

Research Tip – West’s Key Number System

1. What Is It

One of the defining features of Westlaw is the Key Number System. The Key Number System is a classification system that organizes cases by topic, allowing legal researchers to quickly find cases related to a particular issue. This system was created in the 19th century, starting with seven categories: persons, property, contracts, torts, crime, remedies, and government. It has since grown to over 400 topics, covering everything from abandoned property to zoning, and nearly 100,000 individual points of law.

The key numbers are categorized topically in a hierarchical structure. Legal issues are first categorized broadly and then subcategorized down to very specific points of law. Key numbers are the same across all West publications, so if you the document you are viewing contains a key number, you can use that same number to find additional cases from any jurisdiction.

2. How to Use

Key numbers are found on the Westlaw homepage and at the beginning of most cases. To use the key numbers, follow the key number links from within a case or search or brows the list of all key numbers from the homepage.

a. From Within a Case

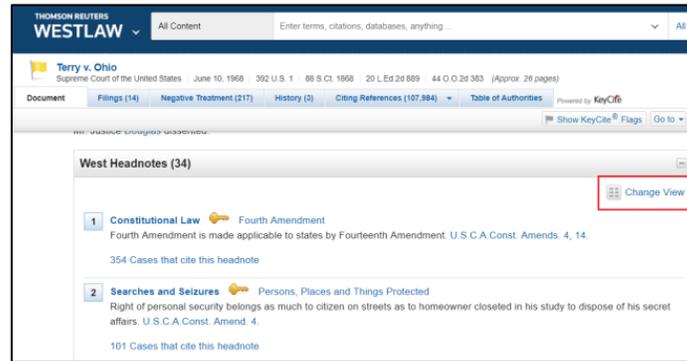
One way to locate relevant cases is to start from the key numbers within a case. Key numbers are found with the headnotes at the beginning of most cases, so you can locate a relevant topic and then find other cases that also examine that particular issue.

The screenshot shows the Westlaw interface for the case 'Terry v. Ohio'. The page displays the case title, court, date, and citation information. Below the case information, there are tabs for 'Document', 'Filings (14)', 'Negative Treatment (217)', 'History (3)', 'Citing References (107,984)', and 'Table of Authorities'. The 'West Headnotes (34)' section is visible, with two headnotes listed. The first headnote, 'Constitutional Law', is highlighted with a red box. To the right of the headnote, a list of key numbers is displayed, including 92, 92XXVII, 92XXVII(A), 92K3848, and 92K3854. The key number 92K3854 is highlighted with a red box.

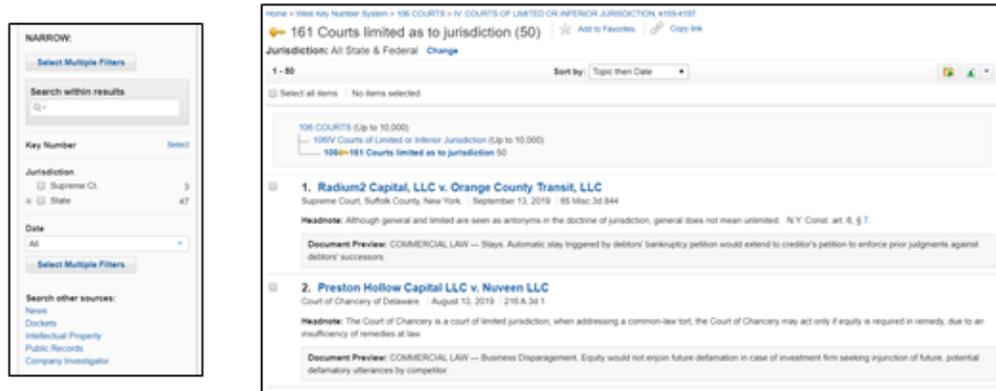
Key Number	Topic
92	Constitutional Law
92XXVII	Due Process
92XXVII(A)	In General
92K3848	Relationship to Other Constitutional Provisions; Incorporation
92K3854	Fourth Amendment (Formerly 92K254.2, 92K255(1))
349	Searches and Seizures
349I	In General
349K25	Persons, Places and Things Protected
349K25.1	In general (Formerly 349K25, 349K7(10))

Research Tip – West’s Key Number System

Click ‘Change View’ to see more or less detail.

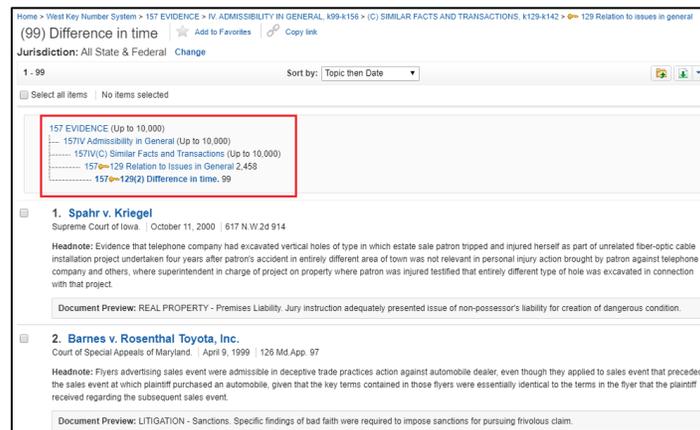


Once you find a relevant topic, select that key number to be taken to the list of cases. From there you can customize your search by limiting jurisdiction, date, or by searching within the results.



