Researching Saskatchewan Case Law: Essential Legal Research with the Law Society of Saskatchewan Library

CanLII

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1. What is CanLII?

The Canadian Legal Information Institute, often referred to as CanLII, is a non-profit organization funded by the law societies of Canada and managed by the Federation of Law Societies of Canada.¹ CanLII provides free online access to Canadian law through its website, http://canlii.org. CanLII endeavors to support lawyers, the practice of law, and the Canadian public by providing an accessible, searchable, and free source of law.²

CanLII was first envisioned in 2000 by the National Virtual Law Library Group to fill the emerging demand for online legal resources and to become, "the best place to consult Canadian law."3 Supported by the Federation of Law Societies of Canada and partnered with Lexum, CanLII quickly grew into the outstanding legal resource it is today.

¹ "CanLII". Available at: http://canlii.org
² "About CanLII". Available at: http://canlii.org/en/info/about

³ Ibid.

2. Scope

CanLII provides access to more than one million Canadian court cases and thousands of statutes, regulations, and tribunal decisions from every legal jurisdiction and court in Canada.4 CanLII's aim is to provide comprehensive coverage of Canadian case law from 2000 to the present and as comprehensive as possible from dates earlier than this.⁵ Information on the scope of CanLII can be found at: http://www.canlii.org/en/databases.html.

CanLII provides full coverage of Saskatchewan case law as follows:⁶

Court of Appeal: 1994 to present

• Court of Queen's Bench: 2001 to present

Provincial Court: 2001 to present

CanLII provides partial coverage of Saskatchewan case law for these courts from approximately 1980 to the present and access to a variety of Saskatchewan tribunal decisions:

Saskatchewan (10)				
SKCA	Court of Appeal for Saskatchewan	1994 -	2014-02-18	
SKQB	Court of Queen's Bench for Saskatchewan	2001 -	2014-02-18	
SKPC	Provincial Court of Saskatchewan	2001 -	2014-02-18	
SKAIA	Automobile Injury Appeal Commission	2003 -	2013-09-09	
SKIPC	Information and Privacy Commissioner	2004 -	2014-02-06	
SKLA	Labour Arbitration Awards	2009 -	2014-02-13	
SKLSS	Law Society of Saskatchewan	2010 -	2014-01-23	
SKSEC	Saskatchewan Financial Services Commission	2008 -	2014-01-29	
SKHRC	Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission	2008 -	2013-08-21	
SKLRB	Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board	2008 -	2014-02-17	

The Law Society of Saskatchewan Library is working with CanLII to increase coverage of Saskatchewan case law. In the coming year, approximately 15,000 to 20,000 Saskatchewan cases will be added to CanLII. This will provide an almost complete record of Saskatchewan case law from 1909 to the present.

 ^{4 &}quot;CanLII". Available at: http://developer.canlii.org/
 5 "CanLII Features". Available at http://legalresearch.org/electronic/canlii-features/

⁶ "Scope of CanLII's Databases". Available at http://www.canlii.org/en/databases

3. Why Should You Use CanLII?

A 2012 study by CorbinPartners Inc. explored CanLII use among the Canadian legal community. The study discovered approximately nine in ten lawyers use CanLII for legal research and that 99 percent of users are satisfied with the website. The study indicated CanLII is a frequent source for case law and is often identified as a first stop for legal research. Some of the reasons for using CanLII for research include:

- Ease of use
- Convenient access
- Favorable cost
- Depth of case law collection

CanLII has certain advantages over the Saskatchewan Cases Database: it allows searches for case law outside of Saskatchewan and is full-text searchable, while the Saskatchewan Cases Database is limited to searching short summaries of cases.

However, it is important to note that CanLII's noteup features may be less reliable and consistent than the same from the Saskatchewan Cases Database.

⁷ "National Client Needs Study". Available at http://canlii.org/en/info/CanLII2012SurveySummary_en.pdf

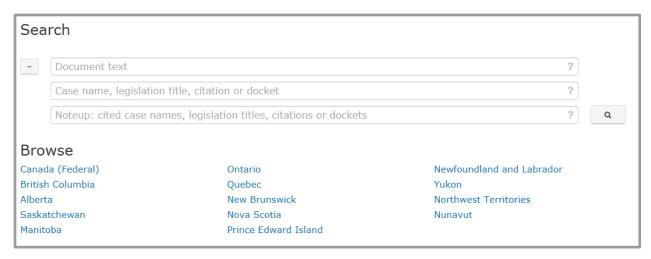
4. Using CanLII

CanLII provides a user friendly search interface and is simple and intuitive to use. It is easy to sort search results and to locate relevant case law. CanLII can be accessed from the "Quick Links" area of the Law Society of Saskatchewan Library homepage at http://www.lawsociety.sk.ca/library.aspx. Alternatively, http://canlii.org/ can be typed into your browser's address bar.

