

## Legal Dictionaries and Thesauri

### What are legal dictionaries and thesauri?

Legal dictionaries provide definitions of legal terms, phrases, maxims, and Latin legal terms. The more comprehensive dictionaries provide citations to cases, legal encyclopedias, as well as *A.L.R.* annotations. Pronunciation guides and historical derivations are included in the more complete dictionaries. The more compact dictionaries only define essential or basic legal terms.

Thesauri provide synonyms, antonyms, and associated concepts, and often basic definitions are given.

### Why are legal dictionaries and thesauri useful?

Dictionaries and thesauri have two primary uses. First, many legal terms have meanings that differ from their non-legal connotations. You should look up your most important legal research terms in a law dictionary to make sure that you understand them. Second, these tools can help you identify additional research terms.

### How do you use legal dictionaries and thesauri?

First you must choose a suitable dictionary or thesaurus. If you are seeking a basic definition of a common legal term, consult a compact dictionary. If you are seeking a more complete definition of a less common term or legal phrase, consult one of the full-size dictionaries. If you are seeking a wider range of related terms and synonyms, consult a thesaurus.

Remember that words can be alphabetized letter by letter or word by word.

### What are specialized dictionaries and legal usage texts?

If you cannot find your term or need a more detailed definition, you may wish to consult a specialized legal dictionary. Specialized legal dictionaries exist in many fields including business law, constitutional law, and international law. There are also special purpose dictionaries, including dictionaries of abbreviations.

Legal usage texts resemble dictionaries and provide definitions while addressing stylistic choices in legal writing.

### How do you cite dictionaries?

It is better to cite a primary authority providing a definition than a dictionary. Sometimes, however, no definition exists in the primary authority within your jurisdiction, so you must cite a secondary source like a dictionary.

Examples of proper citation, based upon Rule 15 of *The Bluebook* are:

*Ballentine's Law Dictionary* 640 (3d ed. 1969).

*Black's Law Dictionary* 977-978 (9th ed. 2009).

Daniel Oran, *Oran's Dictionary of the Law* 278 (4th ed. 2008).

## Dictionaries

- Ballentine, James A. *Ballentine's Law Dictionary, with Pronunciations*. 3rd ed., edited by William S. Anderson. Rochester, N.Y. : Lawyers Co-operative Pub. Co., 1969. ix, 1429 p. **(REFERENCE KF156 .B19 1969)**

This comprehensive legal dictionary includes pronunciations, definitions from cases, references to *Am. Jur. 2d* and *A.L.R.* reports and annotations. It defines Latin legal phrases. Historic words, phrases, and abbreviations are defined. The dictionary concludes with a table of abbreviations of legal reports, treatises, and phrases.

- Beyer, Gerry W. *Modern Dictionary for the Legal Profession*. 4th ed. Buffalo, N.Y. : Hein, 2008. vii, 977 p. **(REFERENCE KF156 .R42 2008)**

This specialized dictionary defines selected legal, banking, business, and medical terms. Some current slang is included. Abbreviations that a practicing attorney might encounter are defined.

- Garner, Bryan A., ed. *Black's Law Dictionary*. 9th ed. St. Paul, Minn. : West, 2009. xxxi, 1920 p. **(REFERENCE KF156 .B53 2009)**

This very comprehensive dictionary provides references to cases, *C.J.S.*, and major legal treatises. Latin phrases, historic terms, and abbreviations are all included. The dictionary concludes with a table of legal abbreviations, a section of legal maxims, and miscellaneous documents and charts.

- Gifis, Steven H. *Law Dictionary*. 3rd ed. New York: Barron's, c1991. xvi, 638 p. **(RESERVE KF156 .G53 1991)**

This dictionary is intended to be a portable, useful study aid for the law student. It permits a basic understanding of a word or phrase. First-year law students will find most of the legal terms that they come across in their assignments. Citations to cases, statutes, and legal treatises provide authority for the definitions. The appendix includes The Constitution of the United States, the ABA Model Code of Professional Responsibility, the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct, Federal Judicial Circuits, Federal Judicial System, and U.S. Supreme Court Justices, 1789-1990.

- Oran, Daniel ; Tosti, Mark, contributing author. *Law Dictionary for Nonlawyers*. 4th ed. Albany, N.Y. : West Legal Studies, c2000. xiii, 345 p. **(RESERVE KF156 .O7 2000)**

This provides easy to understand legal definitions for common terms found in law. Some Latin terms and a few abbreviations are defined. Appendices include a section on where to go for more information and a section on lawyer talk.

- Oran, Daniel. *Oran's Dictionary of the Law*. 4th ed. Clifton Park, N.Y.: Thomson Delmar Learning, c2008. xi, 627 p. Includes 1 CD-ROM. **(REFERENCE KF156 .O69 2008)**

This compact dictionary provides definitions of common legal terms and abbreviations. Multiple meanings are provided. Latin phrases are defined. Select landmark cases are noted. Appendices provide information on where to go for more information, lawyer talk, and legal research methodology.

