



Reading Legal Citations

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What is a citation?

A citation is a reference to legal authorities and precedents such as statutes, cases, regulations and law review articles. Citations are used in arguments to courts, legal textbooks, law review articles and the like to establish or fortify the propositions argued.

Citations to legal materials follow a standard format which makes it possible for anyone using a law library to find cited cases, statutes, regulations, and law review articles.

Most legal citations consist of three basic parts:

- 1) the name of the case, statute, or article
- 2) a statement of where the item can be found in a multi-volume set of legal materials written as:
volume number *name of publication (or set)* *page number*
- 3) a date

A complete case citation looks like this:

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Legal citations may also contain additional information, such as an author's name or the court that issues a decision, which helps the reader determine how authoritative or credible an item is.

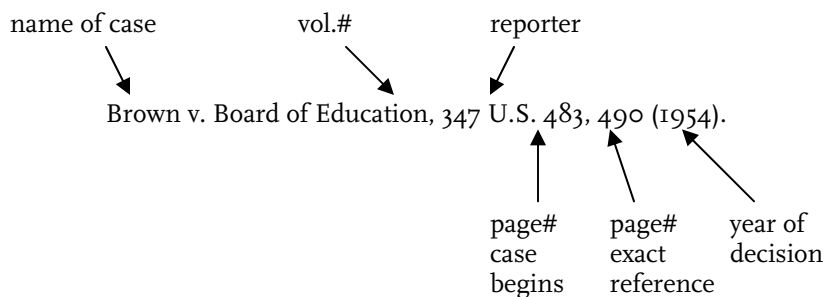
Recently several jurisdictions have adopted format- and vendor-neutral citation forms, and other jurisdictions are likely to follow.

Below are examples of citations to cases, statutes, regulations and law review articles with explanations of the various parts. At the end of this guide is a listing of some common legal abbreviations used in citations.

CASES

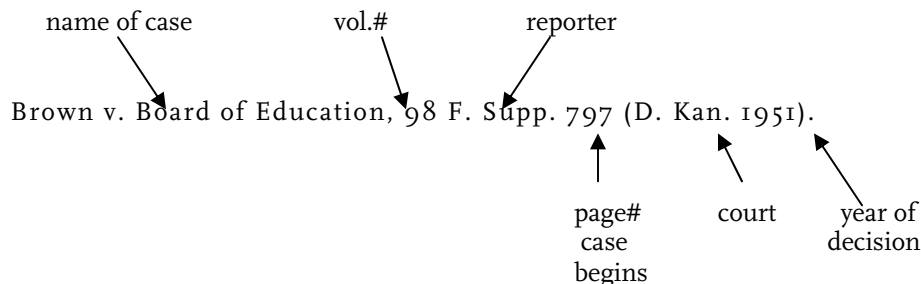
United States Supreme Court

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483, 490 (1954).



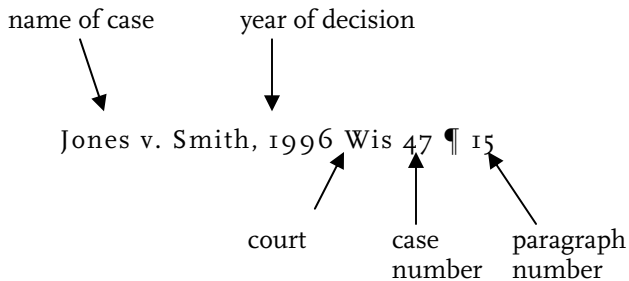
Lower Federal Court

Brown v. Board of Education, 98 F. Supp. 797 (D. Kan. 1951).



“Universal” or “Vendor-Neutral” Case Citation as adopted by the Wisconsin State Bar