CanLII can be used to:

- Locate known cases
- Locate Saskatchewan case law on a point of law
- Quickly locate a case with a common name
- Note up a case and identify decisions citing a particular decision
- Note up legislation and identify decisions citing a particular act
- Locate Saskatchewan tribunal decisions
- · Identify related decisions, legislation cited, and decisions cited

The CanLII main screen appears as follows:



CanLII can be searched in three primary ways:

- Keyword search
- Known item search: Search by case name, legislation, citation, or docket
- Noteup search: Search by cited case or cited legislation

The three methods of searching CanLII correspond to the three CanLII search boxes available from the main screen.

5. Boolean Search Words

CanLII's Boolean search words are displayed in a pop-up box when the cursor is placed over the question mark icon to the right of the search interface:



Find	Operator (case sensitive)	Example
This exact phrase	***	"R. v. Douglas"
All these words	AND, and, no operator	permit hunting
Any of these words	OR, or	city or municipality
None of these unwanted words	NOT, not	custody not child
Words within the same paragraph	/p	levy /p probate
Words within the same sentence	/s	tax /s income
Words within n words	/n	letter /5 credit
Exclude plurals and derivatives	EXACT(), exact()	exact(translator)

This is crucial as every online database has its own unique set of Boolean search words. For example, CanLII's Boolean search words differ significantly from the Saskatchewan Cases Database Boolean search words. It is always helpful to review a database's Boolean search words prior to searching.

Boolean search words can help us search more effectively and efficiently. They can easily broaden or narrow a search by combining different concepts together. Six important Boolean search words to note prior to searching CanLII are:

AND	Narrow a search by combining concepts together
OR	Broaden a search to include results that mention any of the keywords
u "	Narrow a search by searching for an exact phrase
()	Group similar concepts together
/p	Narrow a search by searching within a paragraph
/s	Narrow a search by searching within a sentence

6. Example Search Scenarios

This paper will review seven example search scenarios that will demonstrate basic use of CanLII.

- 6.1 Searching for a Known Case
- 6.2 Searching for a Case with a Common Name
- 6.3 Noting up a Case
- 6.4 Searching for Legislation
- 6.5 Searching for Saskatchewan Tribunal Decisions
- 6.6 Searching for Saskatchewan Case Law on a Point of Law
- 6.7 Searching for Saskatchewan Case Law on a Point of Law

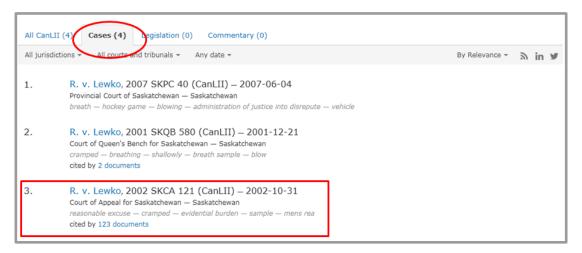
6.1 Searching for a Known Case

In the first search scenario, I would like to locate a 2002 Saskatchewan Court of Appeal case: *R. v. Lewko*, 2002 SKCA 121.

Begin the search by entering the case name in the known item search box.



Based on the results, this search retrieved four cases. The third result appears to be the correct one: *R. v. Lewko*, 2002 SKCA 121.



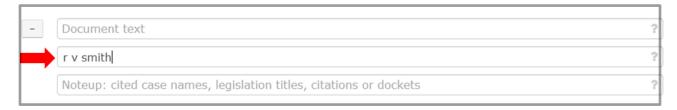
The full-text of this case is displayed when the case name is selected. CanLII displays information about the case at the top of the screen including the style of cause, date, docket, neutral citation, parallel citations, an option to open the case in PDF format, and a noteup feature. The reflex record identifies the legislation and decisions that *R. v. Lewko* has cited.



6.2 Searching for a Case with a Common Name

In the second search scenario, I would like to locate a Saskatchewan Court of Appeal criminal judgment. The case involved an individual with the surname Smith. All I can recall is that the case took place somewhere in the past fifteen years and involved drug trafficking.