You can also change the hierarchy level to broaden your search by selecting any of the key numbers listed at the top of the page. The higher up the hierarchy you go, the more cases will be included in the results.

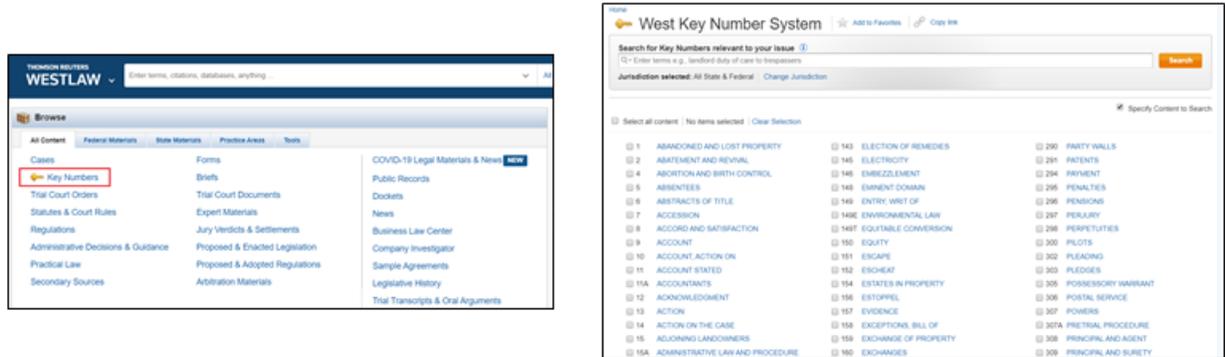
A search from any intermediate level will include results from the more specific levels below it.



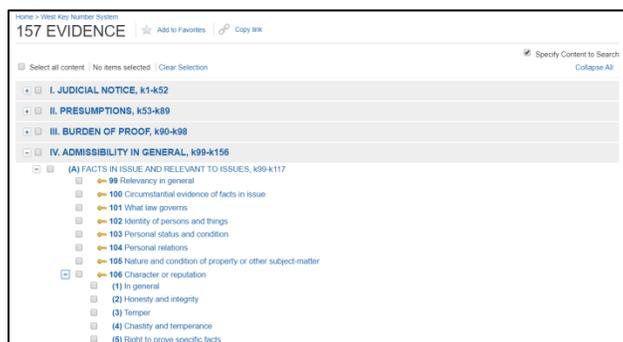
Research Tip – West’s Key Number System

b. Browse & Search

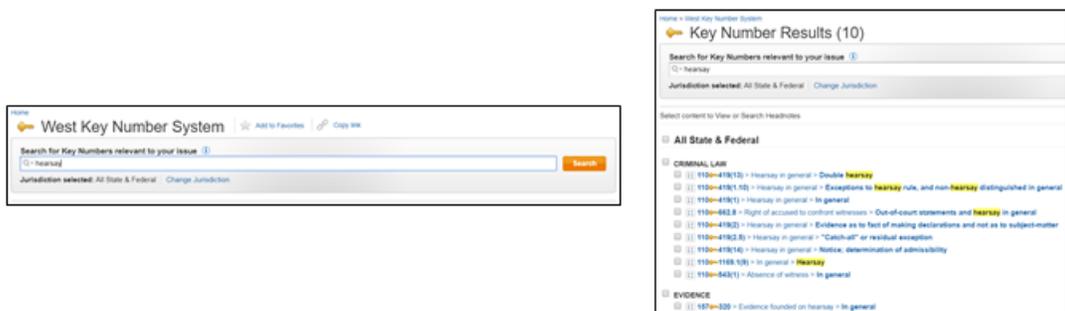
You can find the full list of topics by selecting ‘Key Numbers’ on the homepage.



Select any topic to browse the list of subtopics and locate your issue.



Or use the search box to find a list of key numbers related to your search terms.



Once you have selected an individual key number, you will be taken to a page listing all the cases that have been assigned that key number. Remember you can narrow your results by limiting the jurisdiction, date, or by searching within your results. You can also change the hierarchy level by using the list of key numbers at the top of the results page.

Research Tip – West’s Key Number System

c. Global Search

Key numbers also appear as a filter after running a search in the global search box at the top of every page. You will see a link for Key Numbers in the menu on the left side of the page after running your search.



VIEW:	<<
Overview	16
Cases	10,000
Key Numbers	10
Trial Court Orders	1,207
Statutes & Court Rules	485
Regulations	51
Administrative Decisions & Guidance	1,041
Practical Law	4
Secondary Sources	7,017
Forms	54
Briefs	10,000
Trial Court Documents	6,974
Expert Materials	10,000
Jury Verdicts & Settlements	867
Proposed & Enacted Legislation	8,007
Proposed & Adopted Regulations	2,069
Arbitration Materials	7,464
Public Records	Q
All results	65,840

3. In Print

The Key Number System is also available in print in the form of digests. Some digests are available at the law library. [Use our catalog](#) to find digests available in your location.

4. For More Information

You can find more information and training resources from Westlaw’s Training & Support page at legal.thomsonreuters.com/en/support/westlaw.

For research assistance, contact library staff at library@akcourts.us or (907) 264-0585.