



## **Do Oral Arguments Really Matter?**

It's a fact that the number of oral arguments granted by state and federal courts are continually decreasing year after year—but are they less important? Gain Judge Allison Jones' perspective on page 14.

## Free Legal Information Sources on the Web by Thomas E. Heard



Legal research is not cheap. Once our graduates have their research passwords cancelled, they learn this lesson quickly. Increasingly, firms and agencies must pay research costs from their own budgets and are demanding that attorneys use free and lower cost research tools before incurring the kinds of charges

associated with Westlaw, Lexis, or Bloomberg/BNA. While these low-cost or free sites do not offer the comprehensiveness and powerful search tools of the big services, they do provide access to a range of primary legal materials.

Every member of the Kentucky Bar Association has free access to Casemaker from the KBA's homepage. Casemaker is a good source for federal and state primary materials, and the company is working to increase its power and ease of use.

Several sources are devoted to aggregating legal material and organizing it into a clear webpage layout. Some of the most notable are **Justia.com** and the Legal Information Institute site from Cornell Law School. Google Scholar is also a great place to search case law. All US Supreme Court opinions from 1791 to the present are included with selected coverage of pre-1790 decisions. Federal court of appeals and federal district court opinions are included from about 1923 to the present. State supreme courts and appellate courts coverage begin from 1950. Select the "Case Law" button under the Google Scholar search box. There is also separate search functionality for patent information and legal journals.

The Chase Law Library currently maintains research pages concerning facets of Kentucky law on its website. These research guides, known as LibGuides, provide explanatory text and links to Kentucky law sites. The guides are located on the Chase Law Library Homepage under the research link in the left-hand column.

Most Kentucky legislative information is available directly from the LRC website: <http://www.lrc.ky.gov>. Kentucky Acts are available from 1995 up through the most recent completed legislative session. An updated version of the

Kentucky Revised Statutes is available for browsing or searching. The LRC website also houses the current version of the Kentucky Administrative Regulations and the Kentucky Administrative Register which keeps it current. All of these web versions are considered unofficial.

Kentucky Educational Television's Legislative Coverage Page features video recordings of House and Senate hearings and floor debates. Coverage is not comprehensive but the archived footage goes back to the 2010 regular session. Viewing the material requires the Adobe flash plugin. The address is: <http://www.ket.org/legislature>.

An abundance of Kentucky judicial information is maintained at the Court of Justice website at: <http://courts.ky.gov>. The site includes Supreme Court opinions from 1999 to present, Court of Appeals opinions from 1996- present, as well as local court rules and dockets. Standardized forms for various types of litigation are also available in PDF format.

A pesky and persistent research problem for attorneys is municipal and county codes. In the past, the codes were not readily available and had to be special ordered for each city or consulted at a large library. This research task is now much easier due to the two major US code publishers making their code libraries available on the web. American Legal Publishing Corp. has 77 Kentucky municipal and county codes for searching or browsing at: <http://www.amlegal.com/codes/ky>. The AmLegal library covers most Northern Kentucky cities, and also the Boone and Kenton county codes. Municode is the official publisher for 8 Kentucky communities, one of them being Lexington/Fayette County. The Kentucky Library is located at: <https://www.municode.com/library/ky>. Frequency of updating is left to each respective government; consequently, some are current while others are more than two years out of date.

One way to keep abreast of changes in law and regulation is to periodically look at blogs in relevant practice areas. There are Kentucky-oriented blogs in areas such as personal injury, real estate, family, and business law. Blogs, even professional ones, tend to reflect the quirks of their creators and will sometimes wither and die with little or no explanation. ABA has a list of Kentucky

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law blogs that may serve as a starting point:  
<http://www.abajournal.com/blawgs/topic/kentucky>.

Of course, these sites will not have everything, but they should get you started. For many research tasks, free sites may be a good place to start but a terrible place to end. The big services charge a premium because their editorial enhancements and ability to verify if something is still good law remains a valuable commodity. For a solo practitioner or small firm where costs are a priority, bookmark any of these useful sites in a legal research folder for a faster free research start.

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