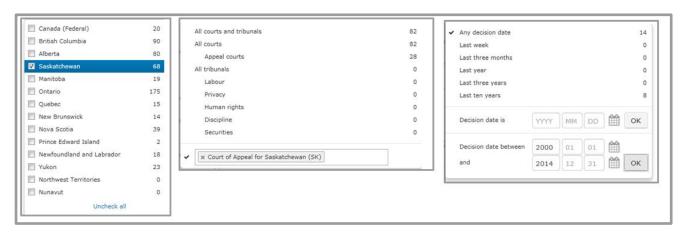
Begin the search by entering a case name in the known item search box.



Based on the results, the initial search retrieved 563 cases named *R. v. Smith*. The amount of results needs to be reduced as there are too many cases to scan through. CanLII searches can be narrowed by jurisdiction, court level, and date at the top tab.



First, limit the search by jurisdiction so it only retrieves Saskatchewan case law. Second, limit the search by court level so it only retrieves cases from the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal. Third, limit the search by date by entering a date range: 2000 to 2014.



By limiting this search by jurisdiction, court level, and date, the amount of results have been reduced to 11. This is a more reasonable amount of cases to read.



The final step is to scan the results to determine whether the correct case was located. It appears that the sixth result is the correct case: *R. v. Smith*, 2007 SKCA 71.

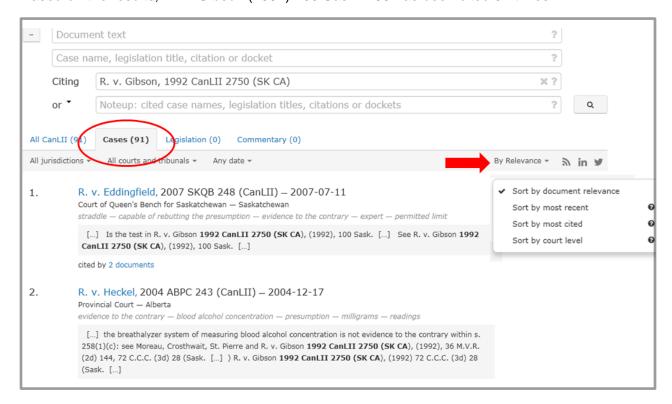
6.3 Noting up a Case

In the third search scenario, I am conducting research on the role of expert evidence in Saskatchewan case law. I have discovered *R. v. Gibson* (1992) 100 Sask R 88 is a Court of Appeal case that comments significantly on this topic. I would like to note up this case.

Begin by entering the case name in the noteup search box.



Based on the results, R. v. Gibson (1992) 100 Sask R 88 has been cited 91 times.



CanLII search results can be sorted by selecting the sorting tab on the right hand side of the screen. Results can be sorted by relevance, most recent, most cited, and court level.

6.4 Searching for Legislation

In this fourth search scenario, I am searching for case law that comments on *The Saskatchewan Administration of Estates Act, SS 1998, c A-4.1*. In particular, I would like to identify how many times section 3 of this act has been cited.

Begin by entering the legislation title in the noteup search box.



Based on the search results, 30 cases have cited this act. Next, section 3 needs to be selected from the search box on the right side of the screen.



Based on the search results, it appears six cases have cited section 3 of this act.



6.5 Searching for Saskatchewan Tribunal Decisions

In the fifth search scenario, I would like to locate Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board decisions. In particular, I would like to review decisions from the past five years.

Begin by selecting the Saskatchewan link from the menu below the search interface.



Selecting this link displays the CanLII Saskatchewan page. This page identifies Saskatchewan legislation, courts, boards, tribunals, and frequently consulted documents. Next, select the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board link indicated below.



Selecting this link displays a Labour Relations Board search page. Decisions can be searched by keyword, case name, citation, or docket. Additionally, decisions can be accessed and browsed by date. For example, select 2009 from the menu.



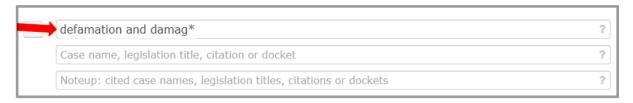
By selecting 2009 from the menu, all Labour Relations Board decisions from that year are displayed.



6.6 Searching for Saskatchewan Case Law on a Point of Law

In the sixth search scenario, I would like to locate recent Saskatchewan case law involving defamation and damages. In particular, I am interested in online defamation.

