



Researching the Law: Getting Started

Before researching the law, follow these few steps to narrow down and organize your search.

Identify the Legal Question

- Ask yourself what is the legal question that you need to be answered. Be specific.
- A clear question will help you focus your research on what is relevant.

Identify the Jurisdiction

- Jurisdiction refers to a court's power to consider and make decisions on a case.
- Courts may be limited to certain types of cases. For example, only Maryland circuit courts may hear divorce cases.
- Courts may also be limited by geography. For example, criminal cases are normally considered in the county in which the incident took place. Criminal cases are typically held in Baltimore City if the incident took place there.

Identify the Relevant Sources of Law

- First, identify whether your case involves state, federal, or international law.
- Second, identify which sources of law affect your legal question.
- Sources of law include:
 - State or federal laws, called statutes.
 - Local laws, usually called ordinances.
 - Regulations, which refer to rules issued by state agencies.
 - Court rules, which govern how court cases are managed.
 - Case law, which refers to court decisions interpreting the law.
- Consider talking to a law librarian or attorney for help.
- Write down where you find relevant laws and rules. A judge or other party may ask for this information.

Locate Resources

- You can visit mdcourts.gov/courthelp or peoples-law.org for links to court forms, Maryland law, and summaries of legal topics.
- Visit the State Law Library page, mdcourts.gov/lawlib, for links to statutes, regulations, and case law.
- Visit a law library to access legal research databases called Lexis and Westlaw.

Resources

- Visit mdcourts.gov/ccll for library locations and information.
- For court addresses and other contact information, view the [list of court locations](https://mdcourts.gov/courtsdirectory) at <https://mdcourts.gov/courtsdirectory>.
- You can get free legal help at the [Maryland Court Help Center](https://mdcourts.gov/helpcenter) at 410-260-1392, or at mdcourts.gov/helpcenter.

Watch the Video



Maryland Court Help

Free. Online. In Person. By Phone.

- Read more about researching the law on the People's Law Library at <https://peoples-law.org/cat/how-do-i/legal-research>.