

Basic Legal Reference in a Non-law Library Assignment

1. Have a look at the Nolo Press books in your collection. Do you have any kept at the reference desk? Which are the most frequently used, both as reference and circulating titles? (You might need to get someone to show you how to see usage information on your circ system.) Check a catalog or the Nolo Press website (www.nolo.com/all_books.cfm) to see if the most used titles are the most recent editions. (It's not a good idea to keep dated legal information.) Check your catalog to see if your library subscribes to any of these in e-book format.
2. Go to the [California Courts Self-Help Center](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov) (www.courtinfo.ca.gov), click on Free & Low-Cost Legal Help, and then on Help from Your Court. Look at the table of counties, and visit the page for family law facilitators, small claims legal advisors, and the self help center if there is one in your area. What kind of information is here? (Different counties have different content on their sites.) If you have a self-help center in your county, what subjects are covered? Is the site easy to navigate? Would you recommend it to a library user?
3. Go to the [Code of Federal Regulations](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr) (www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr) and search the newest data only for recent regulations on the keyword or phrase of your choice. (Possible search suggestions: cloning, terrorist, "environmental protection agency") Click on the "Browse and/pr Search" link (under the search box or the navigation bar on the left and view the CFR by table; select Title 3 (The President) 2005 (if available, if not, 2004); click on "other presidential documents" and scroll through the resulting list, which is arranged chronologically.
4. Go to the [Official California Legislative Information](http://leginfo.ca.gov) site (leginfo.ca.gov) and do the following:
 - a. Click on "Today's Events" and view what floor sessions and/or committee hearings are scheduled for today.
 - b. Click on Bill Information and search for legislation in the current or just prior session that was sponsored by your assembly representative. (If you aren't sure who that is, follow the "your legislature" link, enter your zip code, and search for your representatives.) Choose one or more bills (one at a time) and view the status and history pages of the bill(s) you chose.
 - c. Click on the link to "California Law".
 - i. Choose one of the codes by clicking in the box next to the title of the code. Click the "search" button to view the table of contents of the code.
 - ii. Search the Health and Safety Code for the keyword dog or cat. Do your search again in all codes. Change the default results limiter from 20 to "all". Compare your results: what codes do you get results from other than just Health and Safety? Is the Health and Safety even among the first 10 results?

5. Find out from your supervisor or a coworker what your library's policy and procedure is on referring legal questions. Where do you usually refer? Do you usually call first? Are there specific common requests that are always referred?