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UWP 1

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How to read a court case

(Cover Memo)

The purpose of learning how to read court cases is important because it teaches pre-law students how to directly engage with the politics of their country. This skill will help them better understand the controversial court cases that are being decided on in the highest court of the land, the supreme court. My project is directed towards a specific student audience because they have the desire to develop their skills in this field. These strategies will help them grow as students and assist them in building a strong foundation for their future careers.

I think the strengths of this draft include the knowledge I can bring to the table because of my experience and the sources I provide for the readers. However, I need to improve on my organization and structure of some sentences. It would also be a good idea to include a scholarly piece of evidence to make my argument stronger. A question I have for my peer reviewers is about the formality of my writing, should it be more personal? Or is it fine how it is because of the subject matter since law itself is very formal too?

My peer reviewer seemed to like my piece, but she also provided some critiques so i can improve. She said to make it more fun, which I agree with. This will help engage my audience more. However, I still wish to keep the formal tone because of what the advice article is discussing. Maybe I can also address this issue by being more straightforward and to the point. I

definitely tried condensing my thoughts so that my readers wouldn't get lost in the details. I also added in my own experience to make it more relatable.

My strengths include the evidence I gathered from outside sources and my emphasis on how significant it is to know the skill I am giving advice on. I really tried to make the point that this is a lifelong skill that affects everyone. One weakness is that I could have included more visual evidence. I ended up creating my own diagram because I could not find any visual evidence online.

I have a question about my organization. Is my advice article clear with the steps I am telling the readers to take. Should I add subtitles on each step or paragraph to improve this? Should I also add in more personal experience? I didn't want to take away from the content, but I feel as if it might be important to add more to support my argument.

Why is this important?

If you are currently residing in the United States the law and constitution is bound to be a part of your daily life. This legal information may come from the news or from local events you experience in your daily lives. No matter the medium, extremely significant cases are being decided on in the Supreme Court at this very moment. Cases involving serious issues such as immigration, abortion, and gay rights are prime examples. Therefore, we as citizens must be able to read these cases ourselves and be able to derive our own opinions. This will further help us decide if we believe in the majority decision of the supreme court. It is our civic duty to be engaged with the current issues affecting our everyday lives. This piece will hopefully encourage civic participation and help guide you on how to actively engage with these imminent issues.

Legal issues arise through numerous situations, whether it's walking to the coho and an ACLU person flyering you down or getting sued for a trivial matter. The law is incorporated and intertwined in our lives in various ways. The ability to analyze the legal jargon through the news and court cases we encounter becomes an important skill. This advice article will further help you as a citizen or resident in the United States. We the people have a duty to understand where we live and the laws we live by. We also have a voice and a right to speak our minds. Citizens must show the government that they are paying attention and are prepared to protest if they disagree.

Step 1: Research

The first step to analyzing a court case is to conduct some brief research on the issue that it revolves around. You may hear about these cases in the news or popular media. I personally get notifications about current court cases through the CNN app I downloaded on my phone. An

example of a famous, controversial case that comes to mind is *Phelps v Schneider*. To give you some background information this case involves the Westboro Baptist Church protesting at a military funeral and their freedom of speech being challenged. Before reading the entire case brief you can look at the first few sentences and gather that it involves the Westboro Baptist Church and the first amendment. These keywords will be sufficient enough for you to begin the research step. With this information you can conduct some research on this church and their previous protest activities. A helpful medium to perform this research is youtube, this site provides educational documentaries on controversial organizations such as the Westboro Baptist Church. These videos will enhance one's knowledge and further develop one's interest towards the subject matter.

The second research component would involve the actual law: the first amendment. Now this type of law falls under Constitutional law, which has multiple resources all over the internet. Websites will break down the speech of each amendment making it easier to understand. However, the first amendment itself comes with subsections. Therefore, the next step would be finding the subsection that matches with the court case you are reading. A helpful website for this is "Constitution. Findlaw.com". From conducting some basic research you can discover that the first amendment protects one's freedom of speech, freedom, of religion, right to assemble, freedom of the press, and disallows the government from establishing a religion. Which subsection do you think matches to our overall case? It's freedom of speech! This is a big issue in the United States and there have been numerous cases in the past discussing it as well.

The article "Navigating Genres" states, "Someone must create that first response. Then when that situation happens again, another person uses the first response as a basis for the second, and eventually everyone who encounters this situation is basing his/her response on the

previous ones.” What the author is explaining in the article is referred to as precedent in the legal field. If you want to take the research a step forward you can also look at precedent or previous cases that involve the same issue. You can find out how these precious cases were decided by the supreme court and essentially predict how they will decide in this case.