Begin by entering keywords in the keyword search box: *defamation AND damage**. Using the Boolean AND will search for cases that mention both of these terms. The asterisk symbol is known as truncation. Placing it at the end of the word damage will enable the search to locate all variations of the word: damage, damages, or damaging.



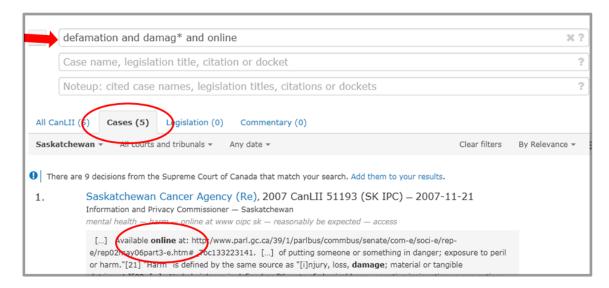
Based on the results, the search located 161 Saskatchewan cases that mention defamation and any variation of the word damage. This amount of results needs to be reduced as there are too many cases to read through.



A strategy to reduce the amount of results is to add an additional search term: *defamation AND damage* AND online*.



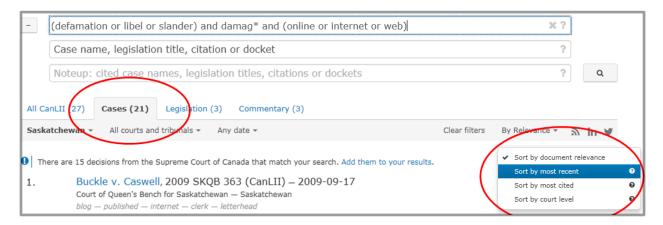
Based on the results, the new search retrieved only five cases, fewer than I expected. Additionally, the results do not appear relevant. They refer to specific online links rather than online defamation.



A strategy to increase the number of results is to think of additional synonyms for our search terms and link them together with the Boolean OR. For example, defamation might also be described as libel or slander. Online might also be described as internet or web.



Based on the results, it appears the new search located 21 cases. The results appear far more relevant than the previous search. The final step is to sort these results by date.



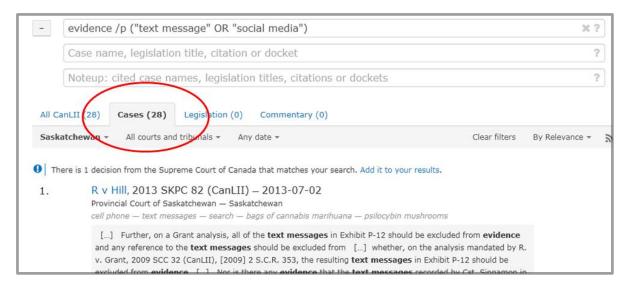
6.7 Searching for Saskatchewan Case Law on a Point of Law

In the final search scenario, I would like to locate Saskatchewan cases that have commented on the use of text messages and social media as evidence.

Begin the search by entering keywords in the keyword search box: evidence /p ("text message" OR "social media"). Phrases are placed in quotation marks. /p is a Boolean command that enables a search to look within a single paragraph. As such, this search is looking for the word evidence within the same paragraph as either phrase.



Based on the results, the search retrieved 28 cases that contain the word evidence within the same paragraph as either phrase.



A strategy that may make this search more precise is to search within a single sentence rather than within an entire paragraph: evidence /s ("text message OR "social media").



Based on the results, this new search retrieved 16 cases.



Social media is a broad concept that can be described in numerous ways. For example, social media might also be described using the words Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube. By describing social media in such a broad way, this search may be missing some highly relevant cases. A new search statement reflecting additional ways to describe social media is: evidence /s ("text message OR "social media" OR facebook OR twitter or youtube).



Based on the results, this new search located 20 cases.



7 CanLII Tutorial Videos

The library has recently created an online series of CanLII tutorial videos. These can be accessed from the "Quick Links" area of the Law Society of Saskatchewan Library homepage at http://www.lawsociety.sk.ca/library.aspx.



The tutorial videos demonstrate how to search CanLII for case law in a variety of practical ways.



8 Additional Research Assistance

If you have any questions about CanLII or require additional research assistance, please contact a Law Society Librarian. We are always happy to assist you over the phone, in person, or via email. The contact information for the library is:

Email: reference@lawsociety.sk.ca

Phone: 306-569-8020 or 1-877-989-4999