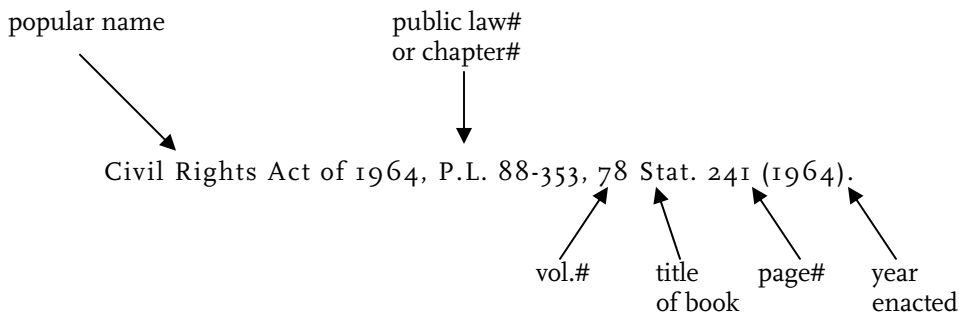
Jones v. Smith, 1996 Wis 47 ¶ 15



STATUTES

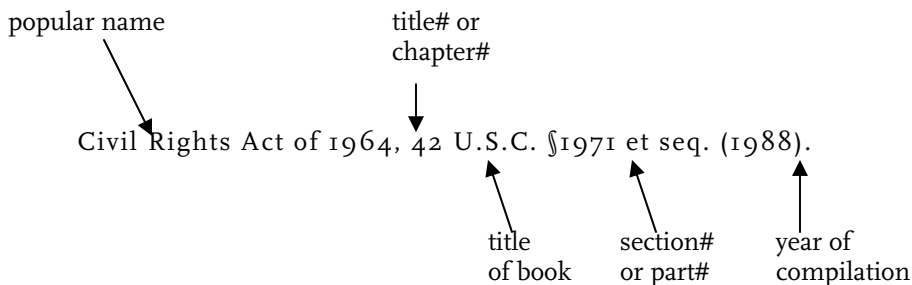
Session Law

Civil Rights Act of 1964, P.L. 88-353, 78 Stat. 241 (1964).



Code

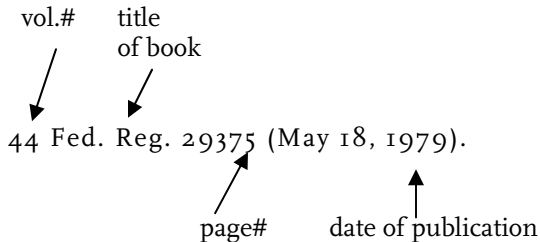
Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. §1971 et seq. (1988).



REGULATIONS

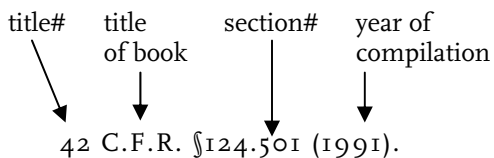
As Promulgated

44 Fed. Reg. 29375 (May 18, 1979).



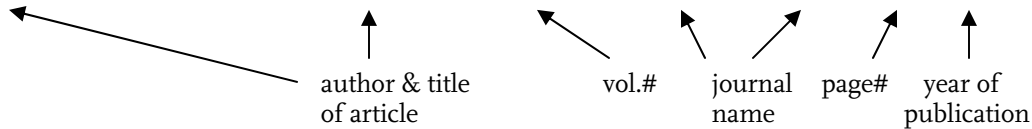
As Codified

42 C.F.R. §124.501 (1991).



LAW REVIEW ARTICLES

Zygmunt J.B. Plater, Environmental Law as a Mirror of the Future: Civic Values Confronting Market Forces Dynamics in a Time of Counter-Revolution, 23 B.C. ENVTL. AFF. L. REV. 739 (1996).



SOME COMMON LEGAL ABBREVIATIONS

A., A.2d	Atlantic Reporter
A.L.R.	American Law Reports
Am. Jur. 2d	American Jurisprudence (encyclopedia)
C.F.R.	Code of Federal Regulations
C.J.S.	Corpus Juris Secundum (encyclopedia)
C.M.R.	Code of Massachusetts Regulations
F., F.2d, F.3d	Federal Reporter
F. Appx.	Federal Appendix
F. Cas.	Federal Cases
F.R.D.	Federal Rules Decisions
F. Supp., F. Supp. 2d	Federal Supplement
Fed. Reg.	Federal Register
L. Ed., L. Ed. 2d	Lawyers' Edition Supreme Court Reports
M.G.L.A.	Massachusetts General Laws Annotated
Mass.	Massachusetts Reports
Mass. Acts	Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts
Mass. App.	Massachusetts Appeals Court Reports
Mass. App. Dec.	Massachusetts Appellate Decisions
Mass. App. Div.	Massachusetts Appellate Division Reports
Mass. L. Rev.	Massachusetts Law Review
Mass. Reg.	Massachusetts Register
N.E., N.E.2d	North Eastern Reporter
N.W., N.W.2d	North Western Reporter
N.Y.S., N.Y.S.2d	New York Supplement
P., P.2d, P.3d	Pacific Reporter
S. Ct.	Supreme Court Reporter
S.E., S.E.2d	South Eastern Reporter
S.W., S.W.2d, S.W.3d	South Western Reporter
So., So. 2d	Southern Reporter
Stat.	Statutes at Large
U.S.	United States Reports
U.S.C.	United States Code
U.S.C.A.	United States Code Annotated
U.S.C.S.	United States Code Service

Note: 2d indicates second series, 3d indicates third series. The series number is an essential part of the title.

For further information and abbreviations see: *A Uniform System of Citation* and *Bieber's Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations*.

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