Step 2: First Read

Now that you have done your research and have gained some background knowledge about the case you can actually begin reading it! Hopefully your interest has also increased and you are excited to start reading. “[Uscourts.gov](https://www.uscourts.gov)” or “[Caselaw.findlaw.com](https://www.caselaw.findlaw.com)” are both amazing sites where you can read the entire court cases to gather all of the accurate unbiased information. These case briefs can be somewhat dense and can contain extensive legal jargon, but don’t be intimidated because there are ways you can get around that and understand the text in simpler ways. First you should read the whole brief to get a basic understanding about what happens. It’s okay if some things are confusing the first time around just try to develop a surface level understanding. Now that you’ve simply read through it, try to ask yourself questions. What was the issue? Why was this case controversial? Who ended up winning? Why did the supreme court decide this? These are just some starter questions so you can comprehend the case more, but you don’t need to have all the answers just yet.

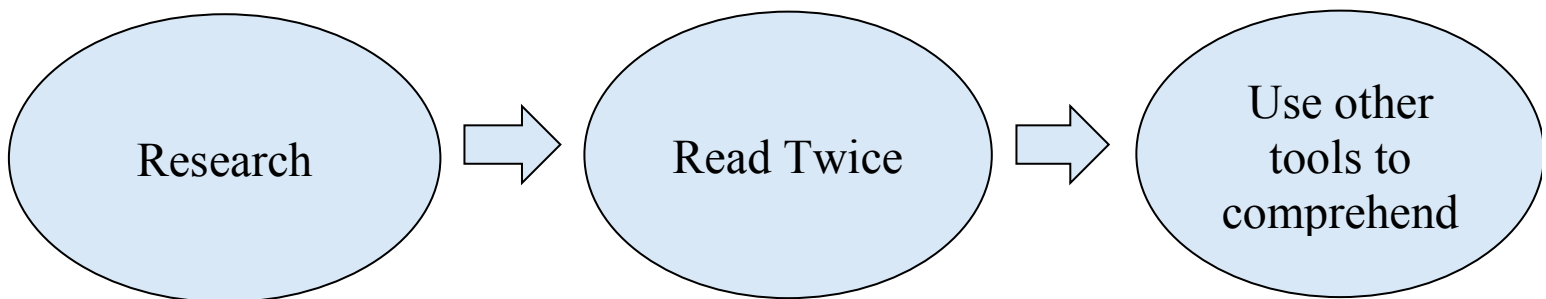
Step 3: Second Active Read

Now it is time to actively read and engage with the text. This next read requires you to pick up your pencil or pen because you are about to annotate! The point of this is to develop understanding by making connections to the reading. Feel free to write notes in the margin, highlight interesting facts, and underline words or phrases you are unfamiliar with. You can also

add in words that help you remember concepts more. If you have any questions it is also a good idea to write them down so you can remember what they are and what concept they are related to. This strategy will help you comprehend the text more.

Step 4: Use Other Tools to Better Comprehend

If you are still confused after actively engaging with the text or want to read the case in a simplified manner there is another resource you can use. A website called Oyez.org is an amazing resource that contains multiple court cases and presents the decisions as straightforward as possible. They condense the long court case brief into one paragraph that includes all of the significant details. You can also find summaries through other sources on the internet by using the common search tool Google.



Conclusion

It is difficult at first to understand this type of writing because this is a different field. The individuals writing these briefs write from a different perspective. Therefore, it is important to read the case briefs from their point of view. Now the people writing these texts are also writing to their target audience. The article “What is academic writing” states, “Good writing is achieving the desired effect on an intended audience.” The majority of individuals reading this type of text will mostly be lawyers, judges, and anyone in the legal fields. This is why they use sophisticated language and unfamiliar legal terms. However, do not fear because with just a click

of a button you can also be an expert on understanding this text. The internet is a great way to develop in depth understanding of topics. This will be the ultimate method to answer any of the previous questions you had.

Learning how to read and understand this type of text is key to understanding current events. Once I learned how to read this type of text I started to keep up with what was going on in the world more. For instance, over the summer I followed the gay marriage case closely. This case went up to the supreme court and the outcome would have a huge impact on America going forward. Being that invested in a case not only strengthened my understanding, but it also brought me great happiness once the decision was revealed. Remember the way that supreme court cases are decided affect our daily lives and the future America that we will live in.

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