## Dictionaries of Legal usage

- Garner, Bryan A. A Dictionary of Modern Legal Usage. New York : Oxford University Press, 1987. xviii, 587 p. (**REFERENCE KF156 .G367 1987**)

This book allows writers to resolve at a glance questions of grammar and style that arise in legal writing. It offers the legal writer guidance on hundreds of points of usage. It addresses problems of usage that do not arise in the writing of persons untrained in law, and consequently cannot be found in general writing manuals. The dictionary presents standards that will enhance nuances. The illustrations originated in judicial opinions. References are also made to statutes.

- Mellinkoff, David. Mellinkoff's Dictionary of American Legal Usage. St. Paul, Minn. : West Pub. Co., 1992. x, 703 p. (**REFERENCE KF156 .M45 1992**)

This dictionary identifies different senses in which words found in law are used and can be used. Through cross references, it tells how words are related to each other and are separated from each other, so that choice of usage is possible. The dictionary provides general legal usage for lawyers practicing in the American Common Law tradition. Illustrative examples and citations to cases are provided. There is an index of entries.

## Dictionary of Abbreviations

- Prince, Mary Miles. Bieber's Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations: A Reference guide for Attorneys, Legal Secretaries, Paralegals, and Law Students. Prince's 5th ed. Buffalo, N.Y. : Hein, 2001. vii, 1103 p. (**REFERENCE KF246 .B46 2001**)

This comprehensive dictionary provides abbreviations for court reports, loose-leaf services, law reviews, government agencies, terms, treatises, and signals. English and Commonwealth abbreviations are also included. Part II is a Reverse Dictionary.

## Speller

- Sloane, Sheila B. The Legal Speller with Useful Medical Terms. 2nd ed. St. Paul : West Pub. Co., c1982. xi, 366 p. (**RESERVE KF156 .S58 1982**)

This speller contains a selective vocabulary from all areas of law and medicine. Latin, French, and Spanish legal terms are also included. Appendices include abbreviations, federal administrative reports, loose-leaf services, directory of United States courts, directory of U.S. embassies and consulates, forms of address, and state postal abbreviations.

## Thesaurus

- Burton, William C. Burton's Legal Thesaurus. 3rd ed. New York : Macmillan Library Reference, c1998. xix, 1012 p. (**REFERENCE KF 156 .B856 1998**)

This thesaurus provides synonyms, part of speech, associated concepts and foreign phrases for the terms included. The comprehensive index defines words and phrases including more informal usages.

## **Electronic Legal Dictionaries**

### **Nolo's Free Dictionary of Law Terms and Legal Definitions.**

<http://www.nolo.com/dictionary/index.html>

This website offers glossary legal terms and legal definitions. It contains plain-English definitions for hundreds of legal terms from the common to the unusual. Nolo publishes books for the practicing attorney.

### **Harvard Law School Library: One-L Dictionary.**

[http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/services/research/guides/one\\_l\\_dictionary.html](http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/services/research/guides/one_l_dictionary.html)

This rudimentary dictionary is designed to help first year law students during the first few days of their law school studies. It explains terms and concepts that new law students are likely to encounter in their classes.

### **Jurist Legal Dictionaries.**

<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/dictionary.htm>

JURIST provides a browsable dictionary of basic U.S. legal terminology focusing on legal procedure.

### **Law.com Dictionary.**

<http://dictionary.law.com/>

There are 3 easy ways to use this dictionary. You can search by word or phrase, find all definitions that include a specific term, or find a definition by clicking on the first letter of a word or phrase.

### **Law Dictionary.**

<http://dictionary/lp.findlaw.com>

This dictionary allows you to search for basic legal terms.

### **Law Dictionary Online.**

<http://law-dictionary.org/>

This service allows you to search in the following categories: Legal Abbreviations, Legal Dictionary, Medical Dictionary, Medical Conditions, Medical News, and Computer Dictionary. You can search by word or phrase or browse by first letter of the word.

### **The 'Lectric Law Library's Legal Lexicon Lyceum.**

<http://www.lectlaw.com/def.htm>

This is a megasite with access to 4 different websites. It advertises itself as the Net's Best Law Dictionary with thousands of definitions and explanations of legal terms, phrases and concepts.

### **Wex: Cornell University Law School, LII/Legal Information Institute.**

<http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex>

Wex is a collaboratively-created, public-access law dictionary and encyclopedia. It provides thorough explanations pertaining to a limited number of terms.

**Lexis**

Lexis provides access to *Ballentine's Law Dictionary*, 3rd Edition; *Bieber's Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations*; Bryan A. Garner. *A Dictionary of Modern Legal Usage*; *The Law Dictionary*; and *Modern Dictionary for the Legal Profession*.

**Westlaw**

On Westlaw, you can search *Black's Law Dictionary*, 8th Edition.