databases. These online resources are continually updated and range in difficulty level, from those oriented to laymen to those meant for practicing attorneys.

II. Free Resources for the General Public Through the State Law Library

The State Law Library website does have some information that is freely accessible for anyone, regardless of whether they have registered for an account.

A. Historical Texas Statutes: <https://www.sll.texas.gov/library-resources/collections/historical-texas-statutes/>

The State Law Library has one of the few (if not only) complete print collections of Texas statutes from initial statehood to present. In 2004, the library embarked on a project to digitize and make freely available the unannotated historical statutes in our collection that were not already present online. With the permission of Thomson Reuters, the publisher of these statutes, the library scanned 63 volumes of statutes spanning from 1879 through 1984 and posted them for public access on the library's website.

Statutes before 1879 can be found online through the [Legislative Reference Library](#).

There is not a single public, free, online option for all statutes after 1984. Statutes after 2004 can be found on Texas Legislature Online's [Statutes by Date site](#). For statutes between 1984 and 2004, the library is happy to provide scans from our print volumes upon request.

B. Frequently Asked Legal Questions: <https://www.sll.texas.gov/faqs/>

To manage the volume of calls and emails asking the same questions, the library created a repository of common questions and the responses we would provide to a patron who contacted the library directly. These are narrow in scope and often very brief. The FAQs contain links to the relevant laws and explanatory articles supporting our explanation.

Common topics include firearms, landlord/tenant issues, marriage and divorce, consequences of a felony conviction, name changes, and abortion.

C. Legal Topic Guides: <https://guides.sll.texas.gov/>

More expansive in scope than the FAQs, legal topic guides take an in-depth look at common legal topics. The kind of information contained in the legal topic guides is similar to the FAQs, but will also include links to reputable forms online, relevant e-books and print books in the library's collection, and lists of agencies or organizations that may be able to offer additional help.

Legal topic guides will take a broad topic, like landlord/tenant law or divorce, and break it down into narrower subtopics or aspects of the law. For example, the guide to *Landlord/Tenant Law* covers subtopics such as the lease, ending the lease, security deposits, repairs, rent, problems while renting, and more. Each subtopic will have a page that addresses even narrower topics or questions. These guides are useful resources for the lay person wanting to learn more about a general area of Texas Law.

We also have created legal topic guides related to legal research that may be more useful for practitioners. These guides cover topics like researching historical Texas statutes, court cases, administrative law, and court rules.

III. Free Resources for Registered Patrons Through the State Law Library

Once a user registers for a free library account, they have access to a wide variety of e-books and databases. When the library first launched the Remote Access Program, the publishers we worked with asked us to implement some sort of constraint on who could access the e-books and databases. Because the library serves the entire state of Texas, we agreed upon the requirement to limit access to those in Texas. Our librarians developed a system that used geolocation data from the web browser to confirm the user's location in Texas prior to allowing them to register for an account online.

One username and password issued by the library will grant access to all e-books and databases.

A. E-books through Lexis Digital Library:

<https://lexisdl.com/library/txsll/>

The library's Lexis Digital Library is powered by Overdrive, which users may find familiar from their local public libraries. Although the e-book platform is hosted by Lexis, it is not limited to titles published by Lexis. Users will also find titles from James Publishing, the American Bar Association, West Academic, and more. Titles range from general overviews (primers, hornbooks, Nutshells) to advanced treatises for the practicing attorney.

The Overdrive platform offers users many unique features to organize their research. Users can highlight passages in different colors, make notes, and add bookmarks. These notes are

saved even once the e-book is returned; when it is checked out again, the annotations are restored.

Users can check a maximum of three titles out at once for seven days each.

1. State Bar of Texas CLE course material:

<https://guides.sll.texas.gov/cle-courses>

The State Bar of Texas provides the State Law Library with complimentary copies of CLE course materials. Since 2017, the courses have been exclusively in digital format, which we offer to registered patrons as e-books. Older courses can be found in print in the library's collection.

Appellate courses: <https://guides.sll.texas.gov/cle-courses/lawsuits-and-civil-procedure#s-lg-box-34240022>

B. Research Databases:

<https://guides.sll.texas.gov/az/databases>

The library provides remote access to several separate databases. One username and password will provide access to all of the databases through a service called EZProxy. Below are some of our more popular databases.

1. HeinOnline

The preservation-minded William S. Hein company has assembled an incredibly rich and thorough database comprising reproductions of a variety of law-related resources. The State Law Library's subscription includes access law reviews and journals, bar journals, legal classics, British case reports, United States congressional documents, and historical versions of the Code of Federal Regulations, the United States Code, and the United States Statutes at Large.

The vast collection of law reviews and law journals is one of the most useful tools that HeinOnline offers. This collection contains 89,680 volumes of 3,414 individual titles. Hein provides access to all volumes of each title that have been published – from the very first volume to the most recent one that the publisher will allow. The journals have been reproduced photographically, which is ideal for citation purposes.

Each Hein collection also comes with an explanatory LibGuide to explain its contents, how to effectively search and filter, and to show additional tools and features to make research more efficient.

2. Fastcase

Fastcase offers the ability to conduct specific and powerful case law research. While it does not have the robust analytical features that LexisNexis or Westlaw offers like headnotes or key numbers, Fastcase is an excellent service for those merely wishing to do straightforward research. Researchers can use natural

language strings or more advanced terms and connectors to formulate their search, and then apply a variety of filters to zero in on the desired results. Fastcase does offer some citation history, including indicators of negative treatment and an interactive timeline showing a visual representation of cases marching search terms.

3. AILALink

Provided by the American Immigration Lawyers Association, AILALink is an incredibly comprehensive database for immigration practitioners or those whose practice intersects with immigration law. Researchers will find primary sources such as statutes, court and administrative decisions, and government memos, as well as secondary sources published by AILA, including the complete text of titles like *Kurzban's Immigration Sourcebook* and more.

4. Legal Information Source

While perhaps not of direct interest for appellate attorneys, EBSCO's Legal Information Source provides a treasure trove of general self-help titles that may be useful for clients, friends, or family who wish to educate themselves on a common legal topic. Legal self-help publisher Nolo's easy-to-understand guides on topics such as estate planning, small businesses, or co-parenting may be good referrals when advising or representing someone is not a possibility.

IV. Print Collection:

<https://guides.sll.texas.gov/recommended-titles>

The library continues to maintain a collection of core print materials that we are unable to offer electronically. Many of our print items can be checked out for up to three weeks. For those not in the Austin area, our librarians are happy to make scans of small selections to be sent via email.

We have listed important and popular titles by subject area on our Recommended Titles page, but the following may be of particular interest:

- Restatements of the Law
- Wright & Miller's *Federal Practice and Procedure*
- O'Connor's Texas and federal titles
- *Federal Appeals: Jurisdiction and Practice*
- *Federal Court of Appeals Manual*
- *The Question Presented: Model Appellate Briefs*

Our online catalog will allow you to search for thousands of titles that are not listed here:

<https://catalog.sll.texas.gov/>

V. Reference Librarians:

<https://www.sll.texas.gov/about-us/public-services/ask-a-librarian/>

The vastness of the library's resources may be intimidating and overwhelming. The library's reference librarians are available to find resources, suggest research strategies, troubleshoot technology, and more. We can be reached by phone Monday – Friday, 8:00am -4:45pm, or you can submit a question through our website 24/7. Our goal is to respond within